

VIEWS OF THE VALLEY OF DESPAIR:  
THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF JACK CORN AND MILTON ROGOVIN  
IN APPALACHIAN COAL COMMUNITIES (1956–1979)

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Information and Media—Doctor of Philosophy

2020

## ABSTRACT

### VIEWS OF THE VALLEY OF DESPAIR: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF JACK CORN AND MILTON ROGOVIN IN APPALACHIAN COAL COMMUNITIES (1956–1979)

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Through extensive archival research, oral history and ethnography, this dissertation examines the coal mining photographs of photojournalist Jack Corn, repositioning his work alongside the work of noted social documentarian Milton Rogovin as being important in reshaping the visual discourse of mining in the 1950s, '60s and '70s. This dissertation argues that Corn's and Rogovin's work in Appalachia disrupted coal mining discourses popular throughout the first half of the 20th-century by repositioning their subjects in a way that changed how society thought about mining. For Corn, the disruption in discourse came from repositioning his subjects from a perspective of celebrating the heroics of mining in the context of empire building to illustrating the devastating consequences of extracting coal from the Earth. Corn's work was generated through a combination of assigned, commissioned and independent projects that led to the creation of a significant body of work. For Rogovin, his work repositioned miners from being a faceless commodity to the coal companies, anonymously working to support the nation's vast industrial complex, to being individuals with unique identities that existed outside the confines of the mines in which they worked. By exploring the ways Corn and Rogovin disrupted popular mining discourse, this dissertation also challenges conventional notions that widespread documentation of the state of the environment in the United States began in the 1970s. Across the literature, the formation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the agency's *Documerica* project are often discussed as being the pivotal moment when



photographic documentation of the environment began to illustrate the widespread effect of human activity on our physical world. This dissertation argues, however that, while *Documerica* was significant in creating a large and diverse archive of photographic evidence showing the effect industry was having on workers, family, public health, and community, photographers such as Corn and Rogovin were approaching documentation from a similar perspective more than a decade before the project launched in 1971. While working at *The Tennessean* in Nashville, Tennessee, Corn departed from documenting traditional narratives of miners at work to explore the socio-economic, environmental and public health aspects of mining while covering coal communities in Appalachia beginning in the 1950s. Heavily influenced by newspaper coverage of the struggles of miners, including coverage from Corn and *The Tennessean*, Rogovin headed to Appalachia in 1962 and commenced what would become one of his longest and most prolific projects: documenting miners, their families and their communities. Finally, this dissertation argues that through their photography Corn and Rogovin were participating in a form of activism with the images they made being more than just documentation, but a type of visual protest against the social and environmental conditions they encountered in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia. In much the same way Margaret Bourke-White, for example, gave *LIFE* magazine readers their first glimpses of Apartheid through her photographs of South African gold miners in the 1950s, Corn and Rogovin gave Americans living outside Appalachia a visual introduction to the human cost of a nation's growing energy consumption.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my wife Stephanie, and daughters Morgan and Emerson, for their unwavering devotion and support through the highs and lows of completing a doctoral program. Words seem inadequate in expressing my gratitude for their grace, patience and encouragement.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I need to thank Jack and Helen Corn, and their daughter Rosemarie Scott, for welcoming me into their homes and granting me access to materials. Their openness, kindness and support of my vision for this project made its completion possible. I also want to thank Sister Marie Cirilo for helping me better understand the Clear Fork Valley and its people. My ethnographic visit to the area would not have been as rich as it was without her guidance, knowledge and the introductions she provided to the people who call Clearfork, Eagan, Pruden, White Oak, the hollows and the hills home. Archival material played an important role in developing the interpretation of Jack Corn's and Milton Rogovin's work presented in this dissertation. I need to acknowledge the vital work of archivists in preserving, organizing and making available to the public materials that help us make sense of our history. Specifically, I would like to thank Curator of Special Collections Zach Johnson and Public Services Archivist Teresa Gray at the Vanderbilt University Libraries in Nashville, TN; archivist Edith A. Sandler at the manuscripts division of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.; and Holly Reed of the Still Picture Reference Team at the National Archives & Records Administration in College Park, MD—the knowledge and expertise of each of you were critical to the success of my data collection. All three of these archives are a tremendous resource, and the collections they house were essential in providing the primary sources materials evidentiary to arguments made throughout this dissertation. I am fortunate to have had the privilege of working with such a supportive and esteemed committee. The diverse perspectives and expertise of Professors Perry Parks, Eric Freedman, Judy Walgren and John Besley challenged me intellectually and helped me develop and focus the following inquiry. It has also been a privilege to work with and learn from my

chair, mentor and friend Professor Howard Bossen. Through your firmness, compassion, constructive feedback and unrelenting support of my research I have learned to ask more specific questions of my research materials, become more thoughtful in my approach, and have become a better, more efficient, writer. You have helped me stay true to the research that is important to me. When others were pulling me in many different directions, you empowered me to forge my own path and guided me to become the educator and scholar I am today, and for that I am eternally grateful. I must thank the faculty and staff of the Knight Center for Environmental Journalism for their continued support throughout my graduate journey. I hope to continue a connection to this vital center for scholarship and journalism. Though not serving on my committee, I also want to acknowledge and thank Professors Lucinda Davenport and Serena Miller for their support and mentorship throughout both my master's and Ph.D. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my friends and classmates; it has been a privilege to get to know you and grow with you over the past four years. Finally, thank you to the College of Communication Arts and Sciences and School of Journalism at Michigan State University for generously supporting my research through summer research and dissertation completion fellowships. Without this vital funding, the ethnographic and archival-intensive scholarship contained in this dissertation would not have been possible.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACA – Appalachian Cultural Association

ADI – Appalachia Development Institute

AIZ – Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung

BTU – British Thermal Unit

CCCP – Coal Commission of the Communist Party, U.S.A.

CCDP – Clear Fork Community Development Project

CWA – Clean Water Act

DNM – Dinosaur National Monument

DRD – Department of Rural Development

EPA – Environmental Protection Agency

FSA– Farm Security Administration

HUAC – House Committee on Un-American Activities

IDC – Industrial Development Council

KAB – Keep America Beautiful

LOC – Library of Congress

MPW – Missouri Photography Workshop

MVHC – Model Valley Health Council

NARA – National Archives and Records Administration

NCLC – National Child Labor Committee

NELA – National Electric Light Association

NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act



ORNL – Oak Ridge National Laboratory

PSA – Public Service Announcement

PRC – public relation council

SDS – Students for a Democratic Society

SLU – Southern Labor Union

TVA – Tennessee Valley Authority

SotE – State of the Environment

SEJ – Society of Environmental Journalists

TCWP – Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning

US – United States (of America)

USGS – United States Geologic Survey

SOCM – Save Our Cumberland Mountains

WOE – What on Earth

WPA – Works Progress Administration

## INTRODUCTION

“We finally ended the war on coal, and I’m proud to report that Corsa Coal, here with us today, just opened a brand-new coal mine in the State of Pennsylvania, the first one in many, many years.”

— Donald J. Trump

On a hot, cloudy afternoon in June 2017, President Donald J. Trump stood on a platform in front of a blue backdrop with “Unleashing American Energy” in large white type and announced his administration’s new energy policy. In the context of ongoing organized international efforts to combat the effects of climate change, the policy he announced signaled a reversal in the commitments previous U.S. administrations had made to address the crisis. Suggesting that energy industries, coal in particular, had experienced “eight years of hell” under the administration of President Barack Obama, Trump boasted a goal of not just energy independence, but global dominance.<sup>1</sup> The president’s vision for energy dominance positions coal mining and other forms of extraction, such as fracking, leading the way forward. In addition to announcing his intention to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Agreement, the president’s remarks also announced the rolling back, or elimination, of dozens of environmental regulations related to air quality, emission standards, and extraction that affect mining companies such as Corsa Coal, whose executives shared the platform with the president during the speech.<sup>2</sup>

The president’s remarks possessed undertones of historical discourses related to coal mining that celebrated extraction as being vital to the nation’s interest.<sup>3,4</sup> The speech romanticizes a time when coal’s abundance made it the only economically viable major source of

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<sup>1</sup> Trump, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Trump, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Wadleigh, 1921

<sup>4</sup> Freese, 2016

energy in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Discourses that celebrated the heroics of the industry in empire building date back more than a century to the 1860s when large geological surveys of the American West reimagined the frontier lands. The surveys transformed the view industrialists and entrepreneurial pioneers possessed of the West from being an untenable wild to being a landscape rich in minerals and opportunity.<sup>6,7</sup> The president's use of these discourses make exploration of how, why, and when the discourse around coal production began to change timely and relevant in contemporary society. This dissertation examines the coal mining photographs of photojournalist Jack Corn, repositioning his work alongside the work of noted social documentarian Milton Rogovin as being important in contributing to the visual discourse of mining in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The works of these two photographers exist in concert with one another; aesthetically different but interconnected by time, place and subject, they work to create a rich and powerful narrative. Together, their work looks outside the darkened shafts of subterranean coal mines to show, first, how the violence of extracting this abundant resource reaches beyond the miners doing the work to affect their families, former miners, and non-miner members of Appalachian communities; and, second, the devastating and irreversible effects of mining on the region's landscape.

Trump's comments in 2017 and other public events have reignited a debate about the future of coal in U.S. energy that began more than a half-century ago. Addressing labor leaders in the crowd, the president said, "Your workers embody the skill, grit and courage that has always been the true source of American strength. They are great people. They break through rock walls, mine the depths of the earth, and reach through the ocean floor, to bring every ounce

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<sup>5</sup> Freese, 2016

<sup>6</sup> King, 1878

<sup>7</sup> Trachtenberg, 1989

of energy into our homes and commerce and into our lives.”<sup>8</sup> These remarks resurrect historical discourses popular through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that celebrate coal as not only plentiful and viable, but the main resource essential for U.S. energy production. While this claim may have historically been accurate, technology has advanced—making contemporary dependence on coal for energy production obsolete and no longer economically, environmentally or socially viable. Corn’s and Rogovin’s photographs in tandem with the environmental movement changed coal discourse over the past six decades. Beginning in the 1960s, the coal-centric discourse evoked in the president’s remarks has been replaced by messages that support energy diversification and production from cleaner, more renewable sources like wind and solar, which aim to reduce the practice of burning coal and other carbon dioxide-emitting fossil fuels.

This dissertation argues that Corn’s and Rogovin’s work in Appalachia disrupted coal mining discourses popular throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century by repositioning their subjects in a way that changed how society would think of mining. The discourses Corn’s and Rogovin’s work disrupted are the same discourses used by Trump at the 2017 policy announcement, and at campaign rallies in coal producing regions. For Corn, the disruption in discourse came from repositioning his subjects from a perspective of celebrating the heroics of the technology and industry of mining in building the empire, to illustrating the devastating consequences of extracting coal from the Earth. Corn’s work is the result of assigned, commissioned and independent projects that led to the creation of a significant body of work. For Rogovin, his work repositioned miners from being a faceless commodity to the coal companies, anonymously working to support the nation’s vast industrial complex, to being individuals with unique identities who exist outside the confines of the mines in which they worked.

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<sup>8</sup> Trump, 2017

In addition to arguing that Corn and Rogovin disrupted popular mining discourse, this dissertation also challenges conventional notions that widespread documentation of the state of the environment in the United States began in the 1970s. Across the literature, the formation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the agency's *Documerica* project are often discussed as being the pivotal moment when photographic documentation of the environment really began to illustrate the widespread effect of human activity on our physical world.<sup>9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16</sup> This dissertation argues, however, that, while *Documerica* was significant in creating a large and diverse archive of photographic evidence showing the effect industry was having on workers, family, public health, and community, photographers such as Corn and Rogovin were approaching documentation from a similar perspective more than a decade before the project launched in 1971. While working at *The Tennessean* in Nashville, Tennessee, Corn departed from documenting traditional narratives of miners at work to explore the socio-economic, environmental and public health aspects of mining while covering coal communities in Appalachia beginning in the 1950s. Heavily influenced by newspaper coverage of the struggles of miners, including coverage from Corn and *The Tennessean*, Rogovin headed to Appalachia in 1962 and commenced what would become one of his longest and most prolific projects, documenting miners, their families and their communities.

Finally, this dissertation argues that through their photographs Corn and Rogovin were activists, and the images they made were a type of visual protest against the social and

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<sup>9</sup> Freese, 2016

<sup>10</sup> Neuzil, 2008

<sup>11</sup> Rome, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Langston, 2018

<sup>13</sup> Bustard, 2013

<sup>14</sup> Shubinski, 2009

<sup>15</sup> Wellum, 2017

<sup>16</sup> Tanczo, 1987

environmental conditions they encountered in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia. In much the same way Margaret Bourke-White, for example, gave *LIFE* magazine readers their first glimpses of Apartheid through her photographs of South African gold miners in the 1950s, Corn and Rogovin gave Americans living outside Appalachia a visual introduction to the human cost of a nation's growing energy consumption.

These arguments are organized around three central questions that explore the creation of these bodies of visually discursive work. First, in investigating the work of repositioning miners as subjects, this dissertation addresses the following question: In what ways did Corn's and Rogovin's photographs challenge and disrupt coal mining discourse in the 1950s and 60s? Additional questions related to this line of inquiry include: How was mining visually represented historically? What effect did advancements in photographic technology have on how mining was photographed? And what did historical representations discursively contribute to understanding the role of miners and the function of mining in society?

Second, were there specific characteristics, factors or conditions unique to the Appalachian region at the time Corn and Rogovin worked there that could have made the production of these photographs possible and aesthetically and discursively different from photographs of coal mining in other regions? Through this line of investigation, this dissertation also explores other influences that might have shaped the work of Corn and Rogovin in Appalachia. Both photographers worked in isolated environments; what effects could their positioning as outsiders have on their approach to developing relationships with their subjects? While their work is connected by topic and proximity of site of production, these were two very different photographers, and it is essential to understand their differences. How might differences in their approach affect the images they created and the nature of how their photographs were

used? How could understanding their audiences affect the possible discourse of their images? For Corn, it is critical to understand to what effect being assigned, being commissioned, or being self-directed to produce a project may have had on the intimacy and aesthetic quality achieved in his work. For Rogovin, understanding what initially drove him to document the life of miners is essential in understanding how his work in Appalachia is situated among his subsequent work of miners in Europe, Asia, South Africa, Mexico and Cuba and his other social documentary projects that focus on people and work.

The last central question this dissertation is organized around is: what was the relationship between Corn's and Rogovin's practice of photography and the culture of activism that arose in the 1960s around civil rights, the Vietnam War, women's rights and the environment? Activism being a concerted effort within and against established structures of power to provoke change, on a more nuanced level this line of questioning also interrogates the role of institutional power in the production of photographic discourse. How did institutional apparatuses, such as newsgathering at *The Tennessean* newspaper or governmental enforcement of regulations, affect the visual discourse of mining in Appalachia? How did the power of local gatekeepers such as union leaders or mine management, or public officials who provided these photographers access to their subjects, affect the visual discourse of mining in Appalachia? Finally, how did the informational campaigns produced by the coal companies and unions affect the visual discourse of mining in Appalachia?

Within the context of the three main arguments made in this dissertation these questions will be discussed across the following eight chapters: Chapter one will discuss how discourse theory combined with photographic criticism will be applied to assign meaning to Corn's and Rogovin's Appalachia photographs. In addition to setting up a framework for the discursive

analysis of their work, the photographs and materials used in this dissertation will be discussed along with the archives they were collected from. Working to inform the argument that Corn and Rogovin disrupted mining discourse, chapter two provides an overview of historical visual mining narratives and how they evolved between the 1850s with the California Gold Rush and the labor movement in the 1920s. Chapter three will examine Appalachia as a place, and within the context of Foucauldian notions of power, discuss the characteristics of the region as particulars that influence the production of visual discourse. Power exerted through institutional apparatuses will be explored in chapter four through the intersecting contexts of photography and activism relating to race, gender, poverty, war and the environment. Chapters five and six re-examine Appalachia in the context of the long-term picture-making projects of Corn and Rogovin, addressing questions focusing on their influences and approaches to gaining access and developing relationships with their subjects. Chapter seven will examine government sanctioned projects that use photography as part of a broader effort to create archives of visual evidence. The photographic work commissioned by the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s will be compared and contrasted to the EPA's *Documerica* project and the President's Report on the Coal Mining Industry (1978–1982). Lastly, chapter eight will reflect on the arguments made throughout this dissertation and discuss the importance of Corn's and Rogovin's photographs in contemporary contexts.



## CHAPTER 1

### UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY: THE AESTHETICS AND DISCOURSE OF IMAGES

“For the first time, I realized I had taken a different kind of picture. I followed my own instincts, and instead of taking a traditional news photograph, I had taken a symbolic image to tell the story. I still consider this photograph the universal portrait of that time, documenting the mountain people’s lifestyle.”

— Jack Corn

Jack Corn wrote the above passage about his first visit to Appalachia in 1957. As an aesthetic object, the portrait he made during that visit of Procter Reagan and his son Terry outside their family home in Fentress County, Tennessee, has meaning. It has meaning as an artistic representation of the time, place and people Corn thoughtfully and skillfully placed before his camera. It also has meaning through the way he discusses the photograph and the context of its creation. Approaching photographic meaning from the perspective of aesthetic objects and context of creation is the foundation of how photographs will be analyzed and discussed in the following dissertation. This chapter serves three main purposes. First, this chapter introduces the primary source materials used for analysis. This introduction includes a discussion of the archives and ethnographic activities used to collect the primary source materials. Second, it creates a framework of photographic criticism and critical discourse analysis methodology and discusses how this framework will be used to arrive at an understanding of Corn and Milton Rogovin’s photographs of Appalachian coal fields. Finally, this chapter will serve as an overview—outlining how the evidence and discussions contained in the following chapters support the arguments central to this dissertation.

## DOING ARCHIVAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD WORK TO INFORM PHOTOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The three arguments presented over the following eight chapters were developed out of extensive archival work, collection of oral history and ethnographic field work. These activities were carried out during three separate field excursions between June and November 2019. Oral histories and written first-person accounts of picture-making activities give photographers a voice outside of their photographs.<sup>17</sup> First-person accounts related to the production of specific images reveal valuable information about the photographer's approach, conditions at the site of production, equipment used and challenges faced in making that image, developing a rich context to expand the knowledge that can be gleaned from a photograph.<sup>18</sup> Collection of primary and first-person materials is the heart of this dissertation.

The first segment of field fieldwork took place June 4–7 in middle Tennessee. June 5 was spent with Jack Corn at his home in Goodlettsville—a 20-minute drive up north Interstate-65 from downtown Nashville. The house resembles a cabin and is set way back off the road up a hill nestled into a woods blanketed with Blue-Eyed Mary wildflowers (Figure 1). Corn has lived in the two-story home with his wife Helen Corn since purchasing the house from fellow journalist Nat Caldwell in the 1970s—their daughter Rosemarie Scott lives just down the hill at the end of the driveway. The morning was spent talking in the living room in front of a large picture window that overlooks the woods and a trail leading further back into the property, which Corn has set up as a nature conservancy. The setting is peaceful and revealing of his deep devotion to nature—a reverence that is echoed in his photographic work. Sitting in a rocking chair, he

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<sup>17</sup> Bossen and Freedman, 2012

<sup>18</sup> Bossen and Freedman, 2012



*Figure 1. Blue-Eyed Marys at Corn home in Goodlettsville, TN, Jack Corn, date unknown.*

discussed his childhood on the outskirts of Nashville during the Great Depression and how that experience influenced him personally and informed his work in Appalachia. He also discussed the people he had worked with and photographed in the Clear Fork Valley and the long-term relationships he developed through his picture-making project. Over lunch, conversation turned to his love for teaching and the time he spent as the Photojournalist in Residence at Western Kentucky University. Helen made deli sandwiches and a creamy overnight fruit salad; Rosemarie made brownies for dessert. Corn talked about study abroad trips to Europe he would take his photojournalism students on in the 1990s, stating how important it was to experience and learn about culture and different perspectives. He believed that being able to relate and connect with people was the key to being a good photographer.

Still sitting at the dining room table after lunch, Corn thumbed through a large black three-ring binder of photographs and captions he made in Appalachia. He would pause and describe the assignments and situations that had led to the making of many of the photographs, and answered questions related to specific photographs. After going through the binder, the setting of conversation moved to the lower level of the house to a den. The room was cozy and well-appointed with a couch, a desk and photographs from photographers he admired such as Russell Lee and Walker Evans hanging in simple black frames on the natural wood-clad walls. There, the interview lasted until mid-afternoon. While the conversation was winding down, Helen prepared brownies to go and gathered other materials such as newsletters from Clairfield and copies of Christmas letters exchanged with Sister Marie Cirillo, an advocate Corn had worked with for decades in the valley.

The next day, June 6, was spent at Vanderbilt University in Nashville in the special collections reading room at Jean and Alexander Heard Library. The library houses the Jack Corn

collection consisting of five boxes of envelopes with notations containing negatives, and hundreds of corresponding photographic contact sheets. Examining the collection revealed an unpublished 78-page manuscript titled “Valleys of Despair.” Corn wrote the manuscript in 2000 as a chronicle of his work in the Appalachian coal fields. As a source of firsthand background and contextual information for the photographs being examined in this dissertation, the manuscript was a remarkable find. Throughout the document were instructions to insert pictures to accompany specific passages. Examination of the contact sheets saw certain images selected by Corn using a colored grease pencil. Many of the selected images also had the word “book” written with a pen indicating they were to be used in the manuscript (Figure 2). The images selected on the contact sheet were determined by the researcher to be the photographs contained in the black binder examined at Corn’s house the previous day. Numbers at the beginning of the captions in the binder corresponded with the insertion notations found in the manuscript (Figure 3). The triangulation and intertextuality of these materials provide a breadth of information that allows for the creation of knowledge of the scene at the time and site of the photograph’s production. The photographs themselves, the detailed description recorded in the manuscript, and Corn’s recollection provided through oral history, all corroborate one another and strengthen the analyses that can be made by providing multiple primary sources of context.

Further collection of primary source materials took place during the second segment of field fieldwork from October 6–9 in the greater Washington D.C. region. October 7 was spent doing archival work at the still picture division of the National Archives & Records Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland. Materials accessed at NARA include contact sheets and a bound caption log related to the 1979 report of the Presidents Commission on Coal, as well a box of materials related to Corn’s work on the Environmental Protection



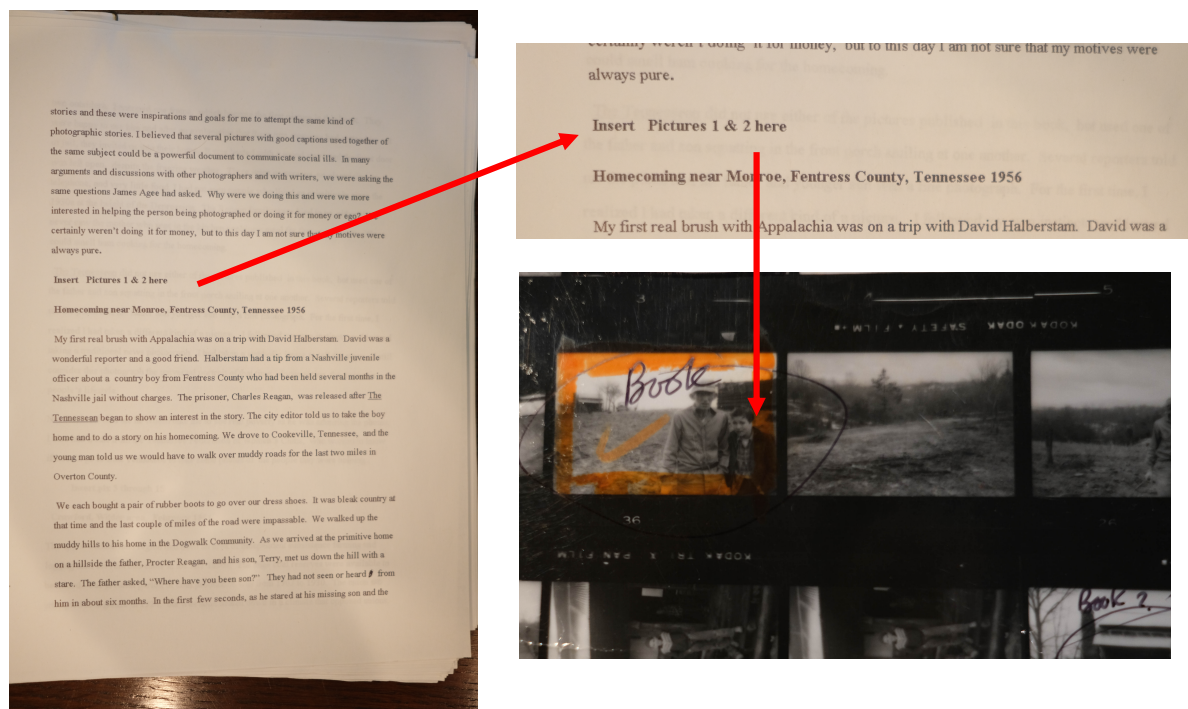


Figure 2. Jack Corn manuscript page and contact sheet in the special collections reading room at Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.

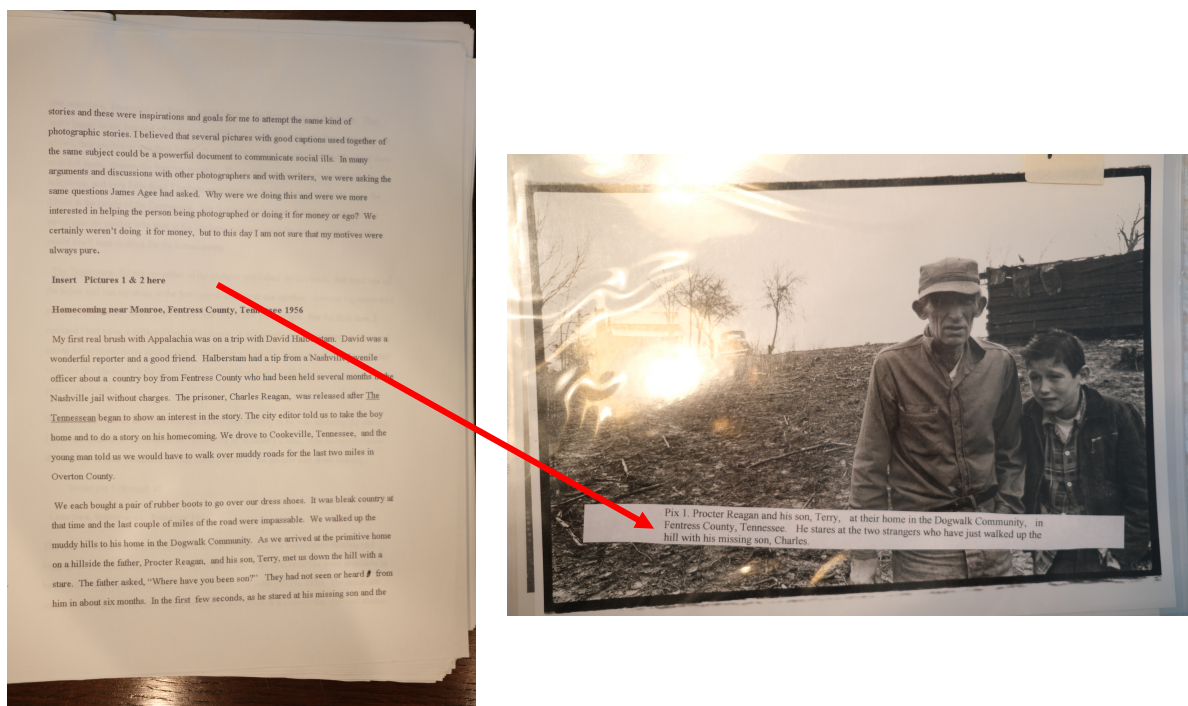


Figure 3. Jack Corn manuscript page at Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN. and binder page at Corn home in Goodlettsville, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.

Agency's *Documerica* project. October 8 and part of the October 9 were spent in Washington, D.C. at the manuscript division of the Library of Congress. The LOC houses 36 boxes containing the Milton Rogovin Collection. Of the 36 boxes, 18 were examined that related to Rogovin's work in Appalachia. These materials included a draft of an autobiography with chapters that included images and talked about his work with coal miners. Also in the collection were sketchbooks, printed trade magazines, pamphlets, and brochures, as well as correspondence between Rogovin and notable figures such as Robert Coles, Pete Seeger, Charles Kuralt, Dr. Donald Rasmussen and Harry Caudill.

The final segment of field fieldwork took place November 17–20 back in Tennessee. An interview with Marie Cirillo on November 17 lasted about an hour and a half over McCafé coffee at the McDonald's in Jellico, Tennessee just off Interstate-75. Jellico is a small one traffic light town nestled in the foothills of Jellico Mountain situated right at Tennessee's border with Kentucky. State highway 25 snakes through the hills and runs through the center of town acting as a small main commercial strip with a bank, grocery store, Dollar General, Walgreens and McDonalds. At the east end of town, highway 25 intersects I-75 and winds its way up and through Jellico Mountain to meet up with state road 90 that runs the length of the Clear Fork Valley. When I-75 was being constructed through Tennessee in the 1960s it was heralded as a way to connect rural areas with urban centers. However, accessing the highway from the remote valleys has continued to be challenging at times.<sup>19</sup> Cirillo said that taking highway 25 to Jellico and I-75 is approximately a 40-minute drive from her home in Eagan.<sup>20</sup> This illustrates just how isolated the valley is and how difficult living there can be at times. Jellico, and La Follette—even further drive to the south—are the closest towns outside of the valley. Cirillo said that Clear

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<sup>19</sup> York, 2018

<sup>20</sup> Cirillo, 2019

Fork residents rely upon these two towns to get groceries and supplies, do banking, receive medical care, and for other convinces not available in the valley.<sup>21</sup>

A second interview occurred the next morning at Cirillo's house at the end of a one-lane, winding gravel road on top of a mountain in Eagan and continued all day throughout the Clear Fork Valley. Cirillo's house is small, but manageable for the 93-year-old. In the living room hang pictures of her family including one of her, her siblings and her parents made while visiting her grandmother in Harlan, Kentucky (Figure 4). A small handwritten label near the photograph describes how living in Brooklyn, New York, the family would pass through the Cumberland Gap to reach family in Kentucky. On the floor in front of the wall of pictures sits a small collection of carved native American figurines. Cirillo said she admires the Cherokee, Chickasaw and Natchez that once called the valley home because of their deep respect and reverence for the land. Cirillo suggested that there are parallels between the exploitation and trauma forced upon indigenous peoples by the U.S. government and the exploitation and trauma caused by coal companies in the valley. There is small guest room, austere in its decor, that Cirillo said she uses for reading because of the abundance of afternoon sunlight. There is wood rocking chair in the corner next to a small bookshelf. A table and lamp sit beside a neatly made single bed that has a wooden cross hanging above it. Cirillo was joined for breakfast by Marie Webster, a life-long Clear Fork resident who took over as director of the Clear Fork Community Institute when Cirillo retired. Over the sound of breakfast cooking in a pan on the stovetop, the two Marie's sat at a small table in the kitchen talking about where Cirillo should take the researcher, and who he should try to meet. The smell of bacon filled the room. The two were

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<sup>21</sup> Cirillo, 2019





opened Cumberland Gap, opened  
up, & helped establish  
New Haven where I spent many  
of my folks

Greatgrandmother, Mother, Nephew, Children & Dad, Grandfather

Figure 4. Family photo on living room wall, Marie Cirillo home, Eagan, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.

acting as gatekeepers in facilitating the ethnographic visit, just as Cirillo and Adams had for Corn decades earlier. On the way to the valley floor Cirillo seemed concerned by a work crew clearing some trees down a narrow two track road. She said most of the land surrounding the house was owned by a land trust she works with, and she would have to check to make sure they attained permission to fell the trees. She said, “now that the coal is gone, our trees are next.”

After leaving the Clear Fork Valley late in the day on the 18th, the researcher drove 203 miles southeast to Nashville (Figure 5). The next morning was spent with Corn at his home getting his perspective on materials collected from NARA and the previous day’s visit with Marie Cirillo in the Clear Fork Valley. Corn lamented how nice it would be to return to Clairfield and see old friends again. Since it was quite a drive, he recalled sleeping many nights on couches at people’s homes in the Valley, including at a small apartment connected to the Post Office in Clairfield shared by Cirillo and another nun. The conversation evolved into a discussion about how much had changed between the 1970s to the present. Touring the valley, the day before, Cirillo directed the researcher down what once was main street when Clairfield was a bustling coal town (Figure 6). They stopped and walked around a barren plot of land (Figure 7). Cirillo explained the site is where the Post Office, her small apartment and Louise Adam’s house used to be. She added that the only structures that remain from the era when Corn would frequent the valley were an abandoned gas station (Figure 8) and the union hall (Figure 9) seen in one of Corn’s photographs (Figure 10). The conversation with Corn lasted through lunch which consisted of chili, bean soup and corn bread.

The remainder of the day, and the following day were spent back at Vanderbilt University in the special collections reading room at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library.



Figure 5. "Ethnographic Tools," researchers field notes, pen, audio recorder and camera and coal specimens on table in Nashville apartment. During tour of the Clear Fork Valley with Marie Cirillo earlier in the day, these two pieces of coal fell from a truck taking over burden to a holding pond. Cirillo suggested we stop and pick them up. Anthony Cepak, 2019.



*Figure 6. Abandoned Main Street, Clairfield, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.*





*Figure 7. Overgrown lot, former site of the U.S. Post Office and postmaster's house, Clairfield, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.*



*Figure 8. "Old service station," Eagan, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.*



*Figure 9. "Former Union Hall," Clairfield, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.*





*Figure 10. "Union Hall," Two men stand outside the Union Hall in Clairfield, TN. Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*

The researcher was given special access to the John Siegenthaler Papers which were still being organized and catalogued at the time of the visit. Initial interest in the massive collection that occupies more than 260 boxes pertained to materials that could provide knowledge of the kind of editor Siegenthaler was, and speak to the culture he cultivated in the newsroom at *The Tennessean*. This led to the discovery of a folder labeled “Tennessean Stories—Clairfield, Tennessee (Marie Cirillo’s Work)—1968–1969.”<sup>22</sup> The folder contained documents and letters between Cirillo and Siegenthaler related to her mission work in the valley. This material was vital in discovering a direct connection between Siegenthaler, Corn and Clear Fork Valley.

Through these three field work excursions hours of oral history and 6,319 pages of documents, contact sheets, photographs and other primary source materials were collected. These primary source materials combined with context from secondary sources informed the arguments developed in this dissertation and were used in the construction of context around the photographs central to these arguments. Examination of the types of materials collected also informed the development of the framework used for analysis outlined in the remainder of this chapter. While the bodies of work of these two photographers will be discussed holistically in comparison and contrast to one another and the work of other photographers, individual photographs have been selected for focused discussion and analysis. Photographs discussed individually were selected based on their historical significance; ability to show aesthetic difference; their position in relationship to the intersecting concepts of identity, power and place; or their ability to illustrate a point of view from either the photographer or the subject.

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<sup>22</sup> John Siegenthaler Papers



## CRITICIZING PHOTOGRAPHS: UNDERSTANDING MEANING THROUGH AESTHETICS

Like any other type of message, a photograph has structure. Structure is perhaps where photographs and other types of messages, such as oral language or written texts, are most closely related.<sup>23</sup> Sounds and symbols are arranged in a particular way to make words, which are assigned linguistic meaning; words are arranged into sentences, and sentences into paragraphs which are capable of expressing more complex ideas that contain a myriad of meanings that are dependent on how the text is interpreted.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, photographs can be read and interpreted. In photography, structure is determined by *form* and *composition*, and interpretation begins with how a photograph is read. Form, or formal objects, are structural devices a photographer uses to encode complex messages into an image.<sup>25</sup> There are many different types of formal objects and each accomplish the creation of different aspects of structure. Perspective, which is the angle of view from which a photograph is shot, can create a sense of scale in the scene and emphasize or diminish the appearance of elements dependent upon where they are placed in the composition. Leading lines create movement in a photograph and draw a viewer's eye to what the photographer has selected as the most important parts of the image. Importance can also be accomplished through framing. A photographer, for example, can emphasize the importance of one object in a photograph by placing that object between or within other objects, creating the appearance of a *frame*. The use of framing as a formal object is clearly illustrated in one photograph from Rogovin's *Family of Miners* series. Made in Scotland in 1982, the photograph (Figure 11), shows a group of people—six men and a woman with a baby carriage—standing in

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<sup>23</sup> Barrett, 2001

<sup>24</sup> Richardson, 2006

<sup>25</sup> Barrett, 2001: 26–27



*Figure 11. Family of Miners, Scotland. Milton Rogovin, 1982.*

line outside a medical office. The men are placed within a formal frame created by the pavement on the bottom, the door opening on the right, the large sign overhead and the sliver of brick wall at the edge of the windows on the left. The carriage places some physical distance between the woman and the men, and her placement outside the frame reinforces the separation. The frame in this regard is the formal object, not the boundary of a photograph—the photographic frame. Composition can be thought of as the syntax of formal objects, the way they are arranged within the photographic frame, to imbue meaning.<sup>26</sup> Form and composition are what allow a viewer to read a photograph. By reading what is seen, photographs can be considered as aesthetic objects. Examining photographs as aesthetic objects allows one to consider the image’s quality as a work of art.<sup>27</sup> Art critic Terry Barrett argues that description and criticism of photographs is an essential first step in interpreting their possible meaning. He writes that “description is a way of noticing in words and a way of getting others to notice.”<sup>28</sup>

If one were examining a photograph, and assigning it meaning as purely an aesthetic statement made by a photographer and their use of photographic language, one could certainly arrive at a meaning for a photograph. However, in isolation from any other methods used for interpreting visual materials, that meaning is likely to be a narrow and incomplete one. Meaning from this approach is narrow and incomplete because photographic meaning comes from more than one site.<sup>29</sup> Take the image of Reagan and his son (Figure 12) as an example. There is denotative meaning that can be arrived at just by reading the photograph and describing what is visible.<sup>30</sup> There is meaning in the way the subjects are positioned in the frame, their expression,

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<sup>26</sup> Barrett, 2001: 26–27

<sup>27</sup> Novitz, 2013: 176

<sup>28</sup> Barrett, 2001: 242

<sup>29</sup> Rose, 2016: 25

<sup>30</sup> Barrett, 2001



*Figure 12. Procter Reagan and his son Terry stand outside their home in the Dogwalk community in Fentress County, Tenn. He is staring at two reporters who have just walked up the hill with his son Charles, who had been held in a Nashville jail for months without any charges being filed. Jack Corn, 1957.*

what they are wearing. Just by looking at what is present one can make some sense of the scene. The house and the car are at a good distance behind the subjects, with rough textured soil in between. This suggests, not only a rural setting with ample open space, but a farm, with the stalks and stem of harvested crops littering the ground and a barn right behind the subjects. The trees are barren, suggesting the photograph was made in late fall or even winter. The subjects are close together suggesting a familial relation, most likely father and son, given the appearance of their ages. Looking outside the photograph for materials that can provide context to the photograph enables the viewer to construct a deeper, connotative meaning.<sup>31</sup> Examining information provided by Corn through titling, captions, and his written and oral account of making this image, confirms the man and boy are father and son. The caption Corn provides in the binder of photographs at his home reads: “Proctor Reagan and his son Terry, at their home in the Dogwalk Community, in Fentress County Tennessee. He stares at the two strangers who had just walked up the hill with his missing son, Charles.” This confirmation helps the viewer better understand the subjects’ posture—and reveals that the boy is crouching and leaning into his father, relying upon him for safety in the presence of this unfamiliar person taking their picture. This is a fair amount of information, enough to allow viewers some sense of rurality and family bond. However, additional meaning of this scene can be found outside of the site of the image itself, in the *site of production* and *site of circulation*.<sup>32,33</sup> Corn wrote about this encounter in the unpublished manuscript and details the context in which it was created. Corn recalls that Procter had not heard from his oldest son Charles for six months—not knowing he had been held in a Nashville Jail without charge. After David Halberstam a reporter at *The Tennessean* began

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<sup>31</sup> Barrett, 2001

<sup>32</sup> Rose, 2016

<sup>33</sup> Hall, 1997

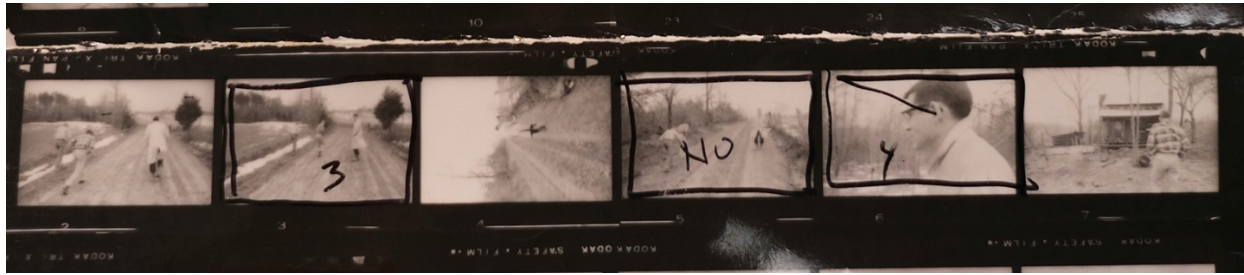


Figure 13. Jack Corn contact sheet showing approach to Reagan house in rural Fentress County, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.



Figure 14. Jack Corn contact sheet showing celebration after initial interaction. Anthony Cepak, 2019.

showing interest in the boy's case, he was released. Halberstam and Corn drove him north to Fentress County to surprise the family and report on the homecoming. The manuscript describes, and a contact sheet (Figure 13) shows, how the road was muddy and impassible by car, so they parked about two miles up the road and walked to the house in rural Cookeville. He made this guarded photograph of Proctor and Terry as they approached. Corn said once Proctor saw his son Charles he asked "Where have you been son" and Corn writes: "in the first few seconds, he stared at his missing son and the two outsiders, I snapped one frame, which became the first picture in this book."<sup>34</sup> After the explanation that Halberstam had helped get him released, Corn said the tense scene faded and the contact sheet (Figure 14) shows the following frames to be more joyous and celebratory as Proctor and Charles are seen smiling as they catch up and of Terry hugging his older brother. Knowing that Corn was there to photograph a surprise reunion

<sup>34</sup> Corn, 2000

between a father and his son contributes to the knowledge created by the photograph. Being a stranger Corn was met with suspicion as he approaches the home. Corn's photograph allows the viewer to see the tension in the scene through the way Reagan positioned himself slightly in front of his younger son. The protective stance puts some distance between the boy and Corn. This dissertation approaches reconciling the connotative and denotative meanings of the aesthetic object and the sites of its production and circulation, through use of discourse analysis and photographic criticism.

#### DISCOURSE AND IMAGES: DERIVING MEANING FROM WHAT IS SEEN AND NOT SEEN IN PHOTOGRAPHS

A widely used approach to understanding discourse is by orienting it within linguistics and other traditions that are interested in textual or syntactical events. From this perspective discourse is understood as being language in use<sup>35,36</sup> and concerned with how statements or sentences are connected to construct meaning.<sup>37</sup> Examined within the context of photographs, instead of statements or sentences, discourse is concerned with the way formal objects are arranged in a composition to construct meaning.<sup>38</sup> Within discourse there exist two parallel, and at times competing, perspectives: *idealism* and *materialism*. These perspectives explain the discursivity of photographic meaning and underscore why both the connotative and denotative approach to analysis is important in examining photographs.

Materialism, as linguist John Richardson writes, is the assertion that “a world exists independent of human beings, and it is this material existence (and specifically our social

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<sup>35</sup> Richardson, 2006: 23

<sup>36</sup> Wetherell, 2010: 3

<sup>37</sup> Wetherell, 2010: 16

<sup>38</sup> Rose, 2016: 205

relations) that determines our consciousness.”<sup>39</sup> The denotative process of describing photographs addresses the presence of objects in a photograph, and does so in part from a materialistic perspective. For example, one description of Corn’s photograph of Reagan might include that there is a cluster of trees, there is a field, a house, a car, a barn and that the sky was clear and bright. These objects would exist in the same reality whether Reagan and his son were pictured or not, and even if Corn had not made that particular photograph which allowed the viewer to see those objects. This illustrates independence of these objects from the discursive reality Corn has constructed through his aesthetic choices. Denotative description then helps separate and rationalize what in a photograph is independent and what is constructed. French philosopher Michael Foucault asserts that this type of aesthetic criticism is necessary in order to remove the observer—their biases—from that which is seen.<sup>40</sup> Psychologist Robert Wicks writes that “this way of regarding the world does not allow the observer to include itself simultaneously as another object to be observed neutrally.”<sup>41</sup> What is constructed in a photograph is also addressed by denotative description, but to a much greater extent by connotative analysis. The constructed meaning of photographs can be understood through the perspective of idealism.

Idealism—like the assertion of sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann that society and individuals construct their own realities—is the notion that social consciousness determines social being.<sup>42,43</sup> Political theorist and Marxism scholar David McLellan writes: “human beings collectively and individually create their own reality in response to changing circumstance.”<sup>44</sup> It is through the prism of idealism that the barn, the house and car can have

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<sup>39</sup> Richardson, 2006: 28

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, 1973: 16

<sup>41</sup> Wicks, 2013: 161

<sup>42</sup> Berger and Luckman, 1966

<sup>43</sup> Richardson, 2006: 27

<sup>44</sup> McLellan, 1986: 7



meaning as objects and make sense in this scene. Likewise, the development of social norms and our understanding of family and kinship constructed through idealism allows for the interpretation of the body language of the two subjects, and the conclusion they are father and son.<sup>45</sup>

Sociologist Fran Tonkiss suggests that the way in which materialism, ideology, denotative and connotative description work together make these perspectives a useful framework for understanding the production and meaning of discourse in photography.<sup>46</sup> Philosopher Gillian Rose discusses implementing Tonkiss' framework of photographic discourse analysis in her book *Visual Methodologies*. Rose writes: "First, there is the analysis of the structure of discursive statements. Second, there is a concern for the social context of those statements: who is saying them, in what circumstances."<sup>47</sup> The structure of discursive photographic statements consists of the formal objects discussed in the previous section of this chapter, and the social context comes from examining the sites of production and circulation of the photograph.

The view of discourse presented by Foucault advances the importance of social contexts in discourse. For Foucault discourse stemmed from the social contexts that regulated meaning-making at given periods of time.<sup>48</sup> He argues that objects and events by themselves cannot produce knowledge; it takes the contexts of place, time and power to produce discourse, which then produces knowledge.<sup>49</sup> Social psychologist Margaret Wetherell posits that constructionist theories of meaning are the foundation of Foucault's conception of discourse writing: "discourse is not about whether things exist but about where meaning comes from. [...] By 'discourse', Foucault meant 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of

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<sup>45</sup> Berger and Luckman, 1966

<sup>46</sup> Tonkiss, 1998

<sup>47</sup> Rose, 2016: 205

<sup>48</sup> Wetherell, 2010: 72

<sup>49</sup> Foucault, 1972

representing knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment.”<sup>50</sup> With the historical nature of the photographs being examined in this dissertation, working in Foucault’s historization of discourse to the framework of analysis becomes essential. Foucault’s approach acknowledges the contribution of place and time in creating the social and physical conditions in which the photographs were produced.

Social conditions can be discussed by addressing the intertextuality of discourse and discursive events at the sites of photographic production and circulation. Rose describes intertextuality as “the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts.”<sup>51</sup> Both Corn and Rogovin wrote texts and collected vast amounts of materials related to their Appalachian picture-making projects. Those texts, when considered alongside the photographs they made, reside within the context of history Foucault was interested in. For the reader of a newspaper, or the patron of a gallery for example, the text that often accompanies a photograph, i.e. a museum label or caption, helps the viewer create meaning through the provided context of a photograph. The context is provided by the writer of the text. In the case of a caption that accompanies a photograph in a newspaper or magazine, that text is often written by the photographer with information he or she collected in field notes. Documentary photographers also often write or attach information to the back of prints providing some context. Typically, museum labels that the gallery viewer encounters are written by a curator using a photographer’s or archivist’s notes, not the photographer themselves. The context the viewer is provided is considered against and reconciled with their personal experience, prior knowledge, and system of

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<sup>50</sup> Wetherell, 2010: 72–73

<sup>51</sup> Rose, 2016: 188

beliefs combined with what is seen in a photograph to imbue that photograph with meaning.<sup>52</sup>

For researchers, context is found in similar places as the casual viewer and is reinforced by analysis of archival material.<sup>53,54</sup>

By adopting a framework of analysis that considers materialism, ideology, denotative and connotative description within the context of a specific historical period (1956–1979), discourse in this dissertation means: knowledge is constructed by identifying the particulars of a photograph, including what can be known through reading and describing the photograph in combination with what can be known from investigating what is outside the photograph. What is meant by outside of the photograph are the circumstances surrounding its creation, the positioning of those who created the photograph, and how the photograph was used within the context of social conditions present at the time. Analysis and discussion of discourse from this perspective permits questions to be asked of photographs that are deeply rooted in the time and place of their creation. Questions such as *what the meaning of mining is* delve deeper than just understanding what mining looked like.

The focus of inquiry can further be refined by studying specific collections of photographs or the bodies of work of specific photographers. In the context of this dissertation, specificity of discourse can be focused on the knowledge of coal mining produced by a particular set of photographs, made of a particular group of miners, in a particular place, at a particular time, by two particular photographers. In the next chapter, photography will be explored through a much deeper discussion of historical discourse and narratives of mining aesthetics that for

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<sup>52</sup> Berger and Luckman, 1966

<sup>53</sup> Startt and Sloan, 2013

<sup>54</sup> Barret, 2001

decades contributed to the heroic vision of empire building while picturing miners as poor, dirty and downtrodden—discourses disrupted by Corn’s and Rogovin’s photographs.

## MEANING AND POWER: TWO PERSPECTIVES OF APPROACH

Knowledge and meaning are produced by power.<sup>55</sup> Where the power of photography, and how it is used, however, depends in part upon what perspective one chooses to take. Based in Marxist theory, traditional reductionist approaches of power operate through breaking society down into a class system of the *bourgeoisie*—“those who buy labour,” the *proletariat*—“those who sell their own labour,” and the *petit bourgeoisie* — “small-scale craftsmen/women and entrepreneurs who either create a product themselves or purchase a commodity and re-sell it for a profit.”<sup>56</sup> Situated within the capitalistic structure, in this system society operates by the bourgeoisie gaining all their power and wealth directly from the work of the proletariat and petit bourgeoisie. From this perspective, power in photography is meant to preserve this hegemonic structure so whereas photography “has power, that power is not equal among all members of society.”<sup>57</sup> Being a self-described socialist, instead of using photography to preserve the hegemonic structure of capitalism, Rogovin sympathized with his proletariat subjects and used his power as a social documentarian to fight against their anonymization by the bourgeoisie. Rogovin used the evidentiary nature of the documents he produced to show that the workers were not only vital to the coal industry, but as individual members of society. Power shown in Corn’s photographs, however, manifests differently. While he certainly did show the effects coal

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<sup>55</sup> Richardson, 2006: 12

<sup>56</sup> Richardson, 2006: 2

<sup>57</sup> Richardson, 2006: 12–13

company control had over the miners and the community, his photographs also show attempts of Appalachians to regain some of that control.

This suggests, as Foucault argued, that power can come from many places. Beginning in the 1970s, Foucault began advancing a new concept of power that conceived that rather than being rigidly structural in a top-down hierarchy, power is more fluid and circulates among multiple spheres and “permeates all levels of social existence.”<sup>58</sup> This departure from a Marxist perspective of structuralism raised questions about who the power derived from language *could* benefit, and if that power could be episodic in nature depending upon the circumstance and context of the discourse. Foucault argued that “where there is power there is resistance ... a multiplicity of points of resistance.”<sup>59</sup> While this dissertation does not fully adopt a Foucauldian framework of power, Foucault’s perspective certainly informs the way power can be seen using photography. Resistance to power manifests in Corn’s photographs through the individuals who were working to improve the social conditions found in Appalachia despite the coal companies’ dominance over all aspects of miners’ lives. What Corn’s and Rogovin’s photographs do from a Foucauldian perspective is challenge the prevailing power of the coal industry through the notion that “there are many discourses that jostle and compete in their effects.”<sup>60</sup> Chapters three and six delve into power in discourse in much greater detail. Chapter three examines the colonial logics employed by coal companies in constructing exploitive structures of power in Appalachia, while chapter six examines the power local gatekeepers exercised in shaping visual discourse through providing Corn and Rogovin access to their communities.

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<sup>58</sup> Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2010: 77

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, 1979: 95

<sup>60</sup> Rose, 2016: 189

## PLACE AS A SITE OF DISCURSIVE MEANING-MAKING

Exploring the concept of *place* is one-way meaning can be extracted from the discourse of a photograph. Understanding the site of the discourse, meaning where the discourse is about or is produced, can be helpful in understanding what the discourse is trying to do. From a humanistic perspective, the concept of place generally relates to the relationship between people and the physical space around them. While exact conceptualizations vary across specific social disciplines, there is a general consensus that place involves some sort of perceived or felt bond between individuals and a location. From an anthropological perspective, the concept of *attachment* is used to understand this relationship. Anthropologist Setha Low suggests that the bond between human and place is a cultural and symbolic way for a people to understand their environment, thus “is more than an emotional and cognitive experience, and includes cultural beliefs and practices that link people to place.”<sup>61</sup> Similarly, sociologist David Hummon argues that “sense of place involves a personal orientation toward place, in which one’s understanding of place and one’s feelings about place become fused in the context of environmental meaning.”<sup>62</sup> Place in the context of this dissertation is considered from a similar perspective. Examining the areas in which Corn and Rogovin made photographs and their understanding of the issues the miners, the families and communities faced is critical to gleaning knowledge from their photographs.

Appalachia is a unique geographic region, with unique cultural experiences shared across those who inhabit the land; the land itself being an important symbol in the creation of shared cultural identities. As a place, what has come to be known as *Appalachia* is vast. Current

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<sup>61</sup> Low, 1992: 165–186

<sup>62</sup> Hummon, 1992: 253–278

consensus is that it occupies 420 counties in parts of 13 U.S. states (Figure 15): from southern New York state down through Pennsylvania and West Virginia, southeastern Ohio, eastern parts of Kentucky and Tennessee, as well as western Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and northern Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.<sup>63,◊</sup> Despite its geographic vastness, geologically, one commonality that links the region's many subregions is large ribbons of rich coal deposited beneath the surface of the Allegheny, Adirondacks, Blue Ridge, Great Smoky and Cumberland mountain ranges. Like long black strands of coveted thread, coal binds these separate mountainous stretches together, weaving a common area of culture around its extraction. The region's geography, people and history are fundamental to knowledge of Appalachia as a remote and isolated place and as the site of production for Corn's and Rogovin's photographs.

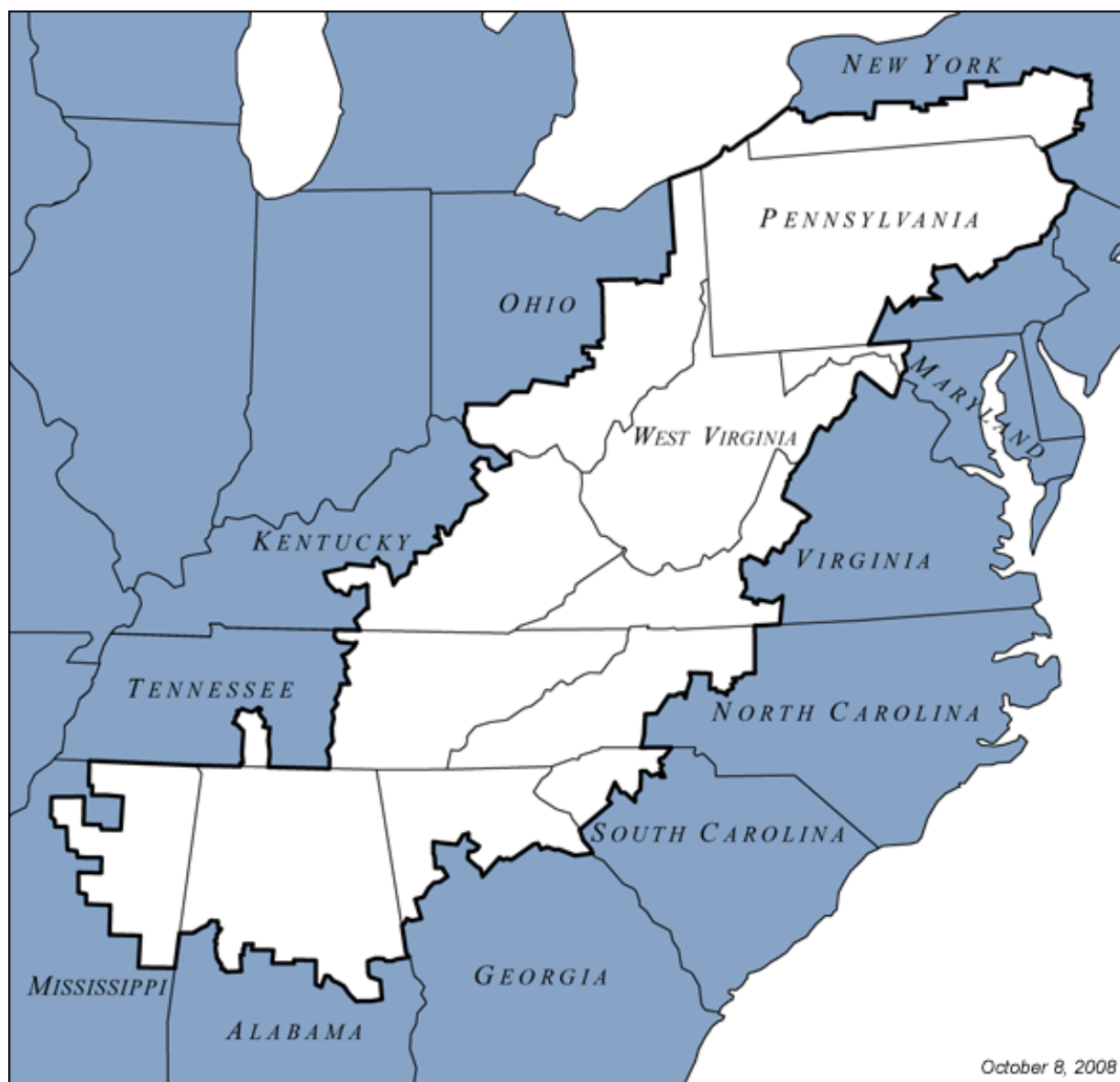
The site of production is helpful in the discourse of an image because it allows for the production of knowledge around the social and physical conditions surrounding how, when and where a photograph was made.<sup>64</sup> Knowing that an image was made in Appalachia, northern Tennessee specifically, adds to the meaning of the photograph and what can be known about the scene. Combining what can be known about the scene through reading the photograph with one's prior understanding of Appalachia as a region from external sources of discourse helps develop a deeper discursive meaning of a photograph. Also contributing to the discursive production of knowledge of a photograph is understanding its site of circulation. The site of circulation gives clues to a photograph's intended meaning because it questions the institutions that may have

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<sup>63</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020

<sup>◊</sup> The Appalachian Regional Commission is a governmental body aimed at the economic development of the Appalachian region. Members of the commission include the governors of Alabama, Ohio, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, South Carolina, Maryland, Tennessee, Mississippi, Virginia, New York, West Virginia, North Carolina, and a federally appointed chair.

<sup>64</sup> Rose, 2016: 27



*Figure 15. 2008 Boundary Map of the Appalachian Region from the Appalachian Regional Commission.*



sanctioned the work and how the photograph was meant to be viewed. Knowing that Corn made many photographs, like the one of Proctor Reagan and his son, as a staff photographer for *The Tennessean* in Nashville while on an assignment, imbues this photograph with meaning. That Corn was a photojournalist give the photograph meaning that is different from if it had been a family snapshot made by the man's wife or a family friend. *The Tennessean* was a news organization with more than 200,000 readers. Knowing that it was made for the intended distribution to those readers as a symbolic story documenting the mountain people's lifestyle contributes to the meaning of the photograph. Chapter three focuses exclusively on the cultural and geographic conditions that have contributed to the construction of Appalachia as a region. These conditions are vital to understanding the sites of production and circulation of Corn's and Rogovin's photographs.

## THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF REPRESENTATION

Thinking about photography in terms of the apparatus of news gathering is one way to approach exploration of identity in the production of discourse. "News is not really as it happened, but an observed documentation of that reality—a representation," of places, events and people in society.<sup>65,66</sup> This argument by journalism scholar Elfriede Fürsich is central to the current examination of the production of photographic discourse and representation, because like news, photographs are also a form of observed documentation. But her use of language—including both 'documentation' and 'representation'—suggest, perhaps *documentation* and *representation* reference the same concept. This raises the question that if documenting and representing something are the same type of discursive action, what does the use of the modifier

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<sup>65</sup> Buoziis and Creech, 2018

<sup>66</sup> Fürsich, 2009

‘observed’ do to understanding the notion of documentation? Cultural theorist Stuart Hall’s exhaustive work in representation holds some insight. He argues that there are fundamentally two types of representation: representation that “describes or depicts” a concept in reality or in the imaginary, and representation that “symbolizes” that concept.<sup>67</sup> Representation within the framework adopted in this dissertation, descriptive representation is embodied by connotative knowledge, whereas denotative knowledge is concerned with a photograph’s symbolic representation. Scholars who work extensively in documentary studies such as Robert Coles and William Stott contend that documentation is an evidentiary action undertaken to offer an accurate depiction of something in reality.<sup>68,69</sup> However, when examined through the mediating effect of observation, Fürsich’s use of both documentation and representation becomes a little more clear. Visual communication scholar Julianne Newton argues that observation is an act of power in which the observed, be it someone or something, “is placed under authority or control,” of the observer.<sup>70</sup> A similar relationship between authority and observation is found in *Discipline and Punishment* where Foucault discusses legibility as the state’s ability to exert control through the implication of surveillance.<sup>71</sup> Placing Fürsich’s argument in the context of the relationship between language and identity suggests that she is applying both meanings of representation to her argument. If what is observed is under the power of the observer, then how reality is documented in a photograph, what is represented is going to depend on who is producing the discourse, and how they see themselves positioned in that reality. The influence and effect of identity on Corn’s and Rogovin’s production of Appalachia photographs are discussed in greater

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<sup>67</sup> Hall, 2013: 2–3

<sup>68</sup> Stott, 1986: 5–6

<sup>69</sup> Coles, 1997: 2

<sup>70</sup> Newton, 2013: 38

<sup>71</sup> Foucault, 1977

detail in chapters five and six. Chapter five explores personal and photographic influences that shaped Corn's and Rogovin's positioning as documentary photographers, and the aesthetics of the work. Chapter six will focus on the approach of these photographers in developing relationships with their subjects in isolated areas of Appalachia.

## CHAPTER 2

### BUILDING THE EMPIRE AND ENVISIONING HEROICS: DISCOURSE AND AESTHETICS OF MINING (1868–1977)

“Coal is the prime mover of our civilization, whether for peace or war, the substance that gives to us more useful things, more things vital to us, is more widely known, that enters more closely into the lives of civilized man than any other substance; about which we know so much and yet so little; formed when there was no sign or footstep of man, yet the real value and worth of which has only been discovered in the last few years; without which our boasted civilization would be as of the Stone Age!”

—F. R. Wadleigh, 1921

The modern world owes, in large part, its existence to coal. As the quotation above suggests, coal has been a fundamental force over the past two centuries, helping to develop how wars could be waged, goods shipped, homes heated, raw materials refined, energy produced, and people moved across vast distances. While early documented uses of coal date back to smelting copper during the Han dynasty in China (206 BCE–220 CE)—and is mentioned in the writings of Greek philosopher Aristotle as being used in the forges of metal smiths—coal did not emerge as the driving force of industrial modernity until its widespread use was adopted in the production of iron in the 1830s.<sup>72</sup> Coal’s rise as an indispensable source of fuel coincides with important periods in both the emergence and development of photographic technology and the westward expansion of burgeoning U.S. nationhood.

This chapter explores perspectives on the practice of photographing mines throughout U.S. history and in parallel, discusses the material connections and technological advancements that link these enterprises. Through an examination of photographs made by Timothy O’Sullivan (1871 to 1874), Lewis W. Hine (1908 to 1924) and Arthur Rothstein (1935 to 1940), among others, this chapter offers commentary aimed at illustrating historical visual representation of

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<sup>72</sup> Wadleigh, 1921: 6

coal mining and what these representations discursively contributed to our understanding of the role of miners and the function of mining in society. This commentary is essential in advancing one of the key arguments made in this dissertation—that Corn’s and Rogovin’s work in the 1950s, 60s and 70s disrupted coal mining discourse popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to illustrate the ways in which their work was disruptive, the discourse being disrupted must first be explored. The photographs discussed in this chapter reflect discourse that reinforces the importance placed on coal in the growth of the United States and its global economic prowess during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

#### SEEING THE SCENE: SURVEY WORK AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN COLONIAL CONTEXTS

In 1867, Yale-educated chemist Clarence King embarked upon a massive expedition west to “study all rock formations, mountain ranges, detrital plains, mines, coal deposits, soils, minerals, ores, saline and alkaline deposits”<sup>73</sup> along the 40<sup>th</sup> parallel between the 105<sup>th</sup> and 120<sup>th</sup> meridians. The expedition was launched by the U.S. War Department under the direction of Major General A.A. Humphreys with the promise of “a study and description of all the natural resources of the mountain country near the Union and Central Pacific railroads; secondly, the completion of a continuous geological section across the widest expansion of the great Cordilleran Mountain System.”<sup>74</sup> The 803-page first volume of King’s report titled “Systematic Geology” was published in 1878 and beautifully illustrated with 27 plates painted by artist Julian

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<sup>73</sup> Trachtenberg, 1989: 119–130

<sup>74</sup> King, 1878



Figure 16. Frontispiece of *The Fortieth Parallel survey report Vol. I, Systematic Geology*. "Natural Column – Washakie Bad-Lands, Wyoming," Julian Bien, 1878.

Bien, and a series of 12 analytical geological maps. The frontispiece of the report (Figure 16) depicts a natural column rock formation jutting to the sky from a rocky terrain in the Bad Lands of Wyoming. Two members of the Washakie band of the Shoshone tribe can be seen at the base of the column looking to their horses and the mountains in the distance. Bien was not a member of the survey team, however, and did not witness this scene for himself. His paintings were interpretive renderings of photographs made by expedition photographer Timothy O'Sullivan. At the time the first volume of the report was published, interpretive illustration was still commonplace in publishing. Despite the growing popularity of photography, photographic

images were not able to be reproduced by a printing press until the halftone process began being adopted in the 1880s, after King's reports were published.<sup>75,76</sup> Though not included in the survey's reports that were widely distributed, O'Sullivan's prints were collected and bound into volumes and shared with high ranking government officials and members of Congress interested in the survey's results.<sup>77</sup>

O'Sullivan's photographs show rugged mountain landscapes, buttes jutting up from desert plains, waterfalls, forested hills, and rivers winding through gorges or far into the horizon. Each view he claimed was constructed to celebrate the physical characteristics and geologic structure of the landscape before him. As often as possible, O'Sullivan placed strips of land in the foreground of his compositions as if to invite the viewers to imagine they themselves standing there. "Mt. Agassiz, Uinta Mountains" illustrates O'Sullivan's masterful use of foreground and background. Taken in 1869, the photograph (Figure 17) shows the summit of Mt. Agassiz gently sloping down to abruptly end at an area of sheer, jagged cliffs that carry the mountain down to a rocky, forested lakeshore. The reflections of the Rocky Mountain Juniper stretch across the glassy surface of the water to a thin sliver of shore O'Sullivan has placed to anchor the position of his view in the frame. Another photograph of a mining camp in 1867 exemplifies this technique. The photograph, simply titled "Gold Hill, Nevada" (Figure 18) is taken from a hilltop vantagepoint looking down at timber structures spread out across a valley to the base of a mountain in the distant background. Just beyond the reach of the settlement and the mountain's base, the viewer can just see an area of disturbed land, foliage removed, soil

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<sup>75</sup> Twyman, 1970

<sup>76</sup> Stulik and Kaplan, 2013

<sup>77</sup> Trachtenberg, 1989: 122

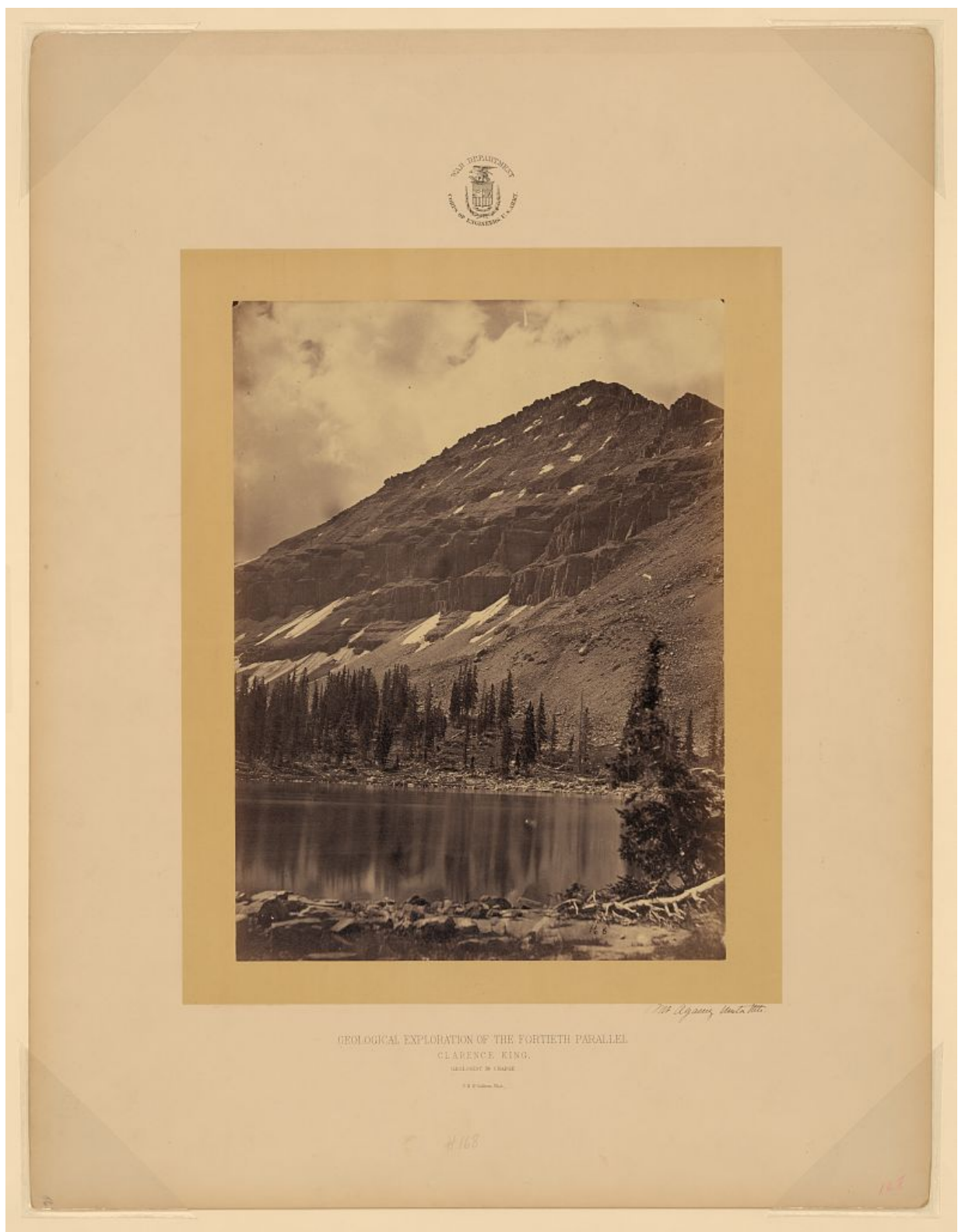


Figure 17. "Mt. Agassiz, Uinta Mts [Utah]," T. H. O'Sullivan, 1869.





Figure 18. "Gold Hill, Nevada," T. H. O'Sullivan, 1867.

lighter in color, where the entrance of a mine has been constructed. The photograph celebrates man's conquest over the land. It shows the industrial prowess of the U.S. and that through mankind's achievement industry can thrive in even the most remote locale. Again, O'Sullivan has grounded his position in the photograph, leaving a sliver of the sagebrush-covered hill in view. Alan Trachtenberg, professor emeritus of English and American Studies at Yale University, writes that O'Sullivan's mining pictures "force us to recognize that even the Shoshone, even Carson Desert, cannot be understood simply as "nature" existing prior to and apart from the social activity of surveys, but as the product of a distinct mode of seeing, knowing, and possessing."<sup>78</sup>

While King and his crew were pressing westward across the North American continent, in Europe teams of English explorers and adventurers mounted similar survey expeditions aiming to *discover* the source of the Nile River in southern Africa. Expeditions such as those to Somaliland led by geographer and ethnologist Sir Richard Burton and to Lake Victoria led by explorer John Henning Speke had similar underlying goals to King's survey of the 40<sup>th</sup> parallel: assess and document resources that could be of economic value to the empire.<sup>79,80</sup> Like Burton and Speke, King chronicled the discoveries of the expedition in written and illustrated volumes. Less than a century had passed since gaining independence from the British Empire, yet the United States found itself modeling its empire building survey after the English colonial practice of Victorian exploration and travel writing. Mary Louise Pratt, a scholar of Portuguese and Spanish languages and literatures, takes aim at the English colonial practice of surveys in her 1992 book "Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation." Her chapter titled "From the

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<sup>78</sup> Trachtenberg, 1989: 152

<sup>79</sup> Pratt, 1992: 201–202

<sup>80</sup> Trachtenberg, 1989: 122

Victoria Nyanza to the Sheraton San Salvador” contains a scathing decolonial critique of Burton and Speke’s expeditions. Using colonial-settler logics that work to establish imperial dominance over peoples and lands through conquest, Pratt argues that the appropriation of view is a mechanism for colonization through the idea of the “monarch of all I survey.” This logic, like Foucault’s legibility, prescribes that to behold something is to have power of it, to possess it. Speke operated under the colonial logic that being the first European to gaze upon Lake Victoria granted him the privilege of naming the body of water. Speke claimed his discovery for the expanding British Empire despite the area already being inhabited by indigenous peoples.<sup>81</sup> King in his survey of the West also employed the practice of ‘monarch of all I survey’ by renaming many symbolic Native American sites, including Mount Whitney in California’s Yosemite Valley. Being able to visually document the discoveries made on expeditions has played a historically important role in reinforcing the power of gaze in the possession of newly discovered territory. Dispatching photographers such as O’Sullivan to accompany the expedition teams, King continued a long tradition of illustrating the landscape employed by European explorers.

In colonial contexts of exploration, the tradition of the illustration, or photograph, brings to public attention all the ways raw, untamed regions of the world could benefit from industrialized society. As a benefactor and protectorate, explorers like King reinforce imperial logics that appropriate land through discovery by asserting their ownership of the view. Photography, like the Victorian brand of “verbal painting” Pratt criticizes in travel writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, operates within the assumption that what the photographer has photographed is *all* there is to *see*. *If* there was more of interest, of importance, of significance, certainly it would have been photographed as well. In many ways the act of taking a photograph itself is inherently

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<sup>81</sup> Pratt, 1992: 202

a colonial act.<sup>82,83,84</sup> Pratt alludes to the colonial nature of visual documentation in *Imperial Eyes* in a very abstract way and provides evidence supporting this claim. Early on in her seminal work *On Photography*, Susan Sontag lays the groundwork to connect Pratt's decolonial arguments and the colonizing nature of the image. Sontag asserts that "to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge—and, therefore, like power."<sup>85</sup> Examining these two very simple and elegant sentences against Pratt's discussion of discovery and exploration photographers can be imagined as embodying the persona of the 'monarch-of-all-I-survey.'

Photographs of mining and miners contribute to the development of socio-environmental visual discourse in a number of key contexts. Through historical observation these contexts can be described as: (1) The objectification and exploitation of miners as a commodity; (2) the glorification of industry in expanding colonial progress (3) the relationship between mine sites as a source of economic production and the communities that form around them; (4) the relationship between miners and the land that is altered through the act of mining; and (5) the erasure in visual narratives of societal mass consumption as catalyst for degradation of the environment through mining activities. Social issues such as westward expansion and indigenous relocation, apartheid, decolonialism and the rise of the environmental movement all have contributed to conditions present at the sites of photographic production for mining photographs. Early work of photographers related to mining in the 19<sup>th</sup>—and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>—centuries focused primarily on architectural or technical studies that illustrated a mine's workings and on portraiture of miners, both of which made discursive contributions to the role of mines and

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<sup>82</sup> Gabara, 2006

<sup>83</sup> Hight and Sampson, 2013

<sup>84</sup> Langford, 2008

<sup>85</sup> Sontag, 1977: xx

miners in society. The context of coal mining discourse popularized beginning with King's survey and continuing through the Great Depression focus on the commodification of mine workers, and the benefit their labor affords industry. It is not until the 1930s that the view of mining begins to widen.

## MINING AND PHOTOGRAPHY: HISTORIES INTERTWINED

Inextricably linked by the raw materials required to gather, focus and record light on a fixed plane, the process of photography and the act of mining have a long and interconnected history. Mined aluminum and magnesium have been used in the production of camera bodies; silica and quartz for optics; gold and copper for modern internal circuitry; and silver for light sensitive emulsion applied to cellulous and glass negatives and tintypes. While mining has provided the materials historically necessary to make a photograph, photography has provided historical evidence and visual narratives that illustrate the relationship between mining and a myriad of social issues. The use of photography as a medium for documentary work has a long and rich history, in which industry, has been a frequent subject.<sup>86,87,88</sup> Photographs of mines and miners occupy episodic instances in the bodies of work of many notable photographers such as Hine, Walker Evans, W. Eugene Smith, Margaret Bourke-White, and Sebastião Salgado. Mining, coal in particular, offers itself to be photographed by yielding natural aesthetics of rich textures, deep gritty tones and both smooth and angular structures for photographers to experiment with composition. Visualized through representations of industrial prowess and vast, imposing landscapes of extractable natural resources, mining has inspired the imaginations of

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<sup>86</sup> Bossen and Freedman, 2012

<sup>87</sup> Benjamin, 1972

<sup>88</sup> Gernheim and Gernheim, 1969

photographers dating back to the California gold rush and the Fortieth Parallel Survey work of O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins, William Henry Jackson and A.J. Russell.<sup>89</sup> The first images made using an experimental magnesium flash powder were made by O'Sullivan of the Savage Mine in Curtis Shaft, Nevada in 1868, making the mine itself an important site in the history of photography.<sup>90</sup> The photograph (Figure 7) is symbolic of the reciprocity found in the material and technological connections between photography and mining. O'Sullivan's silver albumen print was the first time the inner working of a mine could be seen outside of being physically in the mine itself. Aside from capturing what the mine looked like, the photograph as an object also illustrates the importance of mining to industry. It symbolizes the importance of mining in providing the materials necessary for technological advancement, such as the magnesium needed to illuminate the scene during exposure, and the silver needed to make the print. O'Sullivan used technological advancements in photography again in his photograph "Gold Hill, Nevada." The photograph shows more than man's determination to conquer the west, it also gives the viewer a glimpse at how photography of remote places became possible in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, expanding the explorer's technical capabilities for visual documentation of their discoveries.

O'Sullivan's mining photographs were made with the wet plate process of photography called the collodion process. By the 1850s it had mostly replaced the daguerreotype.<sup>91</sup> Pieces of glass were coated with light sensitive silver nitrate just before exposure and needed to be processed quickly after the exposure was complete. In the foreground in the lower left of O'Sullivan's "Gold Hill, Nevada" photograph, his portable blackout tent can be seen. The small

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<sup>89</sup> Trachtenberg, 1989: 119–130

<sup>90</sup> Rogovin and Keller, 2005: 8–9

<sup>91</sup> Dotschkal, 2015



*Figure 19. "Cars coming out of shaft, Savage Mine," T.H. O'Sullivan, 1868.*

light-tight tent allowed O'Sullivan to prepare and process glass negatives in the field, making possible this type of survey photography. Inclusion of the blackout tent in the photograph serves as a symbol of mankind's supremacy over the elements. Not only can man conquer and tame the land, but he can also conquer and tame the light that falls upon that land, controlling and bending it to his will in recording his conquests.

Moving beyond showing the technical aspects of mining, as O'Sullivan did, photographers such as Hine began focusing their attention on working conditions, just at the time the labor movement was taking hold across the country at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Aided in part by advancements in technology, such as the introduction of cellulose roll film in 1889 and the 120mm format in 1901, photographers had more portability and freedom than enjoyed by photographers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>92</sup> In 1908 Hine, a former teacher, began work with the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). Hine's survey of child labor took him to mines in Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky to photograph child laborers known as breaker boys. His work aimed to expose the dangerous and exploitative nature of child labor practices within the U.S. capitalistic industrial complex. Hine's portraits of mines help elevate him to the status of being the predominant documentary photographer of his era. This work became an important symbol of the child labor moment, with advocates for labor law reform using Hine's photographs as evidence of the deplorable working conditions. Hine's photographs, for example (Figure 20), of the stoic-looking, soot-covered laborer helped establish the dominate aesthetic of miners in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hine gave intimate but narrow glimpses into the relationship between miners and their work while exposing the harsh working conditions of child mine laborers. While Hine's

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<sup>92</sup> Eastman Kodak Company, 2013





Figure 20. "Young Driver in Mine," Brown, West Virginia. Lewis Hine, 1908.

mining photographs are important, they occupy relatively small spaces in his overall body of work for the NCLC, and as innovative as they may have been, they are still limited in view. His work focused on the miner and the dangers they faced, rather than the importance of coal to the nation's domestic and industrial needs. Compared with his photographs of other types of labor and industry, Hine's mining photographs showed little beyond the mining sites themselves, exposing the outside life of miners to a lesser extent than the work of Corn and Rogovin.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF COAL TO SOCIETY: FROM HEATING AND THE ELECTRIC LIGHT TO TRANSPORTATION AND INDUSTRY

On May 10, 1876 U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant stood on a platform in the sprawling Machinery Hall at the Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia, a crowd of 100,000 packed around him (Figure 21).<sup>93</sup> Officially named the *International Exhibition of Arts, Manufacturers and Products of the Soil and Mine*, the event was planned as a celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence and showcased both cultural and industrial achievements of the age.<sup>94</sup> Grant stood at the controls of a massive machine on the platform and as a choir sang Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" he pulled a lever, putting the coal-fired steam engine into motion. Environmental and energy policy analyst Barbara Freese describes the event from historical accounts, writing: "With a hiss of steam, the engine's cross beam began to rock, its two enormous pistons began to churn, and eight miles of connecting shafts running through the hall began to rotate. A cheer rose from the crowd as fourteen acres of gleaming machinery

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<sup>93</sup> Freese 2003: 129

<sup>94</sup> Wainwright, Nicholas, Weigley, Russell, Wolf and Edwin, 1982: 460



OUR CENTENNIAL—PRESIDENT GRANT AND DOM PEDRO STARTING THE CORLISS ENGINE.—FROM A SKETCH BY THOS. R. DAVIS.—[SEE PAGE 492.]

Figure 21. President Grant and the Emperor of Brazil starting the great Corliss Engine in Machinery Hall. Harper's Weekly, March 27, 1867.

simultaneously sprang to noisy life, spinning, awing, sewing, pumping, and printing, trumpeting in unison the nation's arrival as an industrial power."<sup>95</sup>

The quote that begins this chapter is from a trade manual published in 1921 by the National Coal Mining News of Cincinnati, Ohio for those in the coal distribution and procurement industries. Written by F.R. Wadleigh of the American Institute of Mining & Metallurgical Engineers, "A Coal Manual for Salesmen, Buyers and Users" is a detailed account of all the industries and functions in society that depend upon coal. By 1895 coal became the primary source of fuel in the U.S., surpassing petroleum-derived products such as kerosene or fuel oil.<sup>96</sup> A 1941 photograph by Howard Liberman, titled "Fuel Conversion" (Figure 22), shows the process of converting a fuel oil furnace to burn coal. This was common practice in the early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as coal became a more abundant source of fuel. Liberman's "Fuel Conversion" and a pair of photographs made in the 1930s by Rothstein make aesthetic connections between the production of coal and consumption, a narrative absent in much of the visual discourse surrounding coal. "West Mine, West Frankfort, Illinois" (Figure 23) shows an abandoned coal tipple next to a row of electrical poles carrying high voltage wires far off into the distance. Tipples are processing facilities located at or near mines used to refine raw coal. They remove impurities through washing and breaking apart larger pieces into either coke, or various sizes such as screenings, nuts, lumps or eggs categorized and sorted based on use.<sup>97</sup> "Ruins of Franco Coal Company No. 1 mine, Steritz, Illinois" (Figure 24), shows the infrastructure of an electrical sub-station at a mining facility abandoned after a flood in 1938. Both photographs visually tie coal mining with the production of electricity which, besides being

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<sup>95</sup> Freese 2003: 129

<sup>96</sup> U.S. Department of Energy Information Administration, 2013

<sup>97</sup> Wadleigh, 1921: 83





Figure 22. "Fuel conservation," Howard Lieberman, 1942.



Figure 23. "West Mine, West Frankfort, Illinois," Arthur Rothstein, 1939.



*Figure 24. "Ruins of Franco Coal Company No. 1 mine, Steritz, Illinois," Arthur Rothstein, 1939.*

used to heat the home, was the most direct link between individuals and coal outside coal-producing regions. These instances in Rothstein's work move away from the abstraction of Hine's worker aesthetic and the knowledge of danger his work produce. Rothstein's work is post-development, showing coal production at the processing and distribution phase. Focusing on processing and distribution moves even further away from O'Sullivan's idealization of the scenic terrain and its potential for development through man's ability to harness and exert control both above and below the land.

Coal was burned in furnaces to heat individual homes. It was used to make steel, and in boilers that powered locomotives and steam ships. Increasing uses for coal led production to double in the U.S. at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Coal production went from 111,302,322 tons in 1890 to 212,316,112 in 1900, and more than doubled again in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>98</sup> Two photographs, "Coaling the Pacific Mail S.S. Siberia" (Figure 25) made in 1904, and "Coaling the Leviathan" made in 1918 (Figure 26), illustrate coal being used to move society. Both photographs show barges moored against steamships as laborers shovel coal into boiler rooms in preparation for voyage. Ships such as these required a massive amount of coal to operate. For example, a 182-foot steamship weighing 235 tons would burn five pounds of coal per hour to generate 1 horsepower of propulsion.<sup>99</sup> At 8.7 knots, requiring 148 horsepower, a steamship of this size would need more than 128 tons of coal to travel the 3,470 miles from London to New York. Freese writes that "the industrial age emerged literally in a haze of coal smoke, and in that smoke, we can read much of the history of the modern world."<sup>100</sup> That smoke

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<sup>98</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, Report of the Coal Mines Administration, 1947: xiv

<sup>99</sup> Institute of Nautical Archaeology, Texas A&M University

<sup>100</sup> Freese, 2003: 2



and the gritty, sooty textures of coal helped photographers document its emergence as the dominant material fueling U.S. industrial might. Photographers like O'Sullivan and Hine helped establish prevailing views of coal and mining that dominated the visual aesthetics for decades. Viewed from a place of privilege, their images are a reminder of how colonial gaze and photography work through symbiosis to reinforce prevailing western logics of imperialism and superiority. In the grand tradition of the monarch-of-all-I-survey, O'Sullivan and other survey photographers of the era understood the explicit interaction between aesthetics and ideology. These photographers revealed to the world a promontory scene. Their photographs of westward expansion and empire building offered a balcony view of colonial conquests.



Figure 25. "Coaling the Pacific Mail S.S. "Siberia" at the fortified naval station of Nagasaki, Japan,"  
Underwood & Underwood, 1904.



Figure 26. "Coaling the "Leviathan", Brest, France," Unknown, May 30, 1918.

### CHAPTER 3

#### POWER, PLACE AND POVERTY: THE CONSTRUCTION OF APPALACHIA AS A GEO-CULTURAL CONCEPT

“Coal has always cursed the land in which it lies. When men begin to wrest it from the earth it leaves a legacy of foul streams, hideous slag heaps and polluted air. It peoples this transformed land with blind and crippled men and with widows and orphans. It is an extractive industry which takes all away and restores nothing. It mars but never beautifies.  
It corrupts but never purifies.”

— Harry M. Caudill, 1962

When Harry M. Caudill set out to demonize what he saw as the perpetration of a great and immoral trauma to his homeland, the devastating psychological, social, economic, political and environmental effects of coal mining were already seemingly irreversible. For nearly a century, outside investors had exploited many parts of the Appalachian region, manipulated the people to sign away mineral rights, and through crude and devastating means, violently ripped the coal that had lain just below the surface of the Earth for eons. Published in 1962, Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* chronicles the struggle of 18 counties in southeast Kentucky situated in a part of Appalachia known as the Cumberland Plateau. Caudill’s well-documented historical research and first-hand knowledge of the area contribute a biting exactness to the power of his narrative. Understanding the setting for *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* as a place also helps contribute to understanding Corn’s and Rogovin’s mining photographs by providing the context of the place where they were made.

Discussion in this chapter centers on addressing how the characteristics, factors and conditions unique to the Appalachian region may have affected Corn’s and Rogovin’s work there. Exploration of these characteristics, factors and conditions will contribute to understanding of what made the production of Corn’s and Rogovin’s photographs possible as well as

aesthetically and discursively different from photographs of coal mining in other regions. The geology of the mountains in Appalachia prescribe what types of coal are found there and how that coal can be mined. Understanding the geologic characteristics of Appalachia compared to other coal producing regions provides vital context of how conditions may have affected the photographs Corn and Rogovin were able to make. This chapter uses the colonial hegemonic structures of power crafted by coal companies and government officials concerned with advancing economic interests over regulation. These structures of power serve as a lens to compare the work of Corn and Rogovin to other photographers who worked in Appalachia. Specifically, the work of Marion Post Wolcott and Jack Delano will be examined to form knowledge of the history of poverty and labor in the region. Differences in the sub-groups of miners photographed by Corn and Rogovin will be discussed alongside the differences between mining in West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky, especially how the industries were affected by the Great Depression (1929–1939) and economic recovery through the 1960s.

## THE EFFECTS OF GEOLOGY ON GEOGRAPHY

Thrust up through geologic forces more than 500 million years ago, the Appalachian Mountains are the oldest on Earth.<sup>101</sup> Hydrologic forces of erosion have dulled and lowered their peaks over many eons while leaving steep and ragged cliffs; however, geologists believe they once stood taller than the Rockies, Alps or Himalayas.<sup>102</sup> With the mountains as its spine, the place that has come to be known as *Appalachia* is vast, many parts of it remote and isolated. Though its exact extent is historically a source of contention amongst geographers,

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<sup>101</sup> Brooks, 1965: viii

<sup>102</sup> Brooks, 1965: viii

anthropologists, sociologists and historians working in the region, current consensus is that it occupies 420 counties in parts of 13 U.S. states. Beginning in southern New York state, it stretches down through central Pennsylvania, occupies all of West Virginia, as well as southeastern Ohio, the eastern parts of Kentucky and Tennessee, western Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and northern Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi.<sup>103</sup> The landscape of Appalachia contains topographic features making the coal fields located there particularly challenging to access and mine. These particularities of place created unique physical and social conditions for Corn's and Rogovin's picture-making.

The Clear Fork Valley in northeastern Tennessee, for example, winds through the Cumberland mountains along the Clear Fork River. The valley begins in the small town of Fonde just north of the Kentucky/Tennessee border approximately 77 miles due north of Knoxville. The valley then extends 20 miles southwest to White Oak, Tennessee, a small town 200 miles northeast of Nashville. Clairfield, once the heart of mining operations in the valley is situated right in the middle of the valley with Fonde to the northeast and White Oak to the southwest; also, in the valley are the towns of Pruden, Eagan and Anthras. This is where Corn spent decades documenting the devastating effects of coal mining. To get to the Clear Fork from Nashville, Corn would typically take Interstate 40 east 190 miles to LaFollette, where he would catch Tennessee State Route 9 north to Morely.<sup>104</sup> From Morely, Tennessee State Route 90 cuts through a gap in the Cumberlands and leads to White Oak at the southwest end of the Clear Fork valley. State Route 90 is a treacherous span of pavement sharply ascending and descending around bends that tightly wind through narrow passages uncomfortably tucked against sheer

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<sup>103</sup> Appalachian Regional Commission, 2020

<sup>104</sup> Corn, 2019

cliffs of exposed rock heaved up over millennia of continental movement.<sup>105</sup> Once over the ridge at the town of White Oak, the road narrows to 1.5 lanes; 1 lane along certain ridges.<sup>106</sup> Kudzu, an invasive vine now prevalent throughout the Appalachian mountains, can be seen creeping everywhere down the steep banks and along the valley floor covering everything from rocky outcroppings to guardrails, abandoned vehicles, even houses.

The harsh terrain is the result of the geologic structure found across the Cumberland Plateau. Structure refers to the observable cracks, bends and heaves found in rock layers created by energy released from the Earth's crust.<sup>107</sup> The sharp steep embankments revealing strata pointing laterally up to the sky are indicative of the effect of thrust faults (Figure 27) combined with erosion from the thousands of rivers and streams running throughout Cumberland Mountains.<sup>108,109</sup> The mountains were formed as the Earth's continental plates were thrust upward along fault lines resulting in tall steep mountain ridges spaced apart by very narrow valleys.<sup>110</sup> A 1936 photograph made by celebrated FSA photographer Wolcott illustrates the long, slender geologic structure of mountains found along Thrust faults in Appalachia. The photograph (Figure 28) shows the southern edge of the Cumberland Plateau near the town of Monteagle, Tennessee, 41 miles northwest of Chattanooga.<sup>111</sup> From an elevated vantage point, Wolcott positions the camera to view across a flat transitional area at the edge of the broad

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<sup>105</sup> Wilson, 1981

<sup>106</sup> Authors ethnographic visit November 2019

<sup>107</sup> Wilson, 1981: 2

<sup>108</sup> Wilson, 1981

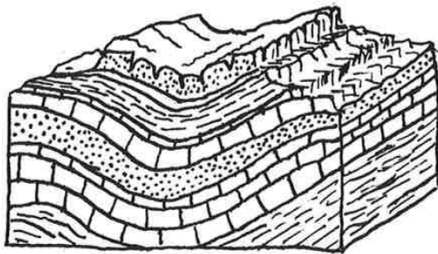
<sup>109</sup> Brooks, 1965

<sup>110</sup> Wilson, 1981

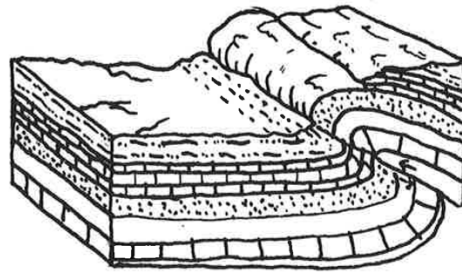
<sup>111</sup> Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington

# GEOLOGY ALONG THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS IN TENNESSEE

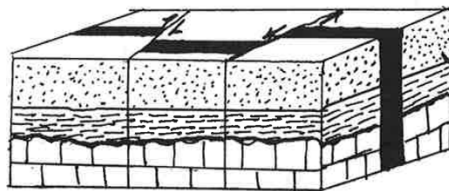
Syncline



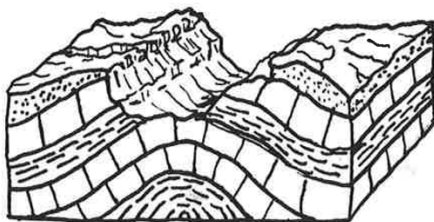
Thrust Fault



Lateral Slip Fault



Anticline



Gravity or Normal Fault

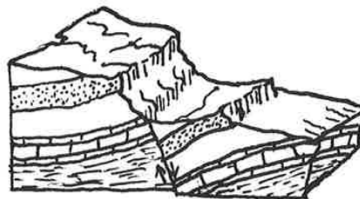


FIGURE 2. Structural Features.





*Figure 28. "View from Cumberland Plateau near Monteagle, Tennessee," Marion Post Wolcott, 1939.*



Tennessee Valley, which stretches 129 miles at its widest point, into the West. Her use of foreground and background is reminiscent of O'Sullivan's sweeping landscapes of the western ranges, using her position as the viewer to ground the photograph in the frame. In the foreground the forested mountaintop of her vantage point can be seen. An abrupt decrease in detail and contrast along the tree line a quarter of the way up the frame indicates a steep ridge sloping down to the valley at midframe. The midground of the photograph reveals the long slender structure of the Cumberland, and other ranges in the Appalachian Mountains. High ridges and steep faces of the mountains stab the frame from the right then gradually slope down at their ends like fingers reaching across the wide flat edge of the central Tennessee Valley. In between the three mountains seen in the distance are the entrances to two winding, narrow valleys. Crossing and diverging over hundreds of miles if seen from above, topographically the long slender Cumberland mountains look like a series of hastily woven lengths of rope, with harsh isolated valleys and hollows occupying what would be the space between the plies.

A motorist guide published in 1981 by the Tennessee Division of Geology describes three geomorphic sedimentary regions of the state: the Appalachian Highlands (east), Interior lowlands (central), and Atlantic Plain (west). Wolcott's photograph captures the transition between two of these regions, the Appalachian highlands and the interior lowlands. In the guide, Geologist Robert Wilson describes how the Cumberland Plateau begins with rocks gently dipping to the south as Wolcott's photograph shows. He describes that moving toward the east, the structure abruptly reverses with rocks steeply dipping toward the northwest at high angles, creating deep gorges and "prominent valleys interrupt the generally rolling terrain of the Plateau."<sup>112</sup> Wilson explains that this rugged eastern region of the Cumberland Plateau was

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<sup>112</sup> Wilson, 1981: 11

Tennessee's major producer of soft and bituminous coal. Coal could be found between strata of conglomeratic sandstone, siltstone and shale; all of which are sedimentary rocks formed by aggregating smaller materials together though intense sub-terranean pressure.<sup>113</sup> Because of their aggregated nature, sedimentary rocks are soft, brittle and fragile, which makes getting at the coal found between their layers delicate and dangerous work. Though the nature of mining inherently comes with great risk to the safety of the miners, mining coal from the brittle rock in Appalachia increases that risk.

There are three major coal producing regions in the United States: The Powder River basin beneath Wyoming and Montana, the Illinois basin, and the Appalachian basin.<sup>114</sup> An examination of two photographs illustrates how mining coal in Appalachia was different from other regions. The different structural characteristics of the rocks found in Appalachia changes the space mines can occupy between strata, and changes dramatically the space in which photographers can operate to document those mines. The first photograph (Figure 29) "Cager, B. Hendrickson," photographer unknown, was made around 1908 at the Chicago and Big Muddy Mine near the town of Marion in southern Illinois.<sup>115</sup> The photograph shows a miner with his hand on a signal bell next to a car full of coal on rail tracks leading out of the mine. Signal bells were a safety feature of the mine and used to alert miners that cars were coming down the track or to signal to the surface to hoist or lower cages. The significance of this photograph to the present investigation is in showing the mine as a space, and the infrastructure constructed to create that space. The coal seam at this particular mine at a depth 103 feet below the surface, was between seven and ten feet thick.<sup>116</sup> The thickness of the coal seams in this region, like the one

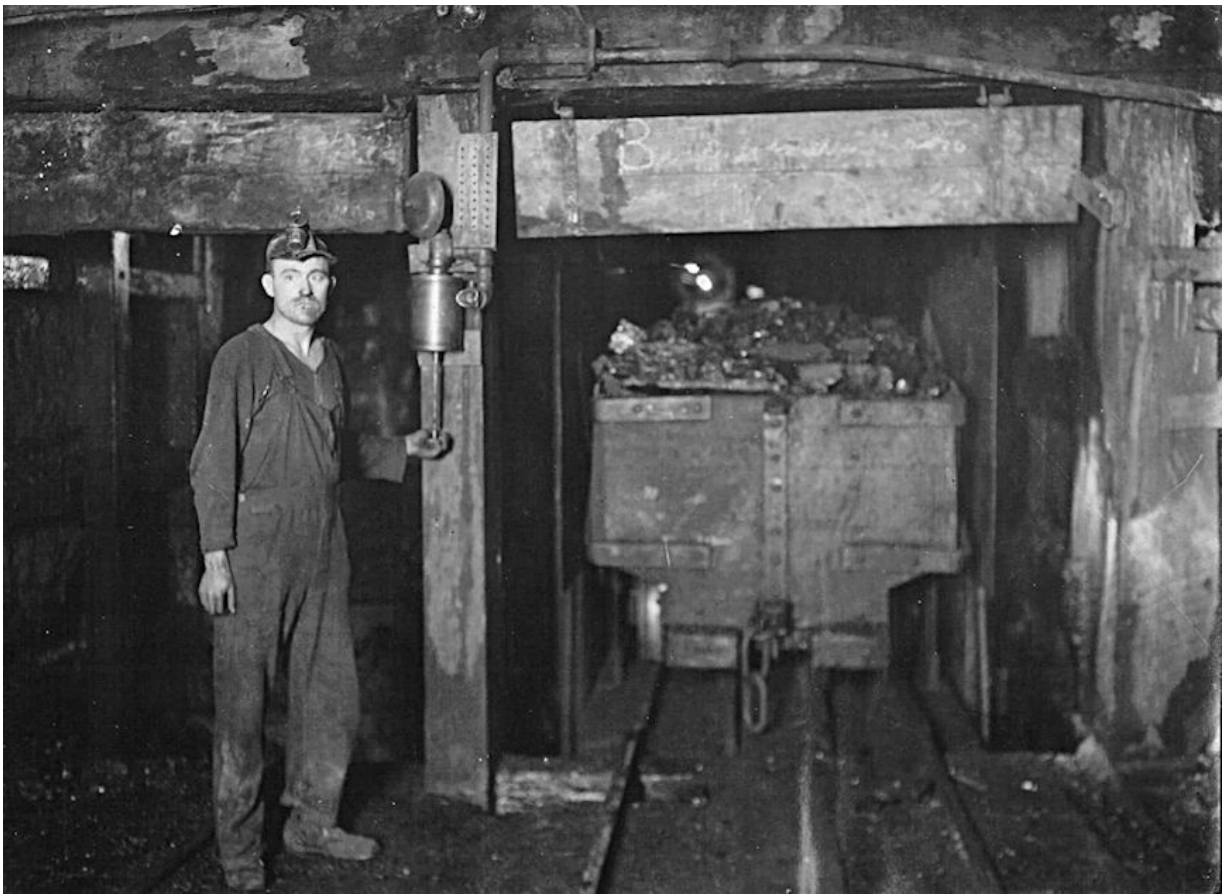
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<sup>113</sup> Wilson, 1981: 10

<sup>114</sup> Tulley, 1996

<sup>115</sup> Marion Illinois History Preservation Society

<sup>116</sup> Marion Illinois History Preservation Society



*Figure 29. "Cager, B. Hendrickson," unknown, 1908.*

mined near Marion, provided ample space once the coal was removed for infrastructure. To reduce risk of mine collapse, a robust ceiling support network was built along with miles of rail tracks, alert systems and mechanical lift mechanisms that aided the mining operation. The thickness of the seams also provided ample headroom for miners to stand upright, a condition not enjoyed by their counterparts in Appalachia.<sup>◇</sup>

A Corn photograph from the mid-60s, “Miner with coal driller,” offers a contrasting view of mining from northern Tennessee.<sup>117</sup> The photograph (Figure 30) shows a crouching miner operating a large hydraulic machine used to break apart coal at the head to advance the mine deeper into the seam. Corn creates a sense of scale by placing the miner on the left third of the frame, allowing the curved wall of the coal seam—yet to be carved out—to frame him in the tight space in which he works. Almost perfectly mirroring the curvature of the wall, the hydraulic tube of the miner’s drill snakes up from the bottom of the frame, leading the eye to the miner and creating harmony between the pictorial conventions at work in the photograph. Examining the space in this photograph compared to the Marion mine shows how the thinner coal seams trapped between the strata of sandstone, siltstone and shale of the Cumberland Mountains affected the working conditions of miners in southern Appalachia. The space is much more confined, and in most mines the ceilings were not high enough for miners to stand upright. The Marion mine photograph shows support structures of thick beams running across the mine ceiling with a support post down to the floor to prevent collapses. While not visible in “Miner with coal driller,” another Corn photograph of this same scene from a different angle shows the types of supports common to mines in this region. “Roof driller, Grundy Co., TN” (Figure 31)

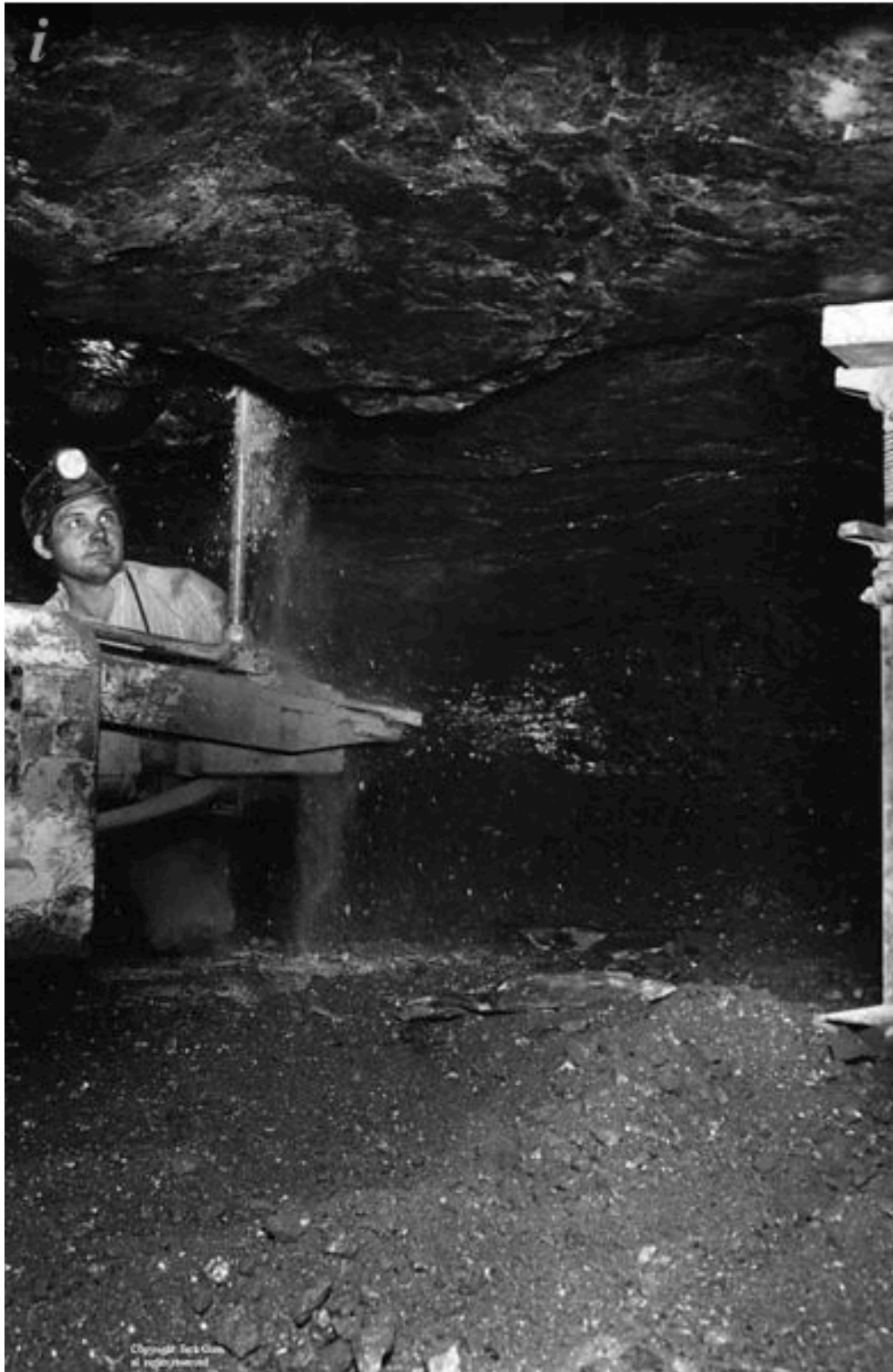
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<sup>◇</sup> Coal seams in certain parts of Appalachia, in northern West Virginia and in Pennsylvania in particular, were thicker allowing for mining that resembled the mines to the west with higher ceilings and more elaborate infrastructure compared to Kentucky and Tennessee.

<sup>117</sup> Jack Corn Collection. (n.d.). Vanderbilt University Special Collections.



*Figure 30. "Miner with coal Driller," Jack Corn, 1968.*



*Figure 31. "Roof driller, Grundy Co., TN," Jack Corn, 1968.*

shows the kneeling using a stream of high-pressured water to cut a hole in the ceiling where a steel screw-jack would be placed. The change in orientation of this photograph to vertical from the horizontal orientation of “Miner with coal driller,” even further collapses the viewer’s perception of space in the mine. Corn’s use of foreground and background traps the miner between two planes of coal—one above him and one below—creating an almost hourglass volume of space for the miner to occupy. A ceiling support jack already in place can be seen to the left of the frame as the miner works to advance deeper into the coal seam.<sup>118</sup>

Corn recalls miner Raymond Teague telling him not to look up, or he would hit his head on the roof as he descended a mine shaft for the first time in a cart pulled by a donkey. Corn writes, “The shaft was about five feet high, wet and dark. The only light came from carbide lamps on our hard hat. It was a difficult assignment, since I had to place my hands on the floor of the shaft to keep my balance, and my hand became covered with coal dust. If I tried to operate the camera, it immediately became covered with dust. I tried to wear gloves until the moment I chose to take a picture, then removed a glove to handle the camera.”<sup>119</sup> In this passage Corn is acknowledging how site of production and photographic technology connect. Journalism scholar Brian Creech argues that how and when photographic technologies are deployed are vital considerations in constructing meaning around the photographs those technologies create.<sup>120</sup> Corn began his career using a 4 x 5 Speed Graphix, still a newspaper industry standard at the time, but was an early adopter of the 35mm Nikon F series (Figure 32), which was introduced in

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<sup>118</sup> Jack Corn Collection. (n.d.). Vanderbilt University Special Collections.

<sup>119</sup> Corn, 2000: 14

<sup>120</sup> Creech, 2017





*Figure 32. Jack Corn's Nikon FM2 with motorized film drive, Vanderbilt University Special Collections.*

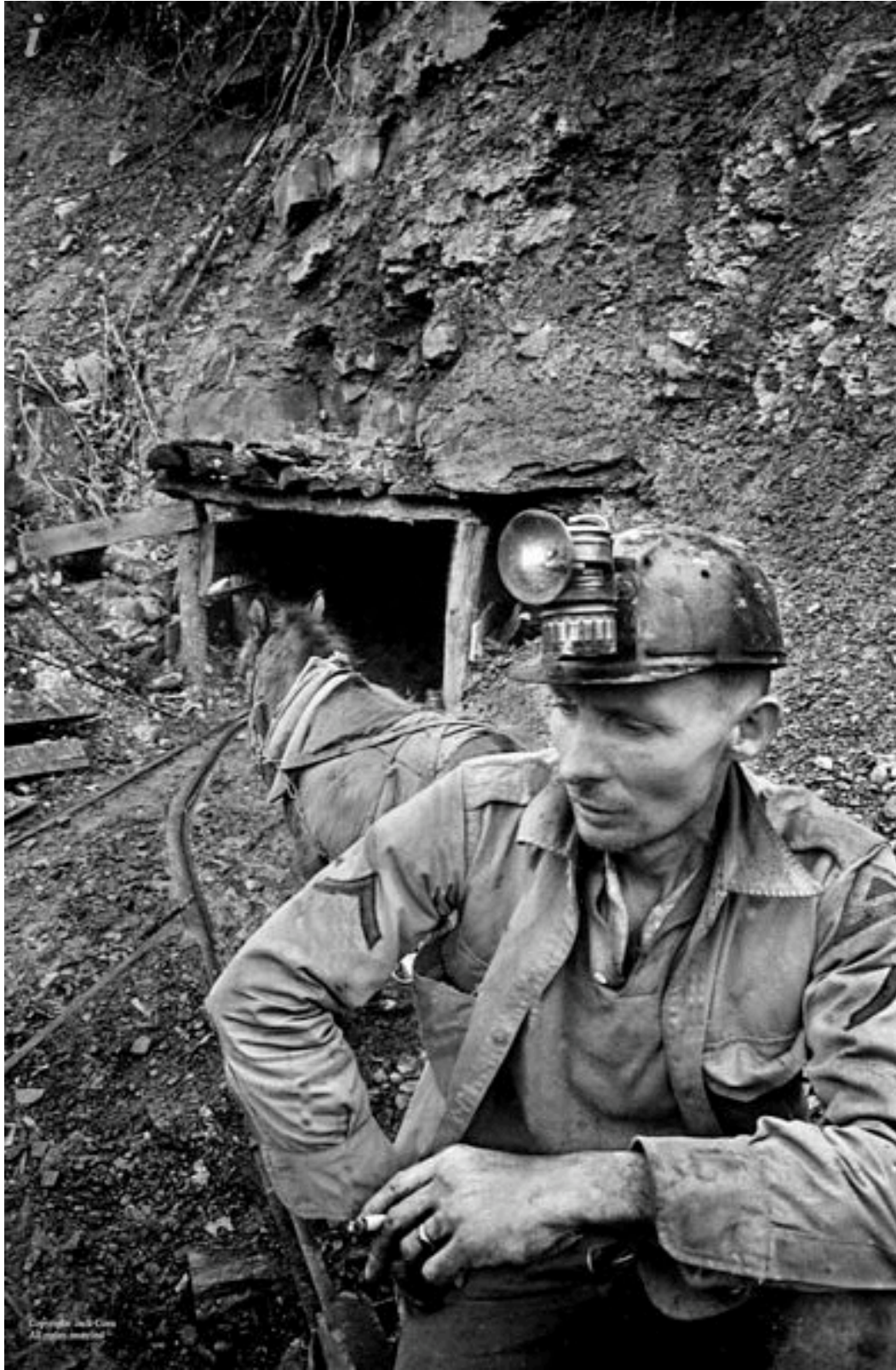
1959.<sup>121,122</sup> The portability of the Nikon F made it ideal for shooting in a variety of difficult situations, such as both outside and inside coal mines. Its lightweight and compact design made it possible for Corn to make two of his favorite photographs on this one assignment. The first photograph (Figure 33) is of Teague in broad daylight wearing a WWII Army Jacket and smoking a cigarette before entering the mine. Placing Teague forward in the frame, Corn uses forced perspective to shrink the appearance of the small mine opening behind him, which reinforces the cramped space of the mine. The nearly straight posture of the donkey's back extending from Teague's right shoulder along with the curved railcar tracks lead the viewer's eye

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<sup>121</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>122</sup> Corn, 2019





*Figure 33. "Teague and donkey, Doghole mine," Jack Corn, 1964.*

to the mine's opening. Crumbling soil and ridged rocks occupy the entire top half of the frame, emphasizing the weight of the massive mountain over the miner's head and the constant risk of collapse. The second photograph (Figure 34) is the very next frame on the roll. Corn made this photograph by hand holding the camera with a long shutter speed exposed to the light of Teague's carbide lamp. The limited light creates dramatic contrast. Teague's face is bright against the darkness of the doghole mine, which further confines the space. His eyes are fixed and arms raised as he examines a large lump of coal donning the "smile that all diggers of minerals from the Earth have when they hit a mother lode."<sup>123</sup> Corn has created great contrast in these two photographs, both in terms of aesthetics and narrative, made a relatively short time apart. Lit by the morning light, the first photograph is bright in appearance, but somber in tone. Void of any detail, the deep blackness of the mine entrance emits a magnetism from its darkened depths, pulling attention away from Teague, whose expression shows concern as he contemplates entering the doghole. In contrast, the second photograph, taken deep within the mine is dark, yet it is much more cheerful in tone. The intensity of the carbide light—burning so bright that, like the mine entrance in the previous photograph, is also void of detail—is able to illuminate Teague's expression of pride and wonder in the seam of coal he has uncovered. Corn's ability to create such a strong connection between Teague's gaze and the piece of coal he holds implies in that moment, the darkness and danger he was contemplating outside in the previous photograph were worth it—and that nothing else mattered but the coal. The limitations of space dictated by

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<sup>123</sup> Corn, 2000



*Figure 34. "Miner holding lump of coal," Jack Corn, 1964.*

geography and geology were not the only factors that could have influenced the pictures that Corn and Rogovin made in Appalachia. The histories of the people, and the cultural perceptions of outsiders to the region are also essential to understanding their bodies of work.

## HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF RURAL APPALACHIA

“Once I had a girl on Rocky Top,  
half bear, the other half cat;  
Wild as a mink, but sweet as soda pop,  
I still dream about that.”

Popularized by country music pioneer Buck Owens, these lyrics from the song *Good 'Ol Rocky Top* suggest a poetic yet disparaging view of Appalachia as a strange land of lesser people.<sup>◇</sup> Born in Texas, Owens helped bring a commercially idealized version of Appalachian culture to the mainstream through the long-running show *Hee Haw*, which he co-hosted with Roy Clark. Though Clark was a native of Virginia, the show—which ran for 26 seasons between 1969 and 1995—has been criticized as helping to advance and popularize the ‘hillbilly’ archetype of an Appalachian.<sup>124</sup> Flanked between Rocky Top and the neighboring Clear Fork Valley of Tennessee to the south and coal fields of West Virginia to the northeast, is Harry Caudill’s home in Letcher County, Kentucky. All located in the Cumberland Plateau, the areas of West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky where Corn and Rogovin worked share the same history and fate as the communities in Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. Caudill’s work, as a document, offers valuable insight to the social, economic and environmental conditions that existed when these two photographers began their own documentation of these areas through the production of photographs. It really is not possible to fully understand the work of Corn and

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<sup>◇</sup> *Good 'Ol Rocky Top* was written by Felice and Boudleaux Bryant in 1967 and first recorded by the Osborne Brothers.

<sup>124</sup> York and Rubin, 2018

Rogovin without examining these bodies of work against the context Caudill provides through his exhaustive construction of historical narrative.

With its vastness, American writer Rudy Abramson argues that Appalachia is more than a distinctive geographic area; it has emerged as a cultural concept not bound by political boundaries drawn to distinguish one county or state from the next.<sup>125</sup> Abramson writes, “the limits of Appalachia are a subject of reoccurring rumination, though in every conception the region reaches from the Deep South far beyond the Mason-Dixon Line into the North, assuring that both its political and cultural histories are as complex as its Landscape.”<sup>126</sup> Yet the nuanced complexity of these histories have often been boiled down into a geo-cultural caricature that historian Richard Drake argues is both over-simplistic and the product of a “few northern writers” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. In her 2018 documentary “Hillbilly,” which examines representations of Appalachia in pop culture, activist and filmmaker Ashley York suggests coal played a major role in the emergence of negative stereotypical caricatures of Appalachians in popular discourse. York grew up in Meathouse Holler, located in Pike County Kentucky, which shares a border with Caudill’s Letcher County in the heart of Appalachian coal country. She argues that the stereotypes that emerged about Appalachians were deliberately constructed and propagated to diminish them as an obstacle to extracting the region’s coal and timber.<sup>127</sup> Lessening the peoples of Appalachia to claim, in the name of progress, the resources of their land mirrors the colonizing approach of European imperialism Pratt criticizes in *Imperial Eyes*. From northern planter William Byrd II’s characterization of North Carolinians as lazy “lubbers,” to shows like the Beverly Hillbillies and Hee Haw, Drake writes that “from an early date, people

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<sup>125</sup> Abramson, 2006: xx

<sup>126</sup> Abramson, 2006: xxi

<sup>127</sup> York and Rubin, 2018

have seen the region in an unusual and sometimes disturbing way.”<sup>128</sup> The way Appalachians are seen historically enables the colonial-settler logic that outsiders needed to intervene in order for the region to be successful, and that local inhabitants were unable, or unfit, to fully develop and utilize the resources located in and on their homelands. If Appalachians were viewed as lazy, ignorant and undeserving of the wealth contained in their lands, there would be far less outcry to outsider interventions and to industrialists exploiting the region.<sup>129</sup> Corn admits that trying to photograph against well-established colonial discourse was challenging and he was warned early on by Clairfield postmistress Louise Adams not to fall into the trap set by other outsiders of how Appalachia and Appalachians should be represented.<sup>130</sup> Corn said that moving away from traditional visual mining narratives was intentional. “Everything in photography is a conscious decision. I wanted to show the whole story of how they lived.”<sup>131</sup> This included showing *where* they lived.

## THE EXPLOITIVE CONVERSION OF THE MOUNTAINEER TO PROLETARIAN

For generations prior to the U.S. Civil War, the Cumberland Mountains, like most of Appalachia, were sparsely peopled by clans of Irish, Welsh and Scottish immigrants; freed or escaped indentured workers; and adventurous colonists wanting to escape the hustle of the burgeoning eastern seaboard.<sup>132</sup> Collectively these groups came to be known as mountaineers — they were hearty, intrepid and self-reliant, surviving off their land through small-scale sustenance farming and livestock herding. In the decades immediately after the Civil War, violence continued throughout the Cumberland Plateau in the form of clan feuds, such as the infamous

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<sup>128</sup> Drake, 2001: xi

<sup>129</sup> York and Rubin, 2018

<sup>130</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>131</sup> Corn, 2019

<sup>132</sup> Caudill, 1962: 6–7

war between the Hatfield clan of West Virginia and the McCoys of Kentucky (Figure 35); some feuds lasted a generation or more and distracted the mountaineers from their pre-war self-reliance.

Investors from the Northeast began to see vast economic opportunity in the unspoiled timber of the Cumberland Mountains. Money from timber felling began to trickle into the plateau, and for the first time the mountaineer acquired a taste for commercially produced goods. Caudill writes that the Cumberland mountaineer possessed a “fiercely independent and uncooperative mentality” to the extent that they “tended offhandedly to reject all discussion and consideration of ideas in the abstract.”<sup>133</sup> The rejection of abstract ideas unfortunately included notions of capitalism, which made the mountaineer vulnerable to exploitation. Investors sent teams of lawyers down to the mountains to acquire long-term, unrestricted timber and mineral rights at a fraction of what they were worth. In the essay “Romantic Appalachia, or, Poverty Pays if you Ain’t Poor,” poet and activist Don West suggests that county and state governments, located in larger more populated valleys, stood idly by and did little to intervene in corporate exploitation of the mountaineers. He argues that the complacency was intentional and retaliatory for the mountainous regions of the south sending soldiers north to fight with the Union army during the U.S. Civil War.<sup>◊,134</sup>

After extensive expansion of railroads into the region, the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw large-scale mining operations spread across the plateau, from West Virginia, down through eastern Kentucky to northeast Tennessee.<sup>135</sup> Mining companies set up towns to support

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<sup>133</sup> Caudill, 1962: 52

<sup>◊</sup> In total the southern Appalachian mountain regions sent nearly 200,000 men north to fight with Union armies for emancipation.

<sup>134</sup> West, 1972a

<sup>135</sup> History of Claiborne County





*Figure 35. "Sam McCoy's grave in KY," Sam McCoy of the famous Hatfield and McCoy feud is buried on a hillside overlooking Tomkinsville, KY. Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*



mining operations that included building roads, schools, houses, post offices, power plants and company commissaries. Mountaineers were hired as miners and with their newly acquired desire for material goods, the mountaineers were happy to abandon their log-cabins and self-reliant life for modern conveniences, like electricity and plumbing.<sup>136</sup> However, the mountaineers were surrendering more than their self-reliance. West argues they were willingly surrendering their agency and slowly slipping into the oppressive bonds of colonial forces.<sup>137</sup> With their modest earnings from dangerous and exhausting labor, they surrendered to coal companies money for rent, utilities, and food and supplies purchased at the company commissaries. Coal company bosses hand-selected sheriffs, mayors, judges and other public officials that were sympathetic to the company's interests and hired doctors willing to turn a blind eye to the dangers mining posed. Every aspect of the miner's lives was controlled by their employers.<sup>138</sup> The colonial hegemonic apparatus imposed by coal companies was reminiscent of the indentureship the miners' ancestors sought to escape by fleeing into the mountainous frontier nearly two centuries earlier.

The structure of power created by coal companies is easily seen in one photograph Corn made in May 1974 for the *Documerica* project, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter seven. The photograph is of the company town of Red Ash, owned by the Raven Red Ash Coal Co. in Tazewell County, Virginia. The photograph (Figure 36) shows a row of

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<sup>136</sup> Caudill, 1962: 93–111

<sup>137</sup> West, 1972b

<sup>138</sup> Caudill, 1962: 93–111



Figure 36. "Old Coal Company Town of Red Ash, Virginia, near Richards in Tazewell County," Jack Corn, *Documerica*, 1974. Original caption reads: Old Coal Company Town of Red Ash, Virginia, near Richards in Tazewell County in the Southwestern Part of the State. This Is a Classic Picture of a Company Town with a Railroad in the Valley Flanked by Miners' Homes. The Coal Mine Superintendent's Home Is Up the Hill in the Upper Left Portion of the Picture. The Separation Is Symbolic of the Caste System Which Once Rule (sic) in the Mining Towns, But Which Is Now in the Process of Change. The Road Is Made of Red Dog, a Mining Byproduct.

shoddily constructed clapboard houses along a dirt road at the bottom of a winding valley. A line of coupled, open-top rail cars laden with the day's haul of extracted coal bends around the tracks across the road from the houses, serving as a constant reminder to the miners that coal was ever present in their lives. Behind the houses, a row of trees sequesters the miners from a steep slope, with a road carved out of its side and paved with mining byproduct called *red dog*.<sup>◇</sup> Perched on top of the slope high above sits the house of the mine superintendent. Clad with gleaming white siding the alabaster fortress looms over the valley and its inhabitants as the 'big boss' keeps a

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<sup>◇</sup> Red Dog is a nonvolatile aggregate material that is the product of coal oxidation.

watchful eye on *all* the company's assets. The angle from which Corn composed this photograph reveals its isolation from the rest of town and fortifies the big boss in a position of authority while reinforcing a hierarchical structure of power the town's design is meant to impose. This same use of elevation to separate class and power can be found in other mining towns Corn photographed, and in earlier photographs taken by Wolcott and Delano, who photographed Appalachian coal miners as a part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) program.

## APPALACHIA THROUGH DEPRESSION AND WAR

While Hine's work in Pennsylvanian anthracite mines for the NCLC helped establish the somber, soot-covered stoicism that embodied the miner aesthetic, in the two decades that followed, Wolcott and Delano took that aesthetic and slightly expanded the view. Stepping back from Hine's texture-centric aesthetic of the miner's work, Wolcott and Delano began to crack the mystique of the anonymous laborer to introduce brief and scattered glimpses of life outside the mine. This broader approach to documenting the Appalachian miner was necessary to achieve the overarching mission of the FSA in illustrating how the work of the federal government was helping to improve the lives of Americans in the Depression era.<sup>139</sup> Dependent on so many other U.S. and global industries, coal was not immune to the bleak economic conditions of the 1930s, though the industry was somewhat insulated due to its importance to so many facets of modern society. Annual coal production fell from its height of 678 million tons in 1928 to 390 tons in 1932.<sup>140</sup> Being the largest coal producing region at the time, Appalachian coal production was hit

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<sup>139</sup> Stott, 1986

<sup>140</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960

the hardest, but not equally across all areas of the region. This is where the conditions in the sub-regions of Appalachia where Corn and Rogovin photographed began to resemble each other less as the disparity between miners and their communities began to emerge. Both before and after the Great Depression, West Virginia was a much larger producer of coal than Tennessee, or even Kentucky. Historically, the state's entire economy had been based on the mining, refinement and transportation of coal. Examination of Delano's WPA work in Pennsylvania and Wolcott's FSA work in West Virginia foreshadows the socio-economic cleft that will discursively separate Rogovin's work highlighting working mining communities in West Virginia from Corn's photographs of communities where mining operations were mostly abandoned.

What mainly separated the sub-regions again comes down to geology and the specific types of coal found in each coal field. Wadleigh's coal manual indexes and describes in great detail the chemical and physical characteristics—everything from moisture content to density, to elemental purity for each type of coal found in each region and discusses the specific use each type of coal was best suited for. For example, Wadleigh explains that due to its low-to-medium levels of volatile, low ash content and high B.T.U output, the best bunker coal for use in the powering of steamships comes from eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia, northern Alabama and the area around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.<sup>141</sup> Containing a low moisture content and high levels of purity, the abundant bituminous coal found in West Virginian coal fields could easily be refined for a variety of uses. The versatility of West Virginian coal helped the state weather the Great Depression and actually experience growth in coal production in the early 1930s. In 1920, with a workforce of 87,000 miners, West Virginia produced more than \$193 million worth of

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<sup>141</sup> Wadleigh, 1921: 100–101



Figure 37. "Miners' children going home from store and post office, Omar, West Virginia," Marion Post Wolcott, 1938.

coal from 926 mines.<sup>142</sup> Although 240 mines had closed by 1930, West Virginia produced more coal with approximately 10,000 more miners than it had a decade earlier.<sup>143</sup>

Wolcott's images of miners and mountaineers in West Virginia reflect life in a state where employment remained somewhat stable during the Great Depression. Photos such as a series made in Omar, West Virginia in 1938 (Figure 37) show the banality of seemingly middle-class children walking home after school. They stop and play along their way down a set of railroad tracks, smiling and laughing as they interact. Other Wolcott photographs of the region such as her view of the Cumberland Plateau discussed earlier, or a series she made in the fertile farmlands of Virginia (Figure 38) show a landscape of promise and prosperity in an uncertain time. But there is one group of images she made at a coal camp near Chaplin, West Virginia in September of 1938 that is particularly revealing of the dynamics of social and economic conditions inside West Virginia coal camps in the 1930s. Photographs from Chaplin include scenes depicting a group of men and boys gathered on the porch of the commissary playing games (Figure 39), or miners giving one another haircuts (Figure 40) or the seemingly ordinary façade of a school. The banality of Wolcott's scenes is indicative of what writer William Stott suggests challenged photographers working in the era: that the true effects of the Depression

<sup>142</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1923: 1271

<sup>143</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1932: 845





Figure 38. "Haystacks and shocks of corn in field near Marion, Virginia," Marion Post Wolcott 1941.



Figure 39. Coal miners card gambling Saturday afternoon on porch of company store, Chaplin, West Virginia," Marion Post Wolcott, 1938.



*Figure 40. "Miners often give haircuts on front porch. The "Patch," Chaplin, West Virginia,"  
Marion Post Wolcott, 1938.*

were hard to see. Workers still employed carried on in life with a relative sense of normalcy, and those out of work tended to slip from sight, absent from public view.<sup>144</sup> The sense of normalcy conveyed in photographs of the haircut, the game and the school is key to understanding the harsh reality revealed in looking at the images collectively—that mining regardless of employment status is a hard, and in many cases impoverished, life.

Wolcott's portraits of miners in Champlin show the contradictory nature of having a job during the Depression yet remaining impoverished as many miners were, especially black and immigrant miners. One photograph (Figure 41), titled "Coal miner and two of his seven children," shows a black miner and his family at home. The miner's physique appears lean, and his face is gaunt, indicative of laborious work. Dressed in corduroys and a collarless buttoned-down shirt, he leans against the coal-burning furnace as two of his daughters sit contentedly by his side. A decorative rug can be seen in front of the furnace covering the wide, pine plank floorboards in the bottom right corner of the frame. While the miner's left arm rests on the stovepipe, his right arm spreads along a shelf adorned with a decorative floral cloth and two small delicate baptism pillows. Above the shelf hangs a mirror flanked on either side by what appear to be two handmade hanging floral arrangements. What is haunting about the image is what appears behind the subjects. In the mirror, Wolcott's reflection can be seen giving the viewer a rare glimpse at both the gazer and the gaze. In reality, in their physical presences, she would have most likely been looking directly at the miner and his two daughters, and them looking back at her. What appears in the photograph, however, is quite different and symbolically striking. Here the miner and his children are in view while the photographer, gazing from a place of privilege, looks away from the scene. Adding to the complexity of the

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<sup>144</sup> Stott, 1986: 92–94





*Figure 41. "Coal miner and two of his seven children. He has worked in the mines for about twenty years. Chaplin, West Virginia," Marion Post Wolcott, 1938.*



Figure 42. "Coal miner's wife (note goiter) and two children. Chaplin, West Virginia," Marion Post Wolcott, 1938.

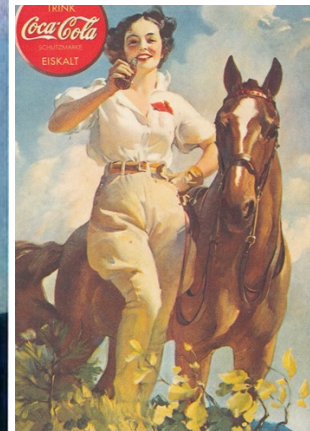
photograph are the duplicate posters of a white woman riding a horse, that have been turned sideways and leaned against the wall behind the furnace.

Examining another Wolcott photograph of this family gives clues to the posters' purpose. In the photograph titled "Coal miner's wife (note goiter) and two children,"<sup>◇</sup> (Figure 42) the miner's wife is shown cooking in the family's kitchen while two of the children play; all three of their gazes seem to lead to a white baby doll laying upon the floor. Behind the woman, holes are visible through the kitchen wall and pieces of tattered cardboard are seen tacked to the exposed timber studs in an attempt to patch them. The posters in the first photograph are likely serving the same function. Closer examination of the prints shows the woman next to the horse raising a bottle to her parted lips. The iconic shape of the bottle reveals that the poster is actually a Coca-Cola ad (Figure 43) from 1937 and was most likely discarded from the company commissary. Painted by commercial artist Haddon Sundblom—who was responsible for illustrating some of the most iconic pieces of advertising imagery of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as the Quaker Oats man and Santa Claus drinking a Coke—the ad reinforces notions of disposable consumerism, and the utility of its new-found use in the miner's home serves as a reminder of the societal norms of capitalistic consumption the family living in poverty is failing to meet. This discourse can also be found in another of Wolcott's images from Champlin (Figure 44). An Italian immigrant is shown resting on his bed and removing his boots while smoking a pipe after a shift in the mine. Trousers and a coat can be seen hanging from the ceiling in the top left of the frame, and a pair of black oxfords sit on the floor tucked beneath the bed. The wall behind the man is papered with newspaper pages filled with advertisements. One

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<sup>◇</sup> The title of the photograph makes note of the presence of a goiter on the wife's neck, which is an enlargement of the thyroid gland typically caused by an iron deficiency from poor nutrition.





*Figure 43. Painting by Haddon Sundblom (left), and its use in a 1937 Coca-Cola advertising poster.*



Figure 44. Coal miner (Italian) resting and smoking his pipe after coming home from work. "The Patch,"  
Chaplin, West Virginia. Marion Post Wolcott, 1938.

ad is for an electric refrigerator with an icebox and another features the angled front grille and sleek sweeping fenders of a passenger car, both luxuries he would not have been able to afford. Despite the direness of their living conditions, these miners were able to squeak out a meager living in an era when many could not.

As in West Virginia production of anthracite and bituminous coal, Pennsylvania also experienced some growth in the early 1930s; however, the opposite trajectory befell Tennessee, and the miners in the Clearfork Valley were hit hard. In 1920 Tennessee's 10,000 coal miners produced \$14 million worth of coal from 107 mines, but mining operations by the end of the decade had all but halted, not even registering as a coal-producing state in the U.S. Census mining report published in 1932.<sup>145,146</sup> The vast majority of mines in Tennessee closed, and coal companies pulled their resources from the towns they had built, abandoning the miners living there, but not their rights to the land. Toward the end of the 1930s those mines still operating were doing so with a reduced number of miners, and with fewer mine engineers. Fewer engineers meant a reduction in safety standards, resulting in increased numbers of mining accidents and casualties.<sup>147</sup> Coal companies began seeing the miners as a liability rather than an asset, blaming their demands for fair wages for the decline in company profit. The once-pleasant and tenable relationship between mine officials and miners deteriorated, often into violence that was exacerbated by the presence of union organizers. New, more mechanized techniques, such as strip mining and mountain top removal, were developed to extract the same volume of coal from seams closer to the surface which required far less personnel.<sup>148</sup> Whereas Wolcott's photographs show the normalcy of business as usual in West Virginia, Delano focused on the more harsh

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<sup>145</sup> Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1923: 1271

<sup>146</sup> Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1932: 845

<sup>147</sup> Caudill, 1962: 165–187

<sup>148</sup> Caudill, 1962: 165–187

reality of unemployment in the mining industry in certain parts of Pennsylvania. While overall coal production remained steady, and even grew in parts of the state, mechanization did result in putting many miners out of work during the decades-long Depression. These miners, Delano writes, were “left with no other source of income, were going into the mines illegally and extracting coal to sell wherever they could. This practice was called bootleg mining.”<sup>149</sup>

Delano’s photographs are gritty and show a real mastery of composition and use of contrast and resemble the stoic, sooty aesthetic found in Hine’s portraiture. Delano was one of more than 40,000 artists hired through the WPA’s Federal Project Number One, which included the Federal Art Project, Federal Music Project, Federal Theater Project, Federal Writers’ Project and the Historical Records Survey. The goal of the project was to provide direct assistance to artists instead of relying upon the distribution of grants through traditional cultural intuitions that received federal funding.<sup>150</sup> Based in Philadelphia, as a WPA artist, Delano focused his efforts on portraiture and architectural photography in the anthracite region of Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, located between Harrisburg and Allentown. Delano arranged 68 of his prints made in 1938 into two spiral bound albums; 39 photographs in volume one and 29 in volume two, both housed at the Library of Congress. Volume one begins with a brief introduction by Delano that reads: “Included in these two volumes are some photographs of Pennsylvania’s Lower Anthracite region. They were taken as part of a study of legitimate and bootleg mining in the area. Most of my three weeks there were spent in Schuylkill County, in and around the towns of Pottsville, Minersville, Shenandoah and Mahanoy.”<sup>151</sup> Opposite the introduction on the inside cover is the head of a miner, hand-cut from a photographic print and pasted on a map of eastern

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<sup>149</sup> Delano, 1997

<sup>150</sup> Larson, 1939

<sup>151</sup> Delano, 1938

central Pennsylvania with an outline of Schuylkill County, (Figure 45). The rest of the album contains a series of photographs of mining structures, photographs of miners at work with captions explaining the process of mining, general views of the town, and a sequence of pictures showing a group of nicely dressed men riding in a wood-boxed flatbed truck to a rally at the state capital, with the caption “miners on their way to Harrisburg.” Volume two is shorter and seems more deliberate in Delano’s selection and placement of photographs. Photographs are in general tighter in crop and offer contrast from one page to the next between legitimate and bootleg mining operations. For example, one two-page spread (Figure 46) shows a mining foreman on the left, his lamp lit illuminating the mine phone he was talking on. On the right is a group of bootleg miners emerging from the darkness of a bootleg hole, their lamps off suggesting the covertness of their operation. By 1938 the estimated number of bootleg miners in Pennsylvania had grown to more than 7,000, operating out as many as 1,965 bootleg holes.<sup>152</sup> But bootleg mine operations were not isolated to Pennsylvania; they were widespread across Appalachia during the Depression as out-of-work miners looked for ways to make money. Marie Cirillo, founder and former director of the Clear Fork Community Institute, said a lot of out-of-work miners in Tennessee, like Teague, joined the Army toward the end of the Depression.<sup>153</sup>

When the U.S. entered WWII, the demand for coal once again increased to fuel the industries producing machinery and goods for the nation’s war effort. In 1942 the U.S. government purchased more than 59,000 acres of farmland in the Bethel Valley 27 miles west of Knoxville, Tennessee. By the end of 1943, a massive complex of windowless buildings had emerged behind heavily guarded barbed-wire fences. Operated by the Site X-10, known today as the Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL), is where on Nov. 4, 1943 scientists from the

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<sup>152</sup> Lauck, 1938

<sup>153</sup> Cirillo, 2019



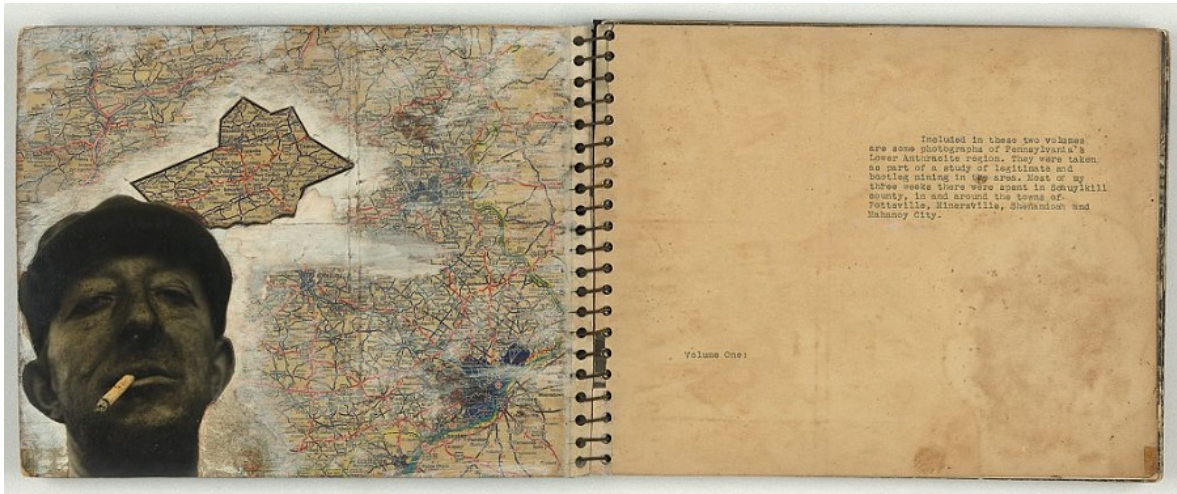


Figure 45. Inside cover of Jack Delano's first album of miners from Schuylkill county, 1938.

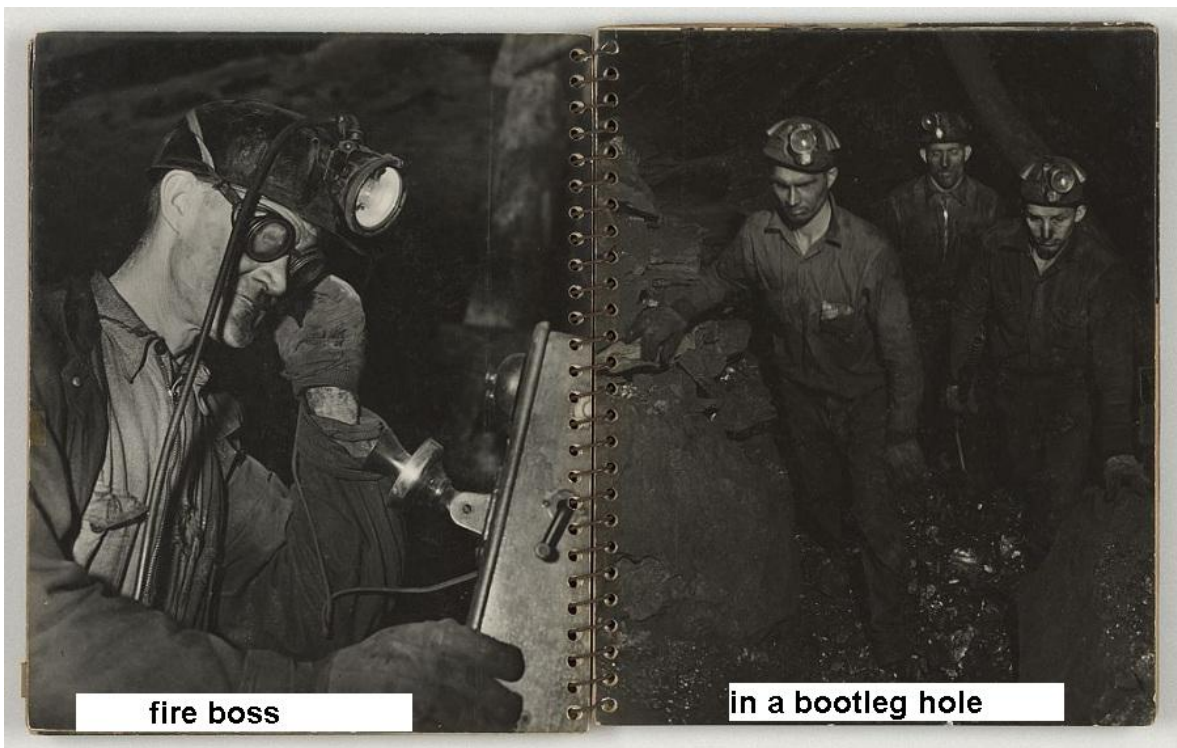


Figure 46. Inside pages showing contrasting views of mining operation from album 2, Jack Delano, 1938.

University of Chicago Metallurgical Laboratory successfully converted uranium into plutonium for the first time, making ORNL the world's first operating nuclear reactor.<sup>154</sup> The work being done at ORNL required a tremendous amount of electricity, and to provide it the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) needed tremendous amounts of coal. The TVA was created in 1933 by an act of Congress "to improve the navigability and to provide for the flood control of the Tennessee River; to provide for reforestation and the proper use of marginal lands in the Tennessee Valley; to provide for the agricultural and industrial development of said valley; to provide for the national defense by the creation of a corporation for the operation of government properties at and near Muscle Shoals in the State of Alabama, and for other purposes."<sup>155</sup> The other purposes being the generation of electricity for areas along the Tennessee River Valley including all of Tennessee and parts of neighboring Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and Virginia. Needing more power than could be produced by its hydroelectric facilities, TVA invested heavily in coal-fired plants, and turned to the Clear Fork Valley, 70 miles to the north, to provide the coal.<sup>156</sup> With much of the work force fighting in Europe and the Pacific theater, the TVA heavily sanctioned the mechanization of mining operations in northeast Tennessee.

The TVA's mechanization of the Clear Fork Valley didn't happen in isolation. Emerging from the Great Depression, coal companies found themselves profitable again amidst a new coal boom. To meet demand, companies expanded surface mine operations rather than resuming production in deep shaft mines that were twice as expensive to operate.<sup>157</sup> Mining operations across Appalachia were becoming more mechanized, leading to widespread poverty on the

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<sup>154</sup> Oak Ridge National Laboratory Historical Archives

<sup>155</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Historical Archives

<sup>156</sup> Cirillo, 2019

<sup>157</sup> Caudill, 1962

Cumberland Plateau as miners had no work to return to after the war. The 1950s saw mass outward migration as former miners who were still able to work left for mining and manufacturing jobs to the north, or in other parts of Appalachia.<sup>158</sup> By 1947 Tennessee once again was registering as a coal producing state in government reports on the industry, producing 7,644,000 tons of coal that year.<sup>159</sup> The states' increase in production however, did not mean an abundant return of jobs. Claiborne and Campbell counties—where the Clear Fork Valley is located—were operating with a mining force of 37.2 and 33.1 percent of what it had been in the 1920s.<sup>160</sup>

The Clear Fork Valley had more than 30,000 residents at the zenith of coal production there in the 1920s. Two years after Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* was published, when Corn traveled there for the first time in 1964, there were less than 1,200.<sup>161</sup> Among those who remained were WWII veterans Teague, and postmistress Adams. It's the people of Appalachia, and their land, that Caudill wrote in advocacy for. *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* is a poetic and prophetic cry to save a region that cannot be generalized as being any one thing. Appalachia is not entirely rural or urban; it is not entirely northern or southern; it is not politically homogenous; not entirely economically depressed; or uniformly lacking access to educational or health related resources as so many historians, sociologists, psychologists, political scientists, journalists, medical clinicians have claimed it to be. Appalachia, like every other *place*, and Appalachians, like any other community of *people*, are subject to struggles in *particular social contexts at specific historical moments*, just as Stott wrote about. The *struggles* that Corn and Rogovin encountered in coal mining communities of the Cumberland Plateau were

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<sup>158</sup> Caudill, 1962: 305–324

<sup>159</sup> United States Coal Mines Administration, 1947: xii

<sup>160</sup> United States Coal Mines Administration, 1947: 7

<sup>161</sup> Corn: 2000

different at different times. While Hine, Delano, Lee and Wolcott did introduce new discourse to visual narratives celebrating the coal industry and coal's importance to society, the meaning those discourses added to what could be known about mining at the time was relatively minor in scope and narrow in view compared to the later work of Corn and Rogovin. Though Corn and Rogovin both faced similar conditions, the two took very different approaches to their subjects, resulting in very different bodies of work.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAKING A MODEL VALLEY: EXAMINING THE POWER OF INSTITUTIONS THROUGH APPARATUSES USED BY THE CORPORATION, ACTIVISTS AND MEDIA IN ADVANCING SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDAS (1920–1970)

“Yes the southern mountains have been missionarized, researched, studied, surveyed, romanticized, dramatized, hillbillyized, Dogpatchized and povertyized again. And some of us who are native and have known this hard living all our lives and our grandpaw’s life before, marvel that our ‘missionary’ friends discover us so often.”

— Don West, 1972

The son of north Georgia sharecroppers, historian, poet and activist Don West held a pragmatic view of Appalachia. Devil’s Hollow, where he grew up, like many of the small unincorporated towns in the mountains, valleys and plateaus of Appalachia, is isolated and poor and its people bound in servitude to the powers of the industrial Northeast. West spent his life trying to illuminate colonial-settler logics he saw as an oppressing force and advocating for the people of the region. He argued that only a “restructuring of the system of ownership, production and distribution of wealth”<sup>162</sup> could solve the problem of poverty in Appalachia. It is from this perspective he wrote the essay, “Romantic Appalachia, or, Poverty Pays if you Ain’t Poor,” which included the passage above. The essay was published in pamphlet form and sold for \$.25 by the Appalachian South Folklife Center, an advocacy center he founded with his wife Connie West in 1964. Located in Pipestone, West Virginia, the center provides educational and cultural support and opportunities to disadvantaged populations through “the restoration of self-respect and human dignity lost as a consequence of the region’s colonial relationship with industrial America.”<sup>163</sup> West’s essay outlines the waves of outside attention Appalachia has received throughout history with each new generation of activists and advocates, opportunists and

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<sup>162</sup> West, 1972b: 3

<sup>163</sup> Appalachian South Folklife Center

industrialists drawn to the region. It is during one of these renewed periods of interest in Appalachia that Corn and Rogovin embarked upon their picture-making projects there. Poverty was widespread, infrastructure deteriorating and health and education resources inadequate.<sup>164,165</sup> Corn's and Rogovin's work shed light on these issues, and as much as their work was driven by discourse from a renewed outside interest in Appalachia, it also helped promulgate that discourse.

West was just one actor operating within the institution of native Appalachian activists, his poetry and prose the apparatus he used to advance his message. But the far-reaching network of Appalachian activists West was a part of was just one institution at work in the region trying to exert influence within the context of multiple social issues. It is critical, then, to understand the interconnectedness of social and economic issues as all the agents, actors and institutions operating in Appalachia contributed to a collision of interests and a struggle for power over discourse during the period Corn and Rogovin were making photographs in the region. Poverty, the environment, public health, and the economy are not issues that can easily be untangled from one another. This chapter explores the relationship between Corn's and Rogovin's photography and forms of activism and institutional power in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Discussion of how their photographs of Appalachia intersect with civil rights, the Vietnam War, women's rights and the environment contributes to one of the main arguments of this dissertation. Through their photography Corn and Rogovin were participating in a form of activism. The images they made were more than just documentation, they were a type of visual protest against the social and environmental conditions they encountered in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia. Focusing discussion around power exerted through institutional structures, the photographs of Corn and

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<sup>164</sup> West, 1972a

<sup>165</sup> Caudill, 1962

Rogovin help illustrate the following contexts: the corporation and public relations, the government and policy, society and social action, and the press and newsgathering. These institutions exercised Foucauldian notions of power rooted in the specifics of their technology, their operational apparatuses and the moment in history that the power was exercised. The power of institutions influenced picture-making in a variety of ways, all contributing to the visual discourse of mining in Appalachia.

#### A SUBJECTIVE COMPLACENCY: THE RISE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE U.S.

Historically the mainstream U.S. press has had a complicated and at times contradictory role in advancing environmental and economic narratives and discourse. The success of *public relation councilors* (PRCs) in supplying information to the news media during World War I led to more and more institutions closing off access to individual sources. Placing PRCs between the journalist and individuals with information allowed institutions the opportunity to shape the information and construct their own narrative of reality.<sup>166</sup> By the 1920s, PRCs were a dominant force in the news production process, and on any given day were directly responsible for as much as 60 percent of the stories appearing in major metro newspapers like the *New York Times*.<sup>167</sup> The emergence of the PRC led to an abandonment of pure factual reporting, replaced by more interpretive and subjective views of reality presented in the news—a reality constructed in part by the PRC. Troubled by this development, conservative columnist Walter Lippman offers a full-throated criticism of democratic society, and the role PRCs play in the creation of irrational perceptions of reality, in his 1922 book *Public Opinion*. Lippman writes:

“The development of the publicity man is a clear sign that the facts of modern life do not spontaneously take shape in which they can be known. They must be given a shape by

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<sup>166</sup> Schudson, 1978: 134–144

<sup>167</sup> Schudson, 1978: 144

somebody, and since in the daily routine reporters cannot give a shape to facts, and since there is little disinterested organization of intelligence, the need for some formulation is being met by the interested parties.”<sup>168</sup>

One of the earliest, and arguably most notable, realizations of Lippman’s observation is the National Electric Light Association’s (NELA) 1920s campaign to prevent the creation of U.S. public utilities. A trade association for emerging utility holding companies, NELA set out to persuade the public that private utilities could offer better, cheaper electricity more efficiently to more people than public utilities.

The NELA campaign was launched shortly after Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot signed the Giant Power Survey Act in 1923 to study the creation of a public utility to bring electricity to the 90 percent of rural Pennsylvania without it at the time.<sup>169</sup> NELA enlisted the help of Samuel Insull, a British-born utility magnate from Chicago to coordinate their efforts. Insull used the connections and experience he had gained advising the British propaganda office during World War I to execute a multi-stage public relations campaign.<sup>170</sup> Insull hired scientists to produce credible-looking empirical studies that argued public utilities were too expensive and ineffective at producing electricity, which contradicted the prevailing consensus of academics at the time.<sup>171</sup> This research aimed to “kill the municipal ownership idea” and was distributed to the public through advertising campaigns and news articles pitched to journalists by NELA PRCs.<sup>172</sup> The campaign also had academic and educational components that funded major research projects and endowed economic departments at universities across the U.S. and partnered with book publishers to alter narratives critical of private utilities in textbooks.<sup>173</sup> Science historian

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<sup>168</sup> Lippman, 1922: 218

<sup>169</sup> Oreskes, 2015

<sup>170</sup> Schudson, 1978: 143

<sup>171</sup> Oreskes, 2015

<sup>172</sup> Oreskes, 2015: 10

<sup>173</sup> Oreskes, 2015



Naomi Oreskes argues that the short-term benefit of squashing the Giant Power project in Pennsylvania and other similar proposals was not NELA's ultimate goal. It wanted to create an alternate reality in which the facts supported their interests, shaped public opinion, and through its educational efforts, molded the thinking of generations to come that any "government involvement in the marketplace was a threat to freedom, despite well-documented evidence to the contrary elsewhere in the world."<sup>174</sup> Despite prompting a Federal Trade Commission investigation, the tactics used by NELA served as a template for other industries and institutions wanting to present alternate realities that favored their interests.<sup>175</sup> In her book *Merchants of Doubt*, Oreskes chronicles how the NELA model of misinformation has been replicated to spread counter-research and doubt about the effects of environmental hazards such as acid rain, the ozone hole, secondhand smoke and global warming.<sup>176</sup>

In presenting what PRCs like those used by NELA gave them as news, journalists believed they were being objective by offering readers multiple perspectives on complex issues, fulfilling their role of informing the public. However, political scientist Peter Odegard suggests that many journalists in this era worried that the ease and frequency in which they attained copy from PRCs was turning them into "little more than intellectual mendicants who go from one publicity agent or press bureau to another seeking handouts."<sup>177</sup> What troubled reporters was the effect of power exercised by PRCs and the institutions they represented was having on journalism, and the subsequent effect journalism was having on society. Linguist John Richardson suggests the social effect of journalism is "through its power to shape issue agendas and public discourse, it can reinforce beliefs; it can shape people's opinions not only of the world

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<sup>174</sup> Oreskes, 2015: 15

<sup>175</sup> Schudson, 1978: 143

<sup>176</sup> Oreskes and Conway, 2011

<sup>177</sup> Odegard, 1930: 132

but also of their *place* and *role* in the world; or, if not shape your opinions on a particular matter, it can at the very least influence *what* you have opinions on; in sum, it can help shape social reality by shaping our *views* of social reality.”<sup>178</sup>

Contrary to the efforts of public relations council in seeding scientific doubt, however, genuine environmental reporting did occur in the 1920s through the 1950s; but it was episodic, focused mainly on conservation or working conditions in the nation’s vast industrial complex, and was typically found in larger urban newspapers.<sup>179</sup> One of the first large-scale environmental issues to be extensively covered by the national press was the 1950 controversy over the proposed dam at the confluence of the Green and Yuma rivers inside Utah’s Dinosaur National Monument (DNM).<sup>180</sup> The project was similar to the construction in the 1920s of the Hetch-Hetchy dam that diverts water from Yosemite National Park to the San Francisco municipal water supply and was met with opposition led by preservationist John Muir and his Sierra Club. The proposed dam in DNM was to be one of a series of dams constructed in a massive hydro-electric project to meet rising need for water diversion and electricity in the West. After a coalition of conservation groups mounted a well-organized, well-publicized campaign, the final draft of the dam project legislation included other proposed dams, except the one inside DNM.<sup>181</sup> Other examples of early environmental reporting come from the *St. Louis Dispatch* in a 1939 anti-pollution editorial campaign, and 1947 coverage of a mine disaster. Both won Pulitzer Prizes for the newspaper, the 1940 Pulitzer being the first awarded for coverage of an environmental issue.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Richardson, 2006: 13

<sup>179</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 145–155

<sup>180</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 145–155

<sup>181</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 145–155

<sup>182</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 177

By today's standards these are considered environmental issues; however, in the 1920s, 30s and 40s the concept of the environment, as conceptualized today, was not yet common in the public psyche. By the 1960s, however, environmental reporting became common in both local and major metropolitan news organizations.<sup>183</sup> Papers such as the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Louisville Courier-Journal* and *Christian Science Monitor* led the way in adding reporters to cover dedicated environmental beats, and many others followed suit. Compared to 10 years prior, news coverage of the environment had risen 300 percent.<sup>184</sup> Some of the reporters covering the environment came from science or health beats, but environmental and journalism historian Mark Neuzil suggests one thing they all had in common “was the influence of biologist Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*.”<sup>185</sup> The book is well documented and authoritatively uses science and data to construct a narrative warning of the widespread overuse of pesticides in agriculture. To understand *Silent Spring*’s influence on not just society but a new generation of reporters, one needs to understand the moment Carson was writing in and the shift in political discourse that occurred in the years leading up to its release. The political shift wasn’t just discursive, it was also cultural and driven by a rapidly growing generational gap that fractured the social paradigm. This fracture included a rejection of traditional styles of reporting by young journalists, and a challenging of the authority held by one generation, by the next.

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<sup>183</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 183

<sup>184</sup> Fox, 1985: 279

<sup>185</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 186

## THE POLITICIZATION OF POVERTY AND POLLUTION

If *Silent Spring* was a catalyst to a great social awakening to environmental issues, the 1952 and 1956 U.S. presidential elections were the restless emergence from a deep REM sleep that directly preceded it. After Adlai Stevenson's second loss to Dwight D. Eisenhower, liberal intellectuals led by Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith and historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. began to reconceptualize the ideology and identity of the Democratic Party.<sup>186</sup> The United States was in a post-war boom of affluence and prosperity. The country had emerged from World War II as a superpower and was battling against the Soviet Union to maintain its international economic and political influence. The high capacity for manufacturing needed for the production of military supplies continued due to increased post-war consumerism—consumer spending was up 60 percent, there was a boom in the population, automobile ownership rose steeply and with their increased mobility, families bought new houses in newly developed suburbs away from noisy, dirty, congested and neglected city centers.<sup>187</sup> But with this affluence also came disparity. The migration of mostly white, middle class families to the suburbs siphoned vital resources and interest from cities and industrialized areas. The remaining population of these areas, consisting mostly of minorities and the poor, were left behind to live amongst crumbling infrastructures, crime and pollution.<sup>188</sup> This is where Democrats would turn their attention, to address social disparity and issues related to the public interest such as the state of the environment.

In an essay called “The Future of Liberalism” in the May 1957 issue of *Reporter* magazine, Schlesinger lays out his argument for a new American liberalism. In the essay he

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<sup>186</sup> Rome, 2003

<sup>187</sup> Joo, 2009

<sup>188</sup> Joo, 2009

begins to first link the idea of quality of life to the environment, asserting that pollution robs Americans of recreation and leisure activities like fishing or boating.<sup>189</sup> Schlesinger also draws a connection between affluence and disparity, writing:

“Our gross national product rises; our shops overflow with gadgets and gimmicks; consumer goods of ever-increasing ingenuity and luxuriance pour out of our ears. [...] But our schools become more crowded and dilapidated, our teachers more weary and underpaid, our playgrounds more crowded, our cities dirtier, our roads more teeming and filthy, our national parks more unkempt, our law enforcement more overworked and inadequate.”<sup>190</sup>

While Schlesinger focused more on social disparity, his co-architect of the new liberal agenda appealed to white suburban families living prosperously in the economic boom to be more conscious of the broader environment. In one passage from his book *The Affluent Society*, Galbraith paints a scene of a suburban family setting out on what they envisioned as a camping trip to a bucolic countryside. Instead of the idealized pastoral escape from suburban life, Galbraith describes a dystopian realization of a modern urban-suburban-nonurban ecology of landscapes interconnected by the byproducts and unintended consequences of post-war consumerism. The family leaves the uniformity of their home situated in a planned community in their airconditioned automobile. They travel through a blighted city over crumbling roads lined with billboards only to find “the countryside has been rendered largely invisible by commercial art.”<sup>191</sup> The family then picnics on processed and packaged food along a polluted river before making camp with their mattresses and tent made of chemical-leaching materials in a denigrated park. Galbraith’s appeal solidified what many had already begun to realize—there is a price to progress and mass consumption, and the processes of producing what is consumed has vast environmental consequences. Rome writes that “by the time *The Affluent Society* appeared, many

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<sup>189</sup> Rome, 2003

<sup>190</sup> Schlesinger, 1956: 8–11

<sup>191</sup> Galbraith, 1958: 253

Americans no longer could take for granted the healthfulness of their milk, because radio-active fallout from nuclear testing had contaminated dairy pastures.”<sup>192</sup>

Schlesinger and Galbraith’s new liberalism began to resonate with the American electorate, especially after the 1957 launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union led many to question whether U.S. efforts in the Cold War were worth it. The life of abundance afforded by the post-war boom throughout the 1950s came under question, in particular by the generation just coming of age, having not known a life free from the perceived threat of communism.<sup>193</sup> Concerned the nation was slipping into social malaise, Eisenhower appointed a committee to envision a new set of national goals, studies were commissioned by public/private entities to identify “the problems and opportunities confronting American democracy” and the *New York Times* partnered with *LIFE* magazine to run a series of reflections on national purpose.<sup>194</sup> Capitalizing on a national sense of self-doubt and a “spirited end-of-the-decade debate about the nation’s mission” environmental and social issues became key components of the Democratic Party platform over the next decade, beginning with the 1960 presidential campaign of Senator John F. Kennedy. Published in July of 1960 ahead of the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, “The Rights of Man” outlined a new Democratic vision for the country and for the first time included environmental issues in a national party platform. The document discusses environmental issues such as air and water pollution, and a move away from coal and oil to cleaner, renewable sources of energy. At the same time, it discusses helping workforces transition into the age of automation through education, and a stimulation of economic development to bring new industries to chronically depressed areas.

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<sup>192</sup> Rome, 2003: 529

<sup>193</sup> Rome, 2003: 529

<sup>194</sup> Rome, 2003: 529

General economic measures will not alone solve the problems of localities which suffer some special disadvantage. To bring prosperity to these depressed areas and to enable them to make their full contribution to the national welfare, especially directed action is needed. Areas of heavy and persistent unemployment result from depletion of natural resources, technological change, shifting defense requirements, or trade imbalances which have caused the decline of major industries. Whole communities, urban and rural, have been left stranded in distress and despair, through no fault of their own.<sup>195</sup>

The policies proposed by Kennedy's Democratic Party aimed to address many of the issues plaguing Appalachian coal communities. Mechanization of the coal industry in the 40s had drastically lowered the number of miners it took to clear a coal field; mineral and timber resources were extracted with no investment in new industries, leaving thousands of people across the Cumberland Plateau out of work.

The deteriorating socio-economic issues facing Appalachia became a focus of the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson after Kennedy's assassination. In his 1964 State of the Union address, Johnson announced a series of social and economic programs aimed at fighting poverty and building the "Great Society." In the speech he said: "Unfortunately many Americans live on the outskirts of hope—some because of their poverty. ... our task is to help replace their despair with opportunity."<sup>196</sup> To launch his Great Society initiative, Johnson went on a series of "Poverty Tours" throughout rural Appalachia. Accompanied by Lady Bird Johnson, members of the White House communication staff and local and capital press corps, Johnson talked to farmers, miners, lumbermen and the region's vast population of unemployed workers. A pair of photographs by White House photographer Cecil Stoughton (Figure 47) and *Time* magazine photographer Walter Bennett (Figure 48) are representative of the visual narrative that emerged from the tour. They both show the president casually and affably talking with residents in the

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<sup>195</sup> Democratic National Convention Committee on Resolutions and Platform, 1960: 21–22

<sup>196</sup> Johnson, 1964





*Figure 47. President Lyndon B. Johnson shakes the hand of one of the residents of Appalachia as Agent Rufus Youngblood (far left) looks on. LBJ Library photo by Cecil Stoughton, 1964.*



*Figure 48. President Lyndon Johnson's visit to Tom Fletcher's home in Kentucky was part of his tour of poverty-stricken areas in the U.S. (Photo by Walter Bennett/Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images). 1964.*

region on their porches of their homes. Johnson's tours of Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia were a spectacle, designed to draw attention to the regional problem of poverty in Appalachia, while providing the nation a visual of the president being involved, concerned and folksy. The tours were widely covered by the media, including *The Tennessean*. The attention Johnson's poverty tour brought to the region is part of the problem West discussed in "Romantic Appalachia." West writes:

Each time we are 'discovered' a passel of new missionaries invade the mountains. Old clothes, surplus food and such are made available and some temporary reforms may result—crumbs thrown to the poor who need whole loaves and some meat, too. Some stirring is stimulated. Hope Flutters painfully to escape the lint covered mill-hills or dust blackened shacks behind slate dumps only to fall broken-winged in polluted air or rivers outside. [...] As the Nation's awareness of the 'new' discovery wanes and, despairing of saving our 'hillbilly souls' anyhow, the 'missionaries' begin to pullout again. [...] Shortly we may be forgotten again until another generation 'discovers' poverty in Appalachia.<sup>197</sup>

West's discourse illuminates a reality in Appalachia that the result of temporary interest in a problem are solutions that are also temporary. In her documentary *Hillbilly*, filmmaker Ashley York talks with her father, Tim York, and aunts Regina York and Karen Vaughn about their experience growing up in the era of Johnson's Great Society. They discuss the fleeting effects government programs had on places like their home, Pike County, Kentucky. York's father and both aunts describe going to school one day and receiving a pair of shoes provided by the U.S. government. Regina York recalls: "Just half the gym was full of ugly shoes. That's what the government, I guess, thought we needed. It was interesting to have people coming in to look at this area, but it became very evident that it was critical."<sup>198</sup> Vaughn suggests that the biggest problem with the temporary attention was perception created by media coverage of the tours. "We did sit on the porch, and we went barefoot, it's just what we did. So, when I see the films,

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<sup>197</sup> West, 1972b: 2–3

<sup>198</sup> York, 2018

and I see the depictions of the poor Appalachian mountain people it really irritates me because I didn't see us as that.”<sup>199</sup>

## CONVERGENCE OF CULTURES: YOUNG JOURNALISTS AND A CRITICAL PRESS

In the 1960s, the traditional thought of journalism as a reflection of society, a reflection of culture, was suspended in a moment of convergence when journalism not only reflected culture but was *a part of that culture*.<sup>200</sup> The assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy had concussed the nation. These events compounded by an end to the fear of being critical of the government in the McCarthy era, and growing anti-war, civil rights, women's rights and environmental movements brought upon what journalism historian Michael Schudson called “the political and cultural ferment of the 1960s.”<sup>201</sup> Schudson writes that these events “made criticism seem not only possible but vital. An understandable world was coming apart at the ‘seams’—appearances could not be trusted.”<sup>202</sup> There came a point, that crystalized in the mid-60s, when the an emerging counter culture had reached the limit of its tolerance in being manipulated by corporations and the government regarding the effects of their activities, in particular relating to environmental issues and the Vietnam War.

For example, during the 1965 March on Washington to End the Vietnam War, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) President Paul Potter delivered a speech to a crowd of 25,000 protesters in front of the Washington Monument (Figure 49). In the speech, titled *The Incredible War*, he admonished the Johnson administration's stronghanded efforts of managing the press. Potter said: “What in fact has the war done for freedom in America? It has led to even more

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<sup>199</sup> York, 2018

<sup>200</sup> Schudson, 1978

<sup>201</sup> Schudson, 1978: 177

<sup>202</sup> Schudson, 1978: 177



*Figure 49. Thousands attend a rally on the grounds of the Washington Monument in Washington on April 17, 1965, to hear Ernest Gruening, a Democratic senator from Alaska, and other speakers discuss U.S. policy in Vietnam. The rally followed picketing of the White House by students demanding an end to Vietnam fighting. Charles Tasnadi/AP*

vigorous governmental efforts to control information, manipulate the press and pressure and persuade the public through distorted or downright dishonest documents such as the White Paper on Vietnam.”<sup>203</sup> Press management was a technique developed by PRCs to control the narrative of news that was not supplied by them. One tactic, for example, was if an event, initiative or campaign were a success, the announcement was held at a place of power such as the White House, or at a company’s corporate headquarters. Failures, on the other hand, were often discussed at the site of the failure, which was intended to place distance between the event and

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<sup>203</sup> Potter, 1965

those responsible.<sup>204</sup> Critical of the way the media has historically allowed itself to be controlled in this manner, Richardson writes:

“The work of mainstream journalists mediates the relationship between ruling class ideology and news content and supports the hegemony by naturalizing, or taking for granted, the inequalities of contemporary capitalism. [...] Journalists have internalized commonsensical notions of who ought to be treated as authoritative, accept the frames imposed on events by officials and marginalize the delegitimate voices that fall outside the dominant elite circles.”<sup>205</sup>

Within society’s defiance of the ‘dominance of elite circles’ a new generation of journalists had reached the limits of *their* willingness to participate in the support of traditional capitalistic hegemonic structures of power that journalism perpetuated since the rise of industrialism in the 1870s. Following the lyrical narratives emerging from counterculture led in part by writers like Ken Kesey, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, young journalists wanted to focus more on the crafting of story rather than the straight reporting of news. Like the rest of their generation, young journalists were skeptical of “official accounts of public affairs” and pushed journalism toward a more active and participatory practice.<sup>206</sup> Rather than passively reporting on the PRCs crafted narrative, the 1960s saw some young journalists, and editors like John Siegenthaler, as advocates, taking on a variety of social and environmental issues.

The new adversarial relationship between journalists and the elite can easily be illustrated by *The Tennessean*’s coverage of mining in the 1960s and 70s. Corn and reporters Bill Greenburg and Keel Hunt, took on coal companies, state regulators and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) over the devastation being caused by a lack of oversight and enforcement in the practice of strip-mining and mountain top removal. One of Corn’s photographs, (Figure 50), titled “Truck on strip mine ruins” shows a cluster of barren trees jutting up from a man-made

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<sup>204</sup> Schudson, 1978: 170

<sup>205</sup> Richardson, 2006: 36

<sup>206</sup> Schudson, 1978: 162–163





*Figure 50. Abandoned truck on strip mine ruins on king mt in Clarified, TN. Jack Corn, 1969.*

butte on top of King Mountain near Clairfield, Tennessee. From a line of dark black soil loosely binding the trees to what remains of the earth beneath them, a sheer limestone cliff plunges into a trench filled with rubble that curves around the mountains contour. The overcast sky illuminates the diminutive silhouette of a dump truck, often called an “earth mover,” parked atop a ridge far in the distance. With this picture, Corn said he wanted to show the scale of the devastation occurring.<sup>207</sup> Mining machines are large in their own right, but through Corn’s use of forced perspective, the one in the photograph is reduced to a toy-like stature when compared to the size of the destruction it created. Through informal balance, Corn is able to show imbalanced power in Appalachia. The imbalance in power comes from both the relatively small machines that were

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<sup>207</sup> Corn, 2019

able to destroy mountains, and metaphorically of the coal companies imposing their will on the valley from far away. In a chapter titled “The Rape of the Appalachians,” Caudill writes of mining machines, “these marvelous new tools enabled men to change the earth, abolishing its natural features and reshaping them as whim or necessity might require.”<sup>208</sup> Corn had been a reconnaissance photographer in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War and once again took to the skies with a camera, this time documenting the devastation caused by *progress* instead of war. “I could see and photograph the widespread damage,” he said of a series of aerial photographs of surface mines around Campbell County in eastern Tennessee (Figure 51) and (Figure 52). “I think the photographs are important historical documents about our land use.”<sup>209</sup> Corn’s use of a high perspective in these aerial photographs gives the viewer a novel view of what many in the valley witness every day at ground level. While showing the true extent of the devastation, elevation and leading lines abstract the destruction creating a striking juxtaposition between contours, light and shadow. Shot nearly straight down, Corn uses a flattened perspective to spatially orient the viewer in the first photograph titled “Land slide down to road and R.R. below, Campbell Co., TN.” Corn shows the wounded mountain by using a thick curving band of exposed rock to move the viewer across the frame. Moving from left to right, two thick bands cut through the forest canopy, catching the eye and leading it down to the parallel railroad tracks in the foreground. Corn’s use of lines here gives the photograph movement and allows the viewer to imagine how debris from blasting would flow down the mountainside. Corn was encouraged by his editors at *The Tennessean* to illustrate this type of destruction of the Cumberland mountains.

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<sup>208</sup> Caudill, 1962: 306

<sup>209</sup> Corn, 2000



*Figure 51. Land slide down to road and R.R. below, Campbell Co., TN. Jack Corn, 1969.*





*Figure 52. Aerial of strip-mined mountain in Campbell Co., TN. Jack Corn, 1969.*

Newsgathering and news values at *The Tennessean* newspaper were shaped by activist editor John Seigenthaler, who encouraged Corn and reporters to examine issues related to mining in northeast Tennessee. Seigenthaler's 2014 obituary in the *New York Times* highlights his extraordinary career as a journalist and activist.<sup>210</sup> Prior to being hired as the editor of *The Tennessean* in 1962, Seigenthaler was a senior advisor to then-U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, and worked on John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign before joining the Department of Justice. He was a civil rights activist, and heavily involved with the freedom rides, acting as chief negotiator between the Department of Justice and Alabama Governor John Patterson. He is even said to have launched the political career of former U.S. Vice President Al Gore. Gore was a reporter at *The Tennessean* in the 1970s, and Seigenthaler encouraged him to run for a congressional seat being vacated by retiring U.S. Representative Joe L. Evins.<sup>211</sup>

Seigenthaler's politics and advocacy for social change shaped not only his identity, but his perception of the role of journalism in society—for him there was no boundary between activism and journalism. Working as a reporter in 1954, he was dispatched to the Shelby Avenue Bridge in Nashville to cover a man threatening to jump into the Cumberland River below. After interviewing Gene Bradford Williams, Seigenthaler grabbed and held him from jumping until the police arrived.<sup>212</sup> In 2014, shortly before his death, that bridge was renamed the John Seigenthaler Pedestrian Bridge. During his time as editor of *The Tennessean*, Seigenthaler mentored a number of young reporters who would have long and celebrated careers such as David Halberstam, Bill Kovach, Jim Squires and Nat Caldwell. Corn recalls working with all these reporters and the culture Seigenthaler cultivated in the newsroom of *The Tennessean*. Corn

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<sup>210</sup> Schwartz, 2014

<sup>211</sup> Schwartz, 2014

<sup>212</sup> Cass, 2014

said they would sit around and discuss current social issues and what *they* could do about them. “We young journalists believed, and perhaps we were naïve, that we could change society and right the injustices that many in America accepted.”<sup>213</sup>

In addition to setting the agenda for *The Tennessean*, Seigenthaler also influenced discourse through his involvement in several community organizations. He was heavily involved with community development and advocacy work being done by the Archdioceses of Nashville. Serving on the board of directors of the Archdioceses’ Department of Rural Development, Seigenthaler oversaw parish and community outreach efforts in rural Appalachian communities in northeast Tennessee including the Clear Fork Valley, which perhaps contributed to his encouragement of coverage of the depressed area despite it being out of the paper’s normal coverage radius. Corn recalls his first trip to an area of Appalachia known as the Cumberland Plateau. In 1956, he accompanied reporter David Halberstam to Monroe in Fentress County, approximately 100-miles northeast of Nashville. Through his reporting, Halberstam had been trying to free a teenage boy, Charles Reagan, who had been held without charge for six months in a Nashville jail. After his release, Corn and Halberstam were instructed by the city editor to drive the boy home and do a story on his reunion with his parents.<sup>214</sup> This encounter, like Seigenthaler intervening on the bridge, blurs the distinction between being a witness to and being a participant in the events before them. The journalists in both of these cases were intervening in events they were covering, thus in a way controlling what they were also observing. As an exercise of power, this resembles Foucault’s notion of *panopticism*. The panopticon is Foucault’s imagining of a structure where few can exert power and control over many by conditioning them

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<sup>213</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>214</sup> Corn, 2000

to think they are constantly being watched.<sup>215</sup> The journalists at *The Tennessean* identifying themselves as being agents of social change helps to understand how they perceived their role as being both a member of society and a changer of it. In the case of Corn, Halberstam, Caldwell and Kovach they were using journalism as an act upon society, in which they worked to change society. In this case, we see the work of the journalist occupy a place of idealism working against hegemonic norms of Appalachian socio-economic class systems. “Journalistic discourse, in particular, is one active element in bringing about such change through shaping understandings, influencing audience attitudes and beliefs (particularly through their reinforcement), and transforming the consciousness of those who read and consume it.”<sup>216</sup> The way that Seigenthaler and the staff at *The Tennessean* perceived their role as journalists shifted what the journalistic discourse they produced does from informing society to making an argument to society that it needed to change.

#### FUELING THE COLD WAR: LABOR, COAL AND COMMUNISM IN THE AGE OF ACTIVISM

A hallmark of the NELA campaign was installation of the logic that consumption of electricity was quintessentially “American” into the national conscience. It follows in that logic that the more consumption, the better, and anything that challenged either the supply or consumption of electricity was not only anti-capitalist, but Anti-American. Pro-capitalist U.S. discourse in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in particular during the Cold War, adopted as its foundation the same principal logic. Economist L.C. Michelon argued in the 1960s that to be American one must be free and capitalistic, the two principles being inseparable.<sup>217</sup> In addition to his work

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<sup>215</sup> Foucault, 1977

<sup>216</sup> Richardson, 2006: 29

<sup>217</sup> Michelon, 1962: 8

teaching at the Illinois Institute of Technology and Purdue University and directing the Industrial Relations Center at the University of Chicago, Michelson contributed to anti-communist discourse. He authored a pamphlet titled “Communism: What it means. How it works”, which was part of a propaganda campaign aimed at the U.S. labor force. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Michelson, along with other leading economic and civic scholars, produced works for a pamphlet series called “Building Economic Understanding” by the Good Reading Rack Service division of Koster-Dana, a New York-based publishing corporation. The series included other titles such as “Our Red Rivals: A penetrating report on why the Soviet people feel they will catch America” and “The Communist Conspiracy: How you can fight it” which were widely distributed to the work force of major U.S. companies such as General Motors, for example. In “The Communist Conspiracy” writer and anti-Communist community organizer Carol Saunders lays out a series of actions individual workers can take in contributing to the fight against the global spread of Communism. Although overtly anti-Communist, her discourse is also a veiled criticism of social movements emerging at the time to advance civil rights and environmental protections and to protest U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

A section titled “Your Civic Responsibilities,” for example, is as much anti-labor and anti-regulatory discourse aimed to quell worker support for efforts to strengthen U.S. environmental and worker safety policy as it is a warning against the spread of socialistic ideology. Saunders writes: “The alert citizen will look closely at those who lay the blame for all ills at the feet of the ‘capitalists’ and seek to subtly change our form of government by placing more and more control over our economic life, thus violating the intents and purpose of our Constitution.”<sup>218</sup> In addition to being “alert,” which implies a constant watchfulness, Saunders

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<sup>218</sup> Saunders, 1961: 14

urges workers to “not be fooled” and to “know the enemy” to “know our government” and the “roots of our heritage” as well as to inoculate their children against subversion. Perhaps most telling of the dualism of her discourse comes in the section titled “Safeguard Your Job,” in which she implores the worker to not be disgruntled, regardless of hardship or injustice encountered in the workplace, because they enjoy the freedom of being employed. Any fight against that freedom, against the corporation, aids the communists in their global economic warfare. The more urgent, fervent and emboldened Saunders’ discourse becomes, the more it begins to resemble the fundamental principles of the ideology she aimed to fight. She discusses at length the individual contributions that workers need to make to meet the greater goal, a need to trust the government to provide answers and solutions to advance the fight, and the need for workers to inform others of what they know and have learned through the sharing of information.<sup>219</sup> It is this last action prescribed in Saunders’ discourse—the *alert* and *watchful* act of information sharing — that was perhaps most fundamental in Rogovin’s move toward becoming a documentary photographer.

Rogovin said his social conscience began to evolve during the Great Depression, when he became involved with the Optical Workers Union.<sup>220</sup> He began attending meetings and classes centered on discussions of the political economy. These discussions were held at a neighbor’s house and run by the Workers’ School, a division of the Communist Party. Bothered by mass unemployment of the working class and the sight of breadlines and growing poverty, Rogovin writes that the meetings and classes “convinced me that Socialism was the path we should take to create a more equitable society.”<sup>221</sup> He himself held a prominent position in a Manhattan practice

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<sup>219</sup> Saunders, 1961: 8

<sup>220</sup> Rogovin, 1997

<sup>221</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 12

that served a more affluent clientele, but he helped other workers organize in less well-off practices across the city, and picketed with them when a strike was called. During one 1938 strike at an optometry shop on 23rd street, Rogovin was accused of harassing a customer and charged with assault. After being convicted, but given a suspended sentence, he decided to leave Manhattan and got a job with a practice in Buffalo, New York. Despite the move, he maintained close ties with the Optical Workers Union in Manhattan and helped union officials meet optical workers in Buffalo. When the practice where Rogovin worked tried to organize, he led the negotiating efforts. The attempt to unionize failed and the workers went on strike; seen as the instigator, Rogovin was fired. He decided to open his own practice and geared that practice to primarily serve union members in Buffalo. The close contact with beleaguered steel, auto and dock workers emboldened his beliefs that many of the working class had been forgotten and lost between the industrial cogs of capitalism. He bought a camera and began documenting the downtrodden lives of the workers in the neighborhood around his practice in Buffalo's south side.

Perhaps in contrast to Rogovin's socialistic ideology was the duty he felt to serve in the nation's war efforts. In 1942, the same year he married Anne Snetsky, Rogovin joined the U.S. Army. He worked in a medical unit stationed at an allied hospital in the English village of Cirencester. In materials he gathered for an unpublished autobiography, Rogovin recalls being struck by seeing "the abuse of land alongside the railroad tracks" in the English country as he traveled by train from Liverpool to Cirencester.<sup>222</sup> His comment on the abuse of land he witnessed in England foreshadows what would be a theme in his early work in West Virginia—the degradation of land and community in the name of economic progress. This abuse, along

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<sup>222</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 20



with the poverty and neglect of the workforce he served back in Buffalo, strengthened his socialistic views. It was these “radical” political views, Rogovin argues, that prevented him from being promoted from corporal to sergeant for more than a year.<sup>223</sup> After being discharged from the U.S. Army in 1945, Rogovin returned to his optometry practice which had been run by his brother Sam in his absence. Back in Buffalo, Rogovin resumed his interest in photography, continuing to make portraits of workers around Buffalo.

In 1953 he traveled to Mexico to work on what would become Rogovin’s first photographic series, “*Early Mexico*.” Traveling with Anne, Rogovin made photographs in Campeche, Chiapas, Oaxaca, and the Yucatan between 1953–1961. Rogovin considers one photograph from this series, “The Iguana Seller,” (Figure 53) to be his first serious success in documentary photography.<sup>224,225</sup> The image made at a market outside the Mayan ruins at Tulum, shows a woman with her arms crossed, leaning forward over an assortment of dead black iguanas. The *cinta*, a traditional Mayan hair ribbon, wrapped around her head appears worn and tattered. Her eyes are deep and engaging, which makes her face welcoming, despite her seemingly stoic expression. The photograph is well-proportioned in its composition. Rogovin centered the woman in the frame, placing her piercing eyes along the top third of the frame, and her folded forearms along the bottom third, creating a pleasing sense of informal balance. He also has the woman leaning in toward the viewer, which creates intimacy between the subject and viewer. The photograph is early evidence of the mastery of human compassion and photographic composition Rogovin would come to possess.

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<sup>223</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 20

<sup>224</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 21

<sup>225</sup> The Rogovin Collection, 2002



*Figure 53. "Iguana Seller," from the series, "Early Mexico." Milton Rogovin, 1953–1961.*

In addition to resuming his interest in photography after his Army discharge, Rogovin also resumed his interest in politics. As the U.S. Cold War intensified, he and Anne increased their socialist activism. The Rogovins' activism included raising money for the legal defense of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, who were tried, convicted and executed as accused Soviet spies.<sup>226</sup> Their protest of the Rosenberg trial followed the photography trips to Mexico, and Milton's continued involvement with labor and social reform groups received the attention of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). In 1957, Milton and Anne were issued subpoenas to testify before the committee. Newspaper coverage of the testimony in the local press (Figure 54) highlighted his refusal to answer the committee's questions and suggests that he was the top communist in Buffalo, even that he played a part in a failed plot to assassinate President Harry Truman.<sup>227</sup> Rogovin said the investigation and media coverage had profound and devastating effects on their family, community and on his optometry practice. He writes: "Children on our street were warned against playing with 'the Rogovin children,' People who know us well were afraid to greet us openly on the street [...] Our patients were afraid to come to our office, for fear they too might be accused of being 'reds.'"<sup>228</sup> Rogovin also said that after their testimony, neighbors kept a watchful eye on them. One neighbor in particular, Rogovin writes, "would go out and copy the visitor's license plate number," anytime anyone came to their house.<sup>229</sup> Inoculation of the children in the neighborhood against the enemy and the neighbors fulfilling their civic duty by keeping a watchful eye placed the Rogovins as the target of the actions prescribed for in anti-Communist propaganda like Saunders' "The Communist Conspiracy: How you can fight it." The attention Rogovin received from his HUAC appearance

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<sup>226</sup> The Rogovin Collection, 2002

<sup>227</sup> *Buffalo Evening News*, Friday, October 4, 1957

<sup>228</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 25

<sup>229</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 25

# ROGOVIN, NAMED AS TOP RED IN BUFFALO, BALKS AT NEARLY ALL QUERIES

## Questioned on a Trip to Mexico, His Acquaintance With Miss Mintz, Party Funds, He Refuses to Talk

The man named by Government witnesses as Buffalo's No. 1 Communist claimed the First and Fifth Amendments today.

Subpoenaed before the House Subcommittee on Un-American Activities, Milton Rogovin, 90 Chatham Ave., an optometrist, made it clear that he would answer few questions.

He took the oath administered by the committee, settled back in the witness chair and, at the invitation of Director Richard Arens, said he had graduated from an optometry school in New York in 1931, came to Buffalo in 1938 and has lived here since, except for Army service during World War II. He has an honorable discharge and served 16 months overseas.

"Have you made any trips to Mexico?" asked Mr. Arens.

The witness declined to answer.

### Balks at Queries on Mexico

Do you remember when there was an attempted assassination

"I will decline to answer under the First and Fifth Amendments."

"Have you ever been in conference with Puerto Rican Communist organizations in Mexico?"

"I decline to answer."

Mr. Arens also questioned the witness as to whether he knew anything of the Communist finances in this area.

"What money did you handle besides your own personal funds?" he asked.

Again the witness declined to answer.

"I put it to you, while you are under oath, to deny or affirm that you were the principal conduit of funds of the Communist organization in this community, were you?"

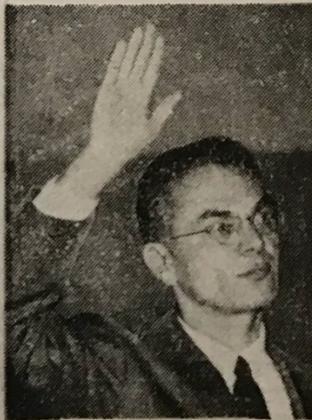
### Refuses to Discuss Miss Mintz

The witness cited his constitutional privilege to refuse to answer. He took a similar stand to the question: "Are you, this minute, a member of the Communist Party?"

Before Rogovin left the stand, Rep. Gordon H. Scherer, committee member, recalled that Miss Helen Mintz, a witness Thursday, had testified that she knew Rogovin as a customer.

He inquired whether Rogovin knew Miss Mintz. He refused, on the same constitutional grounds, to answer this and other questions as to whether he had ever attended a meeting in her apartment in the Touraine Hotel as a Government witness had claimed.

"These witnesses, who have identified you as a leader of the Communist Party in this area, were they telling the truth?" Rogovin was asked. He again refused to answer.



MILTON ROGOVIN

He Gave Little Information

of former President Truman in Washington by Puerto Rican Nationalists?"

"I recall it," Rogovin answered.

"Where were you at that time?"

"Were you in Mexico at or about that time?"

Figure 54. Buffalo Evening News, Friday, October 4, 1957.

and the effect it had on the optometrist practice forced him to make a pivotal decision. He took a step back from optometry to focus more of his time on photography, leaving management of the practice to his brother Sam as he did while serving in the Army. Milton and Anne made more trips to Mexico, and he began work on his celebrated “Storefront Churches Series” on Buffalo’s eastside. In 1970, the Rogovins’ practice moved to a small office and hours were cut when Sam retired; eight years later the practice closed completely, as Milton retired to focus all of his attention on his documentary work.<sup>230</sup>

While the Rogovins were fighting for worker equality, social justice in Buffalo, and an end to the Vietnam War, social movements in the coal communities of Appalachia were also on the rise. Led by activists like West, folk singer Pete Seeger, labor organizer Mother Jones and clergy and community leaders, unorganized yet related efforts were being mounted all over the region to improve the social, economic and public health conditions in the Appalachian coal fields. One such effort was led by the Coal Commission of the Communist Party, U.S.A. (CCCP). To counter anti-communist propaganda like the pamphlet series produced by the Good Reading Rack Service, the CCCP produced its own literature to argue for what it saw as the liberation of the American worker from corporate slavery. The centerpiece of the CCCP’s campaign was a call to end exploitive land leases in Appalachia and a shift to public ownership of coal mining operations and other basic industries such as railroads and utilities.<sup>231</sup> This circles back to Pinchot’s early interest in the idea of public utilities through his commissioning of the Giant Power study in Pennsylvania. A 1970 CCCP publication titled “DIG WE MUST! – INTO THE COAL OPERATORS PROFITS,” (Figure 55) highlights the push by CCCPs for a public takeover of coal, and the party’s fighting for broader worker issues such as drastic reform within

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<sup>230</sup> The Rogovin Collection, 2002

<sup>231</sup> Coal Commission of the Communist Party, U.S.A., 1970: 13





Figure 55. Brochure Cover, "Dig We Must!—Into the Coal Operators' Profits!"  
Coal Commission of the Communist Party, U.S.A., 1970.

the labor unions representing miners and utility workers. Beginning in the 1940s a belief emerged that unions had been infiltrated and corrupted by the coal companies who were accused of providing payouts to top union officials in exchange for favorable contract terms and to end strikes.<sup>232</sup> The May 1974 issue of *United Mine Workers Journal*—a monthly magazine produced for members the United Mineworkers of America (U.M.W.)—illustrates the CCCPs assertion of union corruption.

The issue's cover (Figure 56) features a photograph showing a group of men holding documents while huddled around a picnic table—the headline reads “The Bribe at Brookside: The Story of a Desperate Plot to Break the Duke Power Strike.” The cover story is about a sting operation undertaken by the U.M.W. to catch officials at Duke Power and the Southern Labor Union (S.L.U.) bribing picket line leaders to end a strike at Duke Power's Brookside coal mine. The photograph is of a meeting between S.L.U. president Paul Byrge and field man Noah Harris and strike leaders Carl Noe and Ronnie Curtis held at an airstrip in Harland, Kentucky. The article details how Noe and Curtis documented the attempted bribe by tape recording the meeting while *United Mine Workers Journal* photographer Earl Dotter hid in nearby bushes photographing the transaction. The journal's sting led to the filing of 14 corruption charges against Duke Energy officials and leadership of the S.L.U. and illustrated the power and influence of money the coal companies exercised over their workers and unions charged with representing the workers interests.

Rogovin said he and Anne read a lot in the news about the corruption and poverty miners in Appalachia had been struggling with for years and decided to see it for themselves. Working less at the optometry practice allowed them, in the summer of 1962, to pack up their small Volvo

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<sup>232</sup> Coal Commission of the Communist Party, U.S.A., 1970





Figure 56. Magazine Cover, "United Mine Workers Journal." United Mineworkers of America, May 1974.



van with sleeping bags and camera equipment and drive down to Beckley, West Virginia.<sup>233</sup> In addition to the photographs he made, Rogovin recorded what he witnessed in Appalachia with sketches and poetry. One 6 x 9 inch spiral bound stenographer's notebook, with the label "vacation in W. Va.—July, 1962" handwritten on the cover, is filled with notes and drawings of the region. The drawings do not directly correspond to any one photograph he made. This suggests they are not early studies of specific scenes. They are more conceptual as if Rogovin was working through his first impressions, using the sketches as notes in constructing the thematic representation he wanted in his photographs. A pair of sketches depict the finite nature of coal and what happens when the coal runs out in a community built around its production. The first sketch (Figure 57) shows an earth mover beneath a tippie, receiving a load of processed coal for transport. Beneath the drawing, Rogovin writes: "Probably another year's work—and it'll fold up." The next sketch (Figure 58) shows a road, with a cluster of houses at the end with the name "Raleigh," which is the county where Beckley, West Virginia is located. Below the drawing is a quote from a local miner: "Naw—I didn't want to be a miner if I can help it. This used to be a nice town once when the mines was goin'." Another pair of drawings, one from the same notebook and another from a later trip, further illustrate the deterioration of community once coal companies shutter their deep mining operations. A sketch (Figure 59) labeled "Gary,"—an isolated town 45 miles south of Beckley near the northern border of Virginia—depicts what appears to be a crane stretching across a road with some trees in the background. Below it Rogovin writes: "They're tearin' down the houses there." Destruction of community is also represented in a 1969 sketch (Figure 60) showing a church with a for sale sign posted outside.

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<sup>233</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 42



Figure 57. Coal Tipple Sketch, 6 x 9 inches. Milton Rogovin, West Virginia, 1962.



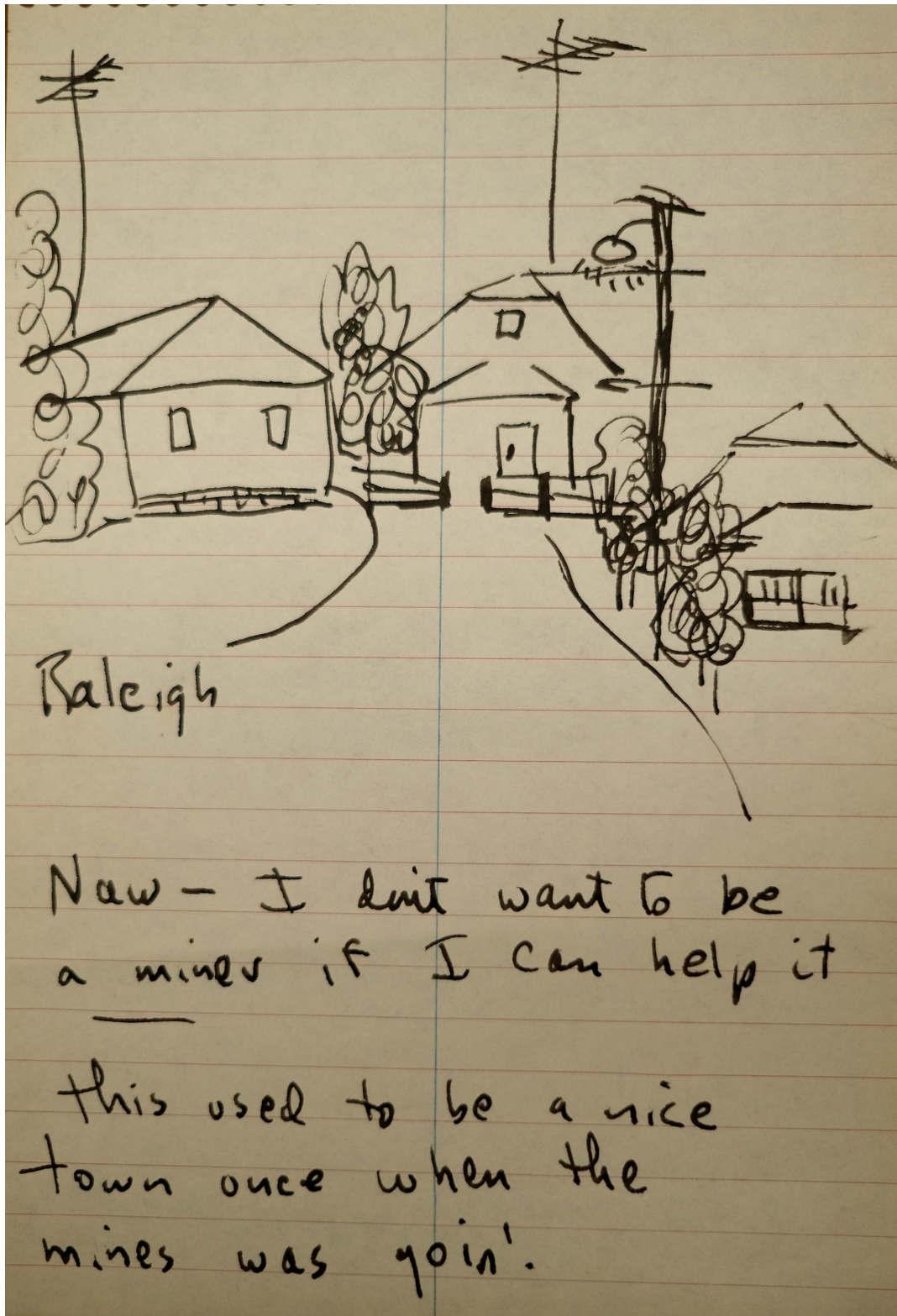


Figure 58. Neighborhood Sketch, 6 x 9 inches. Milton Rogovin, Raleigh County, West Virginia, 1962.

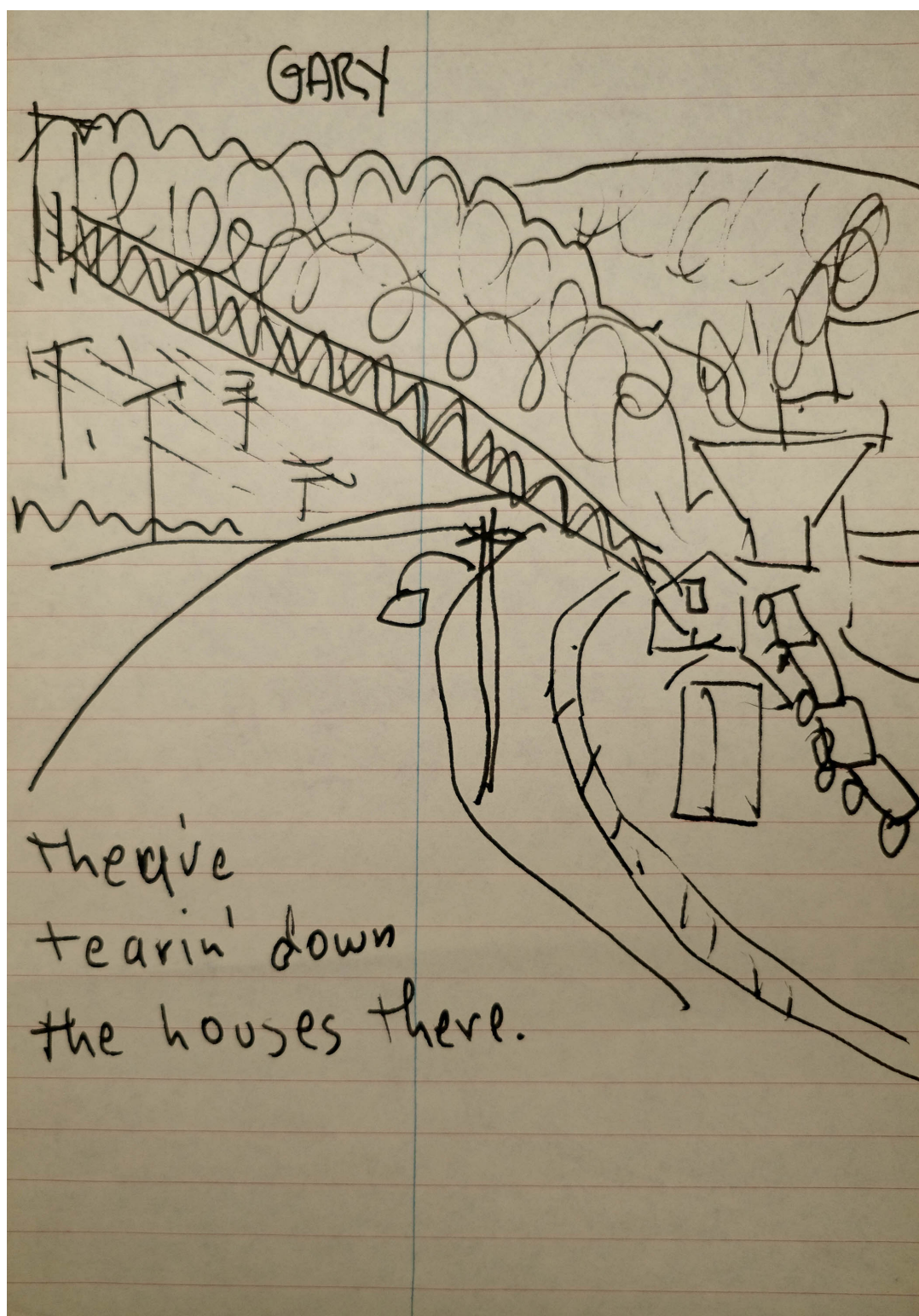


Figure 59. Building Demolition Sketch, 6 x 9 inches. Milton Rogovin, Gary, West Virginia, 1962.





Figure 60. Church For Sale Sketch, 5 x 8 inches. Milton Rogovin, West Virginia, 1969.

Driving down State Road 90 at the north end of the Clear Fork Valley, Cirillo explained that it's not uncommon in coal country for churches founded in one community to end up in another.<sup>234</sup> As deep mines closed and company towns were abandoned, the houses, churches, stores and other structures were often either demolished, or sold to be dismantled and relocated, so that the little coal that might be located under them could be surface mined. This explains, for example, how the First Baptist Church of Pruden, Tennessee, is now located in Pineville, Kentucky.<sup>235</sup>

#### “THEY LOOKED ONLY TO GOD TO GIVE THEM IN THE NEXT WORLD ALL THAT WAS YEARNED FOR IN THIS ONE”: APPALACHIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 1960S AND 70S

Believing a variation of what West, the CCCP, and others were arguing in West Virginia—that a decolonial self-determination was the only hope for cultural and economic salvation—in 1965 a small group of visionaries set out to transform Clear Fork from being the *Valley of Despair* to being the *Model Valley* in a revitalized Appalachia. Led by Clairfield postmistress Louise Adams and Cirillo, the group calling itself the Appalachia Development Institute (ADI) conceived a simple but ambitious plan: free the valley from the shackles of the coal industry by cultivating the resources and workforce available after the coal jobs had gone. The group prepared and produced, among other materials, a twenty-page report assessing the challenges facing the valley, establishing a scope for the project, detailing an outline for initiatives and providing resident testimonials of the underlying reality of Appalachia. The report, which included elements of graphical branding—logos and graphical abstract representations of geographic locations (Figure 61)—was sent to funding and community advocacy groups in the region and across the state of Tennessee. Adams suggests that so much

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<sup>234</sup> Cirillo, 2019

<sup>235</sup> Cirillo, 2019



Figure 61. Branding Elements from Model Valley reports and proposal. Appalachia Development Institute, 1969.



attention and resources were being devoted to urban areas and making a model city, why couldn't a similar approach be taken in developing a model valley? As detailed in the report, the Model Valley project called for the establishment of several separate but interconnected entities serving specific functions to address what ADI saw as the key issues facing the Clear Fork – health, economy, infrastructure and culture were the top priorities.

The project title “Model Valley” was conceived by Adams as a discursive response to a 1964 article titled “A Valley of Despair: The Rural Face of Poverty” that was published in *The Tennessean*. The article, by Bill Kovach, took up half of the front page of the Sunday B section and was accompanied by three Corn photographs (Figure 62). The article chronicles the challenges out-of-work miners and their families faced from a lack of access to medical services and poor educational resources and facilities. Cirillo writes in the Model Valley Report: “Not unlike many other Appalachian mountain communities, our Tennessee and Kentucky valley of despair, has been victimized since 1945 by industrialization, post-war cutbacks, and the failure of the Unions to adapt to real situations.” Corn’s photographs accompanying the article capture this struggle. One photograph titled “Buffalo School, kids at pump, Clairfield” (Figure 63), shows a group of children in a mud-filled play-yard, sharing a tin cup to drink from a pump well at recess. Corn uses depth of field to create complexity in the image with the three students at the well and their classmates running about behind them all being in focus. Corn’s understanding of geometry is at play, creating motion at the well. The tilted head of the girl on the left brings the viewer to her downward positioned arm. From there, the eye moves up the handle, down the water pump, to the spout, into the cup, then back up the arm of the girl on the right.

In addition to showing the condition of the school, seen in the background, the photograph connects to a broader issue in the valley—water. Runoff caused by blasting





*Figure 63. "Buffalo School, kids at pump, Clairfield," Jack Corn, 1961.*

associated with surface mining left the rivers and streams in the Clear Fork polluted. Corn's previously discussed photograph, "Stripmine landslide" (Figure 64) illustrates the path debris from blasting *overburden* takes down the mountain sides to whatever lies below. Overburden is a term used by the coal industry to describe the material that sits on top of a seam of coal that must be removed in order to extract the resource. In some cases, there is nothing below, but often there are streams, homes, or farmland. Corn's photograph "Huddleston farm with strip mine overburden" (Figure 65) shows fields that were destroyed, contaminated, and rendered untillable by blasting debris. Similar to his photograph "Truck on strip mine ruins," Corn uses informal balance to illustrate power. He placed a mound of removed overburden in the foreground to exaggerate its size. Here the viewer sees the tracks of an earth mover appearing larger than the furrows in the Huddleston's field below, larger than their horse, and larger than their house off in the distance. The mound itself dwarfs everything else in the photograph, even the mountain in the background, as if to signify that the coal was more important than anything else. Instead of calling the rocks and soil mountains, as they are, they are called overburden to portray them as being an obstacle "over" the precious coal that is burdensome to remove.

Coal company discourse underscores how such devastation can be justified. One industry publication titled "The Greening of West Virginia" describes coal as an "energy crop" and oversimplifies the process and impact of its removal by likening it to a "harvest." A graphic (Figure 66) illustrates the process in simple terms. The graphic shows a cross-section of a surface mine and includes only three labels: "hillside," "slope" and "coal seam." Between the large mound labeled *hillside* and smaller mound labeled *slope*, an excavator is seen scooping up coal from an exposed seam. This same graphic, with a few additional labels (Figure 67), is also found





*Figure 64. "Stripmine landslide," Jack Corn, 1969.*



*Figure 65. "Huddleston farm with strip mine overburden," Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*

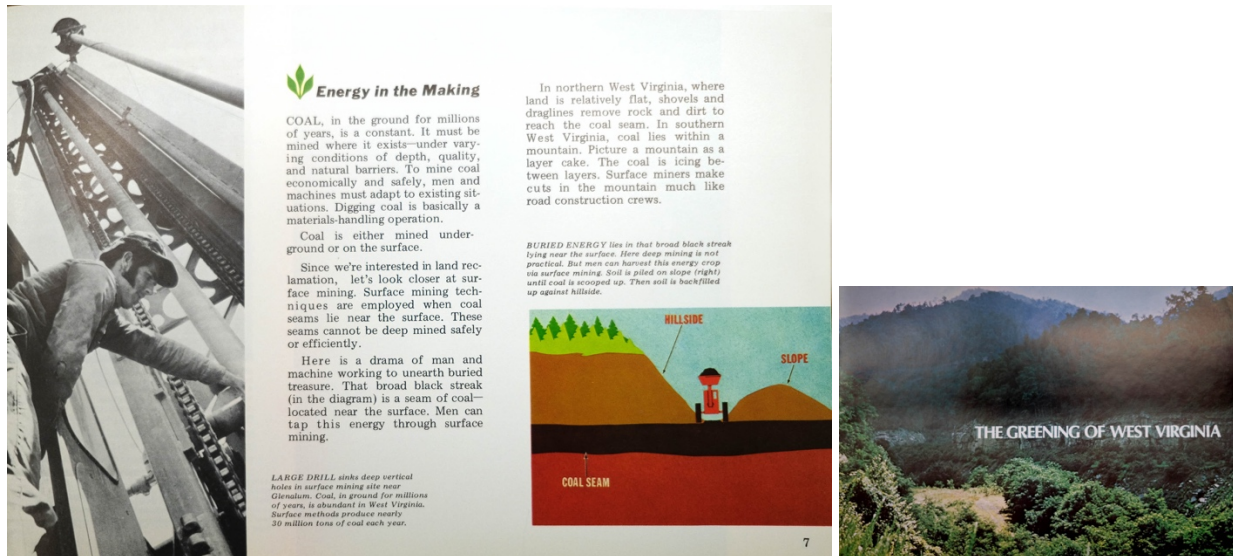


Figure 66. Strip Mining Graphic from “The Greening of West Virginia.”  
West Virginia Surface Mining & Reclamation Association.

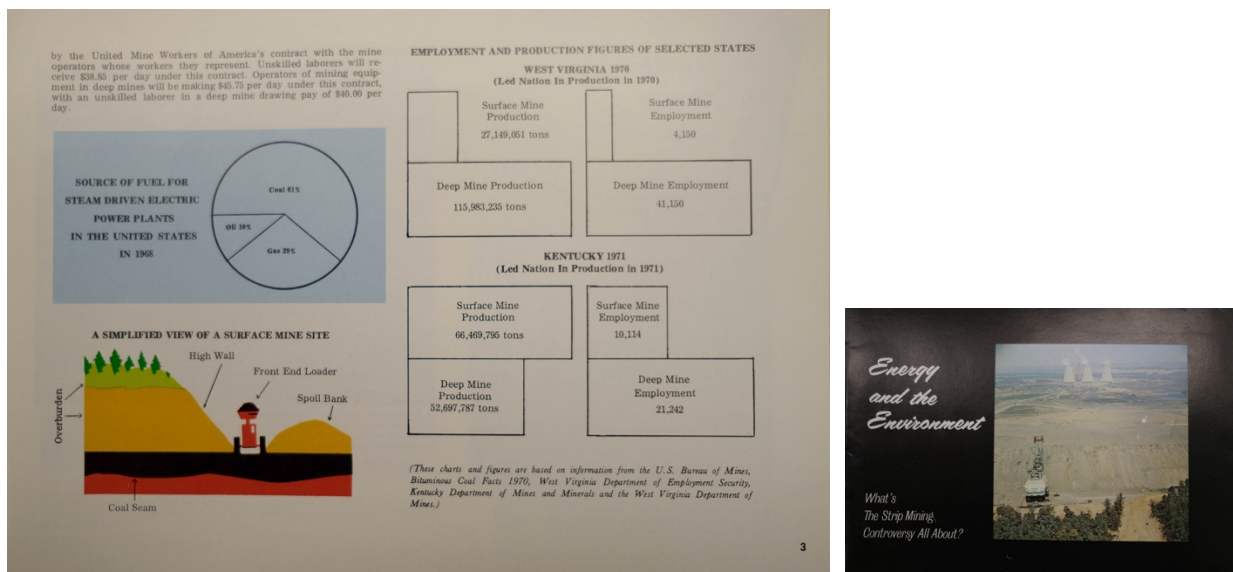


Figure 67. Strip Mining Graphic from “Energy and the Environment: What’s The Strip Mine Controversy About?”  
Surface Mining Research Mining Library in Charleston, West Virginia.



in a publication titled “Energy and The Environment” produced by the Surface Mining Research Mining Library in Charleston, West Virginia. What the graphic shows is a process known as mountain top removal; what it doesn’t show is how the trench between the hillside and slope was created by explosion to expose the coal seam below.

Pollution of rivers, streams and creeks by overburden seeped into groundwater and left wells, like one in Corn’s photograph the children were drinking from, vulnerable to contamination. Wells were also at risk of contamination from the widespread practice of bootleg mining. Charles Higginbotham, director of the Clear Fork Utility District (CFUD), recalls an incident in the 1960s when his neighbor Fred Hanes denied a group of miners access to the coal beneath his property. Higginbotham said the next day Hanes went out to draw some water and heard the miners down his well stealing the coal.<sup>236</sup> Setting up the CFUD was a hard-fought battle that took more than a decade. The district was established by the Model Valley Economic Development Corporation (MVEDC), one of the initiatives of Adams and Cirillo’s ADI. Standing in the understated, beige-painted cinderblock lobby of the MVEDC, Executive Director Mary Jo Leygraaf said that access to water and other basic services were vital to the development of the valley.<sup>237</sup> Seeing the degraded status of the community’s drinking water, solely drawn from individual wells, the MVEDC began in the late 1960s advocating for extension of the municipal water system that ended in White Oak further up the valley. Leygraaf said funding the project was an issue, and it would take until 1983 for CFUD to be able to offer municipal water to the residents of Clear Fork.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Higginbotham, 2019

<sup>237</sup> Leygraaf, 2019

<sup>238</sup> Leygraaf, 2019

In addition to finding sustainable sources of funding, one of the biggest obstacles Adams, Cirillo and the ADI faced in realizing their Model Valley was land and accessing the resources found. In 1972 the ADI and MVEDC opened a pallet factory on a plot of land behind the MVEDC office in Clairfield; Corn covered the dedication for *The Tennessean* (Figure 68). The factory employed 18 workers and was the first new industry in the valley since the deep mines began to close in the 1960s.<sup>239</sup> Wood to construct the shipping pallets came from timber on the MVEDC property around the factory. When all the usable hardwood on the property had been harvested, the factory began struggling to find raw material necessary for operation. Coal companies held leases on the majority of land in the valley and were waiting for the coal to run out to begin harvesting the timber. The timber that was felled was used to support coal operations, so they refused to sell hardwood to the MVEDC.<sup>240</sup> Despite initial success, the factory closed after a few years in operation.<sup>241</sup> The coal companies refused to sell timber to the MVEDC, knowing it would suffocate the efforts of locals to build non-coal related enterprises in the valley. Reliance on coal is what gave the coal industry its power, and the pallet factory threatened the reliance the people of the Clear Fork Valley had on coal for prosperity.

Power uses discourse and photography to underscore and promote its interest.<sup>242</sup> One way of gaining knowledge from photographs is to understand who is using the photograph and how.<sup>243</sup> Foucault's perspective of power however, posits that institutional power can be disrupted through the wielding of power by other actors at given periods of time. Foucault conceived that rather than being rigidly structural in a top-down hierarchy, power is more fluid and circulates

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<sup>239</sup> Appalachia, 1972

<sup>240</sup> Cirillo, 2019

<sup>241</sup> Leygraaf, 2019

<sup>242</sup> Richardson, 2006

<sup>243</sup> Tagg, 2009



*Figure 68. "Clairfield pallet factory dedication," Jack Corn, 1972.*



*Figure 69. Untitled, from Appalachia Series, Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*

among multiple spheres and “permeates all levels of social existence.”<sup>244</sup> Through their photography, both Corn and Rogovin fought against the exercise of institutional power aimed at keeping Appalachia reliant on coal. Rogovin’s portraits shatter the illusion that miners were defined by the work they did. Though he photographed them at work, he challenged the sooty aesthetic enlisted by photographers before him by not always showing the miners as being dirty. For example, his photograph of three female miners (Figure 69) shows them wearing unstained work clothes, and their faces free of coal soot. From their hardhats, carbide lanterns and aluminum lunch pails it is clear that they are miners; however, Rogovin has freed them from the dark and gritty masks that would conceal their identity. Rogovin is making a statement that the workers are not an anonymous commodity—not chattel in the massive industrial workings of the coal industry. His photographs fight against the structure that places the miners’ lives completely under company control, giving them agency and individuality. Similarly, Corn celebrated the spirit of the people he photographed while bringing attention to issues and obstacles they experienced in trying to once again become self-reliant. He highlighted their success in launching new enterprises, and their frustration that the geography of their valley home not only physically isolated them from the rest of the Claiborne County, but also sequestered them from an equitable allocation of government resources.

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<sup>244</sup> Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2010: 77

## CHAPTER 5

### INSPIRING A VIEW OF APPALACHIA: GREAT DEPRESSION ERA PHOTOGRAPHY FROM WALKER EVANS TO RUSSELL LEE

“They are fine photographs of a mature and serious artist, working in the great American tradition of Lewis Hine, Jacob Riis, and continued in the FSA photographs of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn and others.”

— Paul Strand, 1966

Penned in a letter of support for Rogovin’s fellowship application to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, the above praise reveals the deep appreciation photographer Paul Strand came to hold for Rogovin’s work. Strand was among a cohort of photographers including Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston who helped establish photography as a serious American art form in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He is celebrated for his commanding vision which borrowed from traditional studies of form and light used by painters and sculptors that he skillfully applied to the photographic medium.<sup>245</sup> Strand mentored Rogovin when he was beginning to hone his practice of photography in the 1960s, and as their friendship grew, so did their respect for one another’s work and approach to social documentary.

Like Rogovin, Corn also looked to a master of the medium to guide him as a young photographer, developing a lifelong friendship with photographer Russell Lee. Lee, best known for his work with the Farm Security Administration, took an ethnographic approach to exploring issues of class culture in American society. Through discussion of their personal influences along with their photographs, this chapter explores the social and personal factors, including the work of other photographers, that shaped Corn’s and Rogovin’s Appalachia work. While their work is connected by topic, time and proximity, Corn’s and Rogovin’s style and approach yielded very

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<sup>245</sup> International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum

different bodies of work. Through analysis that contrasts their work, this chapter explores the positioning of both photographers, which is essential to understanding their differences. Examining what influenced them in their development as photographers establishes critical understanding of both the aesthetic characteristics of their work and the discursive meaning of their photographs.

## THE TRADITION OF SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY WORK

Considered a masterpiece of documentary expression, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is the product of a failed *Fortune* magazine assignment to document the lives of tenant farmers in rural Alabama in the waning years of the Great Depression. Unlike Harry Caudill's confidence with his subjects in *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s, writer James Agee found frustration in his own limitations and inability to fully understand the context of the place he was sent to document. Compounding his frustration was what he viewed as inadequacies of the magazine essay and photographic series as mediums in capturing the true nature of the farmer's lives. After abandoning the assignment, Agee and photographer Walker Evans collaborated on telling the story in book form. Journalism scholar Elfriede Fürsich suggests that *observed documentation* such as that created through a photographic record is mediated or influenced by the one doing the observing.<sup>246</sup> The human act of observation strips away any idealized sense of sterile purity that may be inherent in the act of documentation. This mediation dictates that how something is represented and documented will depend on who is doing the observing that leads to that documentation. The human effect on documentation is what writer William Stott conceptualizes as *social documentary*. Stott writes that social documentaries "increase our knowledge of public

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<sup>246</sup> Buozis and Creech, 2018: 1431



facts, but sharpen it with feeling; put us in touch with their perennial human spirit, but show it struggling in a particular social context at a specific historical moment.”<sup>247</sup> Perhaps it is the struggle of the human spirit within the particulars of social context that Agee agonizes over capturing that makes his work so meaningful to discuss. Both Stott and psychologist Robert Coles discuss Agee, Evans and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* at length, using the book, its critique and approach as a framework for forming an understanding of documentary work. Both Corn and Rogovin stated *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was an important book to growth and understanding of their role as documentary photographers. Corn writes: “the book impressed me as much as anything during that period in my life. [...] As I look at Walker Evans’ photographs today, I see the world I grew up in during the 1930s.”<sup>248</sup>

Coles argues that what Agee and Evans are showing is that while documentary is *a* story, it is not, nor could it be *the only* story. Agee writes that through “documentary work, imagination encounters and tries to come to terms with reality; and the way in which that is done, the outcome achieved, is as varied as the individuals involved in the effort, the struggle.”<sup>249</sup> Agee illustrates this point in suggesting that in another, perhaps purer form, his documentation of sharecroppers would consist not of words, but of photographs and “fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement.”<sup>250</sup> By suggesting that experiencing the materiality of a reality through smell, touch and taste could shorten the gap between encounter and imagination in *coming to terms* with that reality, Agee is actually demonstrating how the choices one makes affects the outcome of documentary work. Corn and Rogovin saw similar

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<sup>247</sup> Stott, 1973: 18

<sup>248</sup> Corn, 2000: 4

<sup>249</sup> Coles, 1997: x

<sup>250</sup> Coles, 1997: 3

realities in eastern Tennessee and central West Virginia, but their imaginations informed by the artists and photographers they individually admired, delivered them to different outcomes.

## WALKER EVANS

The influence of Walker Evans on Corn and Rogovin is undeniable. Both photographers express the importance of Evans' photographs and Agee's words from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* as being foundational to their understanding of social documentary work, and their roles as documentarians. Evans was a prolific photographer, and evidence of his expansive body of work can be found in an 87-plate portfolio of his early FSA projects published in 1938 by the Museum of Modern Art. Accompanying the 75<sup>th</sup>-anniversary republication of "Walker Evans: American Photographs" was an essay from American writer and art critic Lincoln Kirstein. In the essay Kirstein connects the approach of early photographic masters like Mathew Brady and French photographer Eugène Atget in orienting their imagery to an object to Evans' anti-art view of the photograph as a record. His images are direct, pointed and almost lyrical in the way they are self-contained, yet are connective to Evans' broader vision and to the reality for which they are a proxy. Kirstein argues that Evans, like other early masters of the medium, aimed "to render the object, face, group, house or battlefield airlessly clear in the isolation of its accidental circumstances, to record the presence of every fact gathered within the net of rays focused on this lens, to create out of a fragmentary moment its own permanence."<sup>251</sup> The striking detail Evans achieves in his photographs accomplishes the objectified fragmentary moment by inviting an imaginative interaction with what is viewed in the document of an otherwise banal scene.

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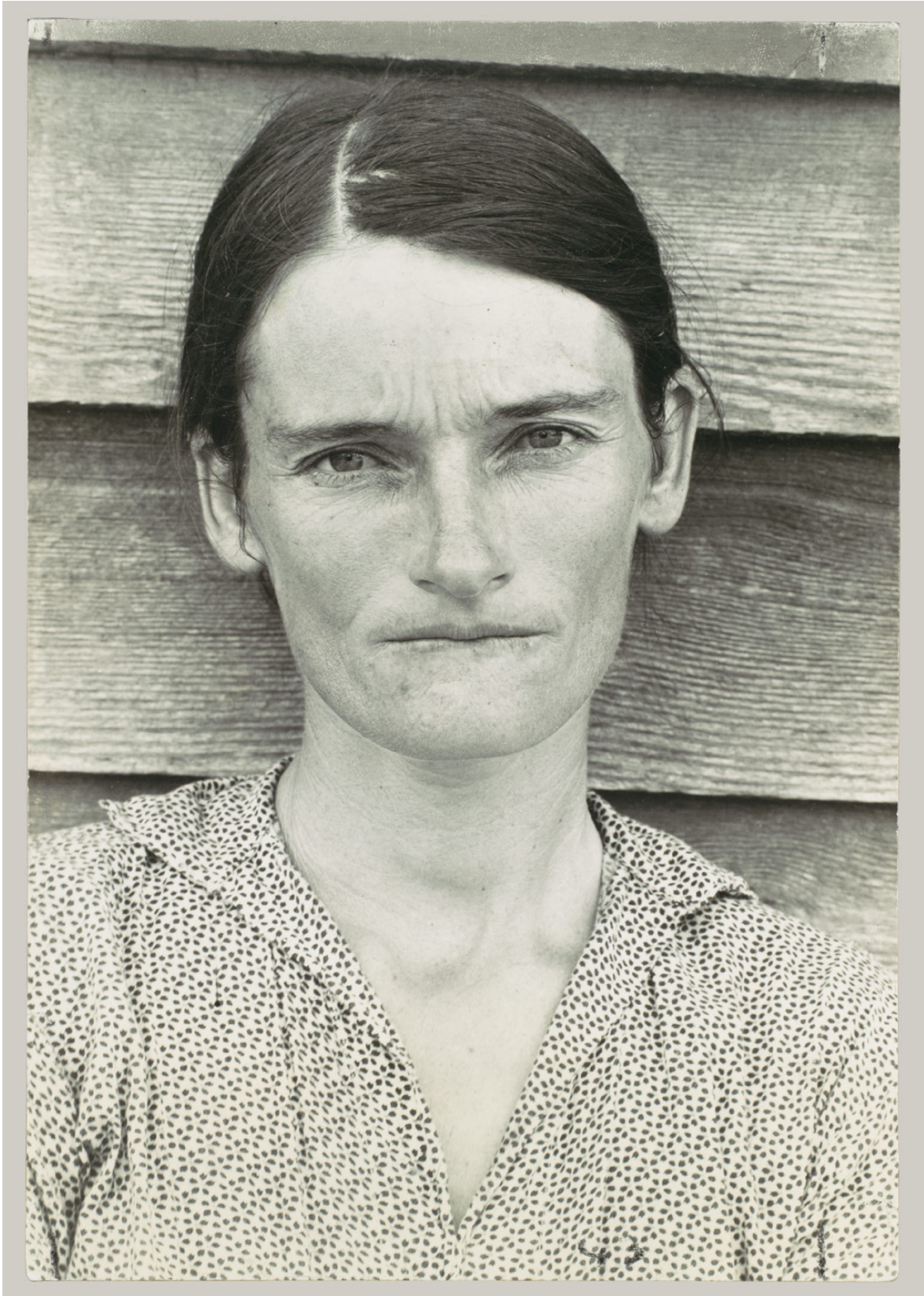
<sup>251</sup> Kirstein, 2012: 192

Focusing on four photographs from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, for example, one can begin to understand the connective lyricism of Evans' fragmentary moments. Two portraits (Figure 70) and (Figure 71) depict southern sharecroppers. The first shows cotton farmer Floyd Burroughs gazing past his furrowed brow directly at Evans' camera, his shirt crumpled and soiled, and denim overalls worn. The second portrait is of Burroughs's wife, Allie Mae, leaning against the weathered planks of a clapboard-sided structure, most likely their home in Hale County Alabama. Her hair is pulled back, revealing the concern in her expression—eyes squinted, mouth thinly drawn across her face. Two more photographs (Figure 72) and (Figure 73), still humanistic, focus on structures of rural southern life without directly showing the people living it. The first photograph shows the corner of a room in the Burroughs home, containing four objects. There is a chair to the left side of the frame, pushed against the clapboard wall. Above the chair hangs a butter churn paddle, and to the left a piece of cloth with ragged edges. Leaning against the wall opposite the chair in the frame is a straw-bristle broom. The other photograph shows a small, slightly leaning structure, Evans labeled a chicken coop, made with uneven scraps of wood. A hinged door in the center of the building is left open, revealing a dark emptiness inside. Separately these four photographs tell individual stories, seemingly isolated from one another. Kirstein argues, however, that the apparent isolation of each of Evans' scenes is an illusion created by his mastery of the medium. Kirstein writes: "They lack surface, obvious continuity of the moving picture, which by its physical orientation compels the observer to perceive a series of images as parts of whole. But these photographs, of necessity seen singly, are not conceived as isolated pictures made by the camera turned indiscriminately here or there. In intention and in effect they exist as a collection of statements deriving from and



*Figure 70. "Alabama Tenant Farmer," Hale County, Alabama. Walker Evans, 1936.*





*Figure 71. "Alabama Tenant Farmer Wife," Hale County, Alabama. Walker Evans, 1936.*





*Figure 72. "Kitchen Corner, Tenant Farmhouse," Hale County, Alabama. Walker Evans, 1936.*



*Figure 73. "Chicken Coop on Floyd Burroughs' Farm," Hale County, Alabama. Walker Evans, 1936.*



presenting a consistent attitude.”<sup>252</sup> Viewed separately, Evans’ portraits and structural photographs provide narrow glimpses into a way of life; viewed together, however, those glimpses become deeper, more human and more meaningful. Seeing the man and the woman, then the room and shed, one can picture those people in those places, even though they are not in the photograph Evans presents. One can imagine that broom being used, and that shed being built through their association with the other photographs. This imaginative interaction Evans creates in this photograph is perhaps the biggest influence of his work, on the work of Corn and Rogovin. Each photographer was able to understand what Evans was doing in his documentary work and combined it with other influences to execute their own visions.

Corn recalls seeing a Monet Exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago when he was first developing his photographic style. He said he felt a connection with the way Monet would paint the same haystacks in different seasons, lighting conditions and perspectives. Corn writes: “Many writers, painters, photographers and other kinds of artists seem drawn to this method of many different views of the same place or subject [...] I hoped each image would be special and I spent long hours trying to obtain a photo that revealed the subject. I liked doing a series of photographs of one situation.”<sup>253</sup> In addition to mimicking Monet and Evans approach to documenting a scene, Corn said he looked to the pages of *LIFE* magazine in the 1950s as inspiration of how to assemble photographic stories. “I believed that several pictures with good captions used together of the same subject could be a powerful document to communicate social ills.”<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Kirstein, 2012: 194

<sup>253</sup> Corn, 2000: 5

<sup>254</sup> Corn, 2000: 6

Rogovin found inspiration in similar places. The work of Hine, Dorothea Lange and Margaret Burke-White were all influential in helping him develop his social aesthetic. Like Corn, Rogovin also connected with the works of classical painters – Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier and Käthe Kollwitz – recalling that “those three artists had a greater influence on me than any of the photographers.”<sup>255</sup> Rogovin said he was exposed to these painters’ works through reading the socialist periodicals *Masses* and *The Daily Worker*. Goya, in particular, appealed to Rogovin because of the painter’s de-emphasis of the heroic scene. On appreciating Goya, Rogovin writes: “Art can present the pathos of anonymous men and women whose lives are exemplary only insofar as they are shared by an immense mass of deprived and suffering humanity.”<sup>256</sup> The anonymity of Goya’s subjects is a characteristic Rogovin adopts in his own work. Though he goes to great lengths to show his subjects as individuals, Rogovin never identifies them in any of his captions, titles or poems. As strong a connection as Corn and Rogovin felt to the work of Monet and Goya, they both were helped in their aesthetic journey to find their own perspective by the photographers who mentored them, Lee and Strand.

## PAUL STRAND

Rogovin became acquainted with Strand through the Photo League, a New York-based cooperative of photographers whose work focused on social issues. Strand, along with photographers Berenice Abbott, Sid Grossman and Sol Libsohn, founded the Photo League in 1936 at a time when similar photography collectives in Europe, such as the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*<sup>♦</sup> (AIZ), began to fracture and splinter as the continent moved closer to war.<sup>257</sup> AIZ was a

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<sup>255</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 13

<sup>256</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 13

<sup>♦</sup> Translation: Workers Illustrated News

<sup>257</sup> Haran, 2012: 469

byproduct of the worker photography movement, which heralded the slogan ‘the camera is a weapon in the class struggle’ and sought to help the “industrial proletariat to wrest the mass media from the bourgeoisie.”<sup>258</sup> Not as radical as AIZ but wanting to use photography as an instrument for social justice, the Photo League’s membership was comprised of some the most notable photographers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century such as Hine, Jack Delano, Arthur Rothstein, W. Eugene Smith, Aaron Siskind and Arthur Fellig (Weegee).<sup>259</sup> With his intersecting interests in photography and social issues, Rogovin felt an affinity with the group and began subscribing to its newsletter *Photo Notes*. Like Rogovin, the group had been targeted by the U.S. government and suspected of subversive sympathies. In 1948, the Photo League was placed on a list of “totalitarian, racist, communist or subversive” groups by U.S. Attorney General Tom C. Clark.<sup>260</sup> Wanting to distance itself from forbearer groups like the AIZ, the Photo League went out of its way to not be overtly political as an organization. The league’s president Walter Rosenblum and executive committee launched a legal and public relations campaign to fight against being associated with other groups on the list, such as the Ku Klux Klan, The Communist Party, or The Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. In the keynote address of a special meeting of the Photo League’s members, Strand called for strength and unity against the oppressive tactics of a reactionary U.S. government. Excerpts of Strand’s speech were printed in a special issue of

*Photo Notes*:

“...We are not allowed to talk about photography tonight. A lot of other people in America are being prevented from discussing the things nearest them, the things which related to their creative work and creative lives. Instead, they are faced with the necessity of talking politics. Although artists have not in the past wanted to mix art with politics, the politicians have already mixed politics in art. [...] To silence you, intimidate you, make you think before you speak or not dare to think your own thoughts, but to go along

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<sup>258</sup> Haran, 2012: 469

<sup>259</sup> The Jewish Museum of New York

<sup>260</sup> Rosenblum, 1948: 1

with something that people are not willing to go along with—these are the objectives of the reactionary forces existing in our country today.”

Rogovin kept a copy of this issue that included Strand’s speech and referenced it in his unpublished autobiography. Rogovin said that that he faced a similar pressure as Photo League faced after being labeled as being an ‘un-American’ organization. He said because of the HUAC investigation his own “political voice was essentially silenced.”<sup>261</sup>

Rogovin began writing to Strand in 1966. Along with his first letter, he sent some photographs from his *Store Front Churches* series that were published in *Aperture* magazine. Strand’s initial response to Rogovin’s work was critical, yet encouraging. In his letter dated Sept. 23, 1966, Strand writes: “That you are an artist, such photographs as pages 69–73 fully attest. And there are others perhaps a little less complete aesthetically and content wise. But you are also well on your way towards an even greater mastery of the photographic medium.”<sup>262</sup> Rogovin asked him specific questions about his aesthetic decisions and the sequencing of images and Strand replied: “A series of related and cumulative images such as you attempted, relates more to film as a medium than to literature (the essay) and the dialectical development of the best documentaries can perhaps be useful to examine. Also, the whole question of long, medium and close up shots as well as camera angles are very important when pictures are put together. But perhaps you have already considered these aesthetic questions long since.”<sup>263</sup> Over time their letters become less formal, and Strand’s praise becomes more forthcoming as Rogovin’s style and technique develop. The two photographers’ and their wives Anne and Hazel develop a friendship and would visit when possible. In one letter post-dated Orgeal, France, Dec. 31, 1969

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<sup>261</sup> Rogovin, 1997

<sup>262</sup> Strand, 1966

<sup>263</sup> Strand, 1966

Strand thanks Rogovin for a few prints he sent and suggests they meet during an upcoming trip to New York. Strand writes:

“The photographs are expression both of your fast-growing mastery of the medium of photography itself and of your ability to communicate clearly the feeling you have for people, so understanding and warm. We have to see more of what you did in W. Virginia when we go to New York as we are in late January. This time we have rented an apartment at 244 East 5<sup>th</sup> Street, our “landlord,” our friend James Ceronson. We expect to have a phone but don’t know the number yet. In any case we will call you.”<sup>264</sup>

This letter is indicative of the warm regard that developed between the two friends and shows Strand’s evolving commentary on Rogovin’s work. In their first exchange, Strand was pointed in what he saw as deficient in Rogovin’s work, whereas this letter three years later acknowledges growth and Rogovin’s strides toward mastery of the medium. In his letter to the Guggenheim Foundation in the mid-1970s, Strand recognizes Rogovin as a photographer who has realized his potential. Strand writes that the photographs in Rogovin’s *Store Front Churches* series “were in every way exceptional. They revealed an approach to reality which was deeply humanist and an aesthetic sensibility mastering the medium.”<sup>265</sup> Strand adds that “Rogovin is not searching for a path, he is a man at the height of his powers—who knows what he wants to do and how to do it.”<sup>266</sup>

## RUSSELL LEE

A longtime admirer of FSA era photography, Corn said he met Lee at a National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) conference where Lee gave the keynote address. Lee was talking about doing documentary work, and Corn said that Lee convinced him the work he was

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<sup>264</sup> Strand, 1969

<sup>265</sup> Strand, c. 1974

<sup>266</sup> Strand, c. 1974

doing in Clear Fork could be developed into a long-term project.<sup>267</sup> Like Rogovin and Strand, Corn and Lee began corresponding and over many years developed a deep friendship and mutual respect. Corn said Lee was a tremendous mentor and helped shape his career and his approach to photography. Best known for his FSA work in Texas and New Mexico, Lee began his art career as a painter, using photography to create reference material for his compositions.<sup>268</sup> As his interest in photography grew, Lee used photographs as the sole medium in early exploration of bootleg coal mining in Pennsylvania. In 1937 he was hired by Roy Striker to join the FSA and abandoned painting to focus on photography. After the FSA was defunded in 1943, Lee served in the U.S. Army Air Transport Command, where he documented airfields used to supply allied troops during WWII. After the war he continued his documentary work for the U.S. government, helping the Department of the Interior survey the health of workers in the coal fields of Kentucky and West Virginia. The result of the work was a 1947 report titled “A Medical Survey of the Bituminous-Coal Industry” (Figure 74) which employed field research teams to interview and examine miners to gather information about their health. From an occupational epidemiology perspective this report and others examining the health of dye and smelting workers provided important evidence concerning the hazard U.S. workers faced.<sup>269</sup> Beginning in the 1920s, the nature of one’s work started to become an important consideration in helping to diagnose and treat a number of illnesses that were discovered to be work-related, such as black lung disease.

Like Hine’s photographs for the NCLC more than two decades earlier, Lee’s images for the medical survey illuminate the working conditions of coal miners. Instead of focusing on the forced labor of children, Lee illustrated how the process of mining itself affected the miners. The

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<sup>267</sup> Corn, 2019

<sup>268</sup> Indiana University Art Museum

<sup>269</sup> Stellman, 2003



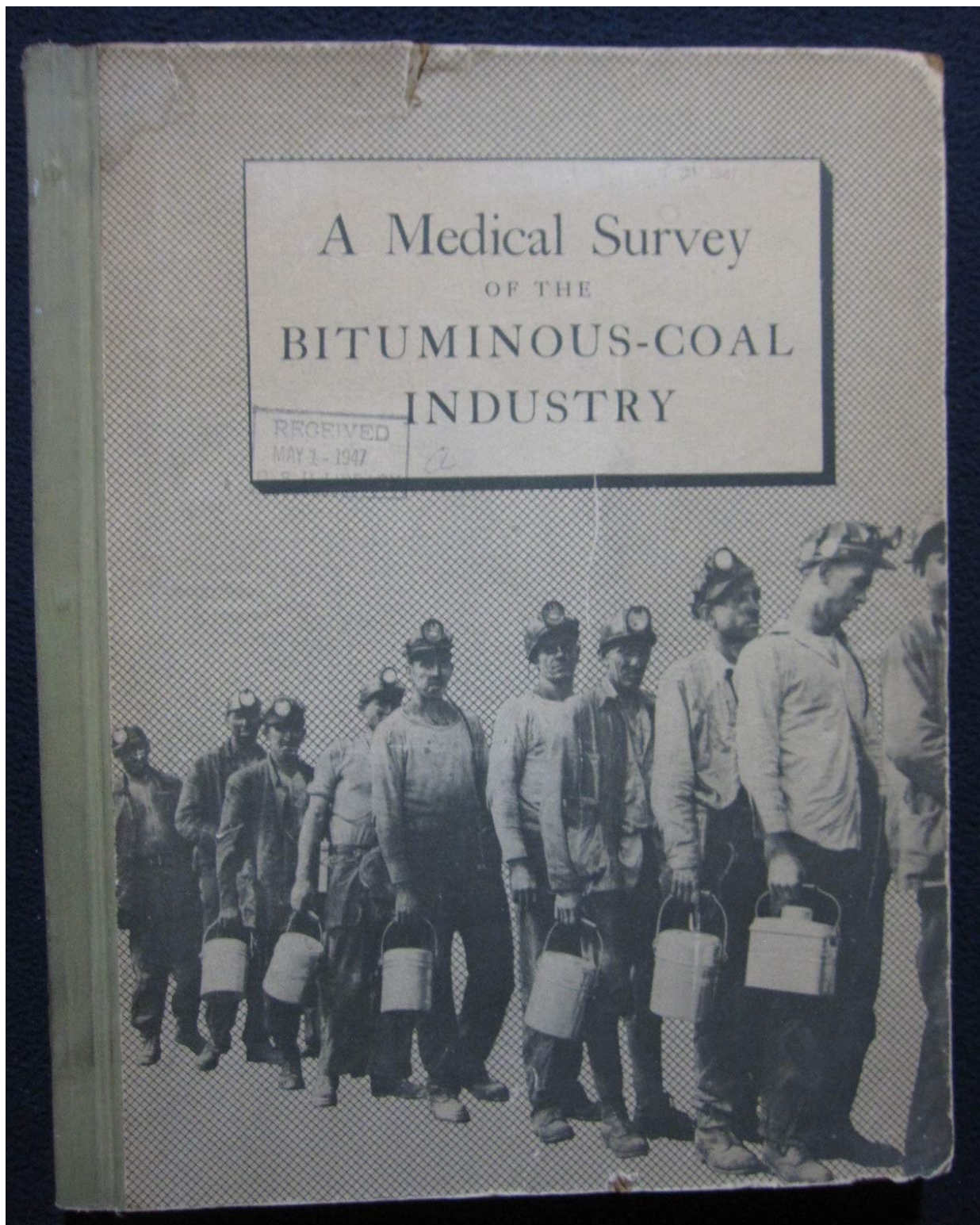


Figure 74. Cover Artwork, "A Medical Survey of the Bituminous-Coal Industry," United States Department of the Interior, 1947.

machinery used in the mechanization of mining—drillers and excavators—creates a greater volume of particulate matter than traditional pick-and-shovel methods. Aided by Lee's photographs, the report suggests that the increase of mechanization in the 1930s coincides with a rise in black lung like illness caused by sustained inhalation of coal dust. For example, one photograph from the report (Figure 75) shows a miner, crouched over on his knees shoveling 'big dust' into a pile next to a coal cart track. Big dust, the images' caption explains, is a mixture of ground slate and coal and a byproduct of drilling machines used to get at the coal which can be seen simmering iridescently in the background. The coal shafts were typically not well ventilated, and miners like the one in Lee's photograph worked without masks or respirators to prevent them from inhaling the coal dust. Lee's subjects seem less aware of his presence and camera than Hine's, giving his photographs a more natural look. For example, Lee's photograph titled "A miner. Lejunior, Harlan County, KY." (Figure 76) shows a miner between shifts holding his lunch pail under his arm as he smokes a pipe. His posture is relaxed, with his attention focused on something out of the frame. The distraction of the miner allowed Lee to capture this candid moment showing the miners as they naturally were. Corn said this natural candid style is what he tried to accomplish in his own work, writing: "As I learned the craft of photojournalism, I tried to develop a system of photography that did not pose and direct people as much. I preferred to spend lots of time with the subject and to have a good reporter draw attention away from me, and I was blessed with helpful ones most of the time."<sup>270</sup>

In 1978 President Jimmy Carter once again commissioned a government report related to the coal industry. The President's Commission on Coal, led by West Virginia Governor John D. Rockefeller IV, produced the report titled "The American Coal Miner: A Report on Community

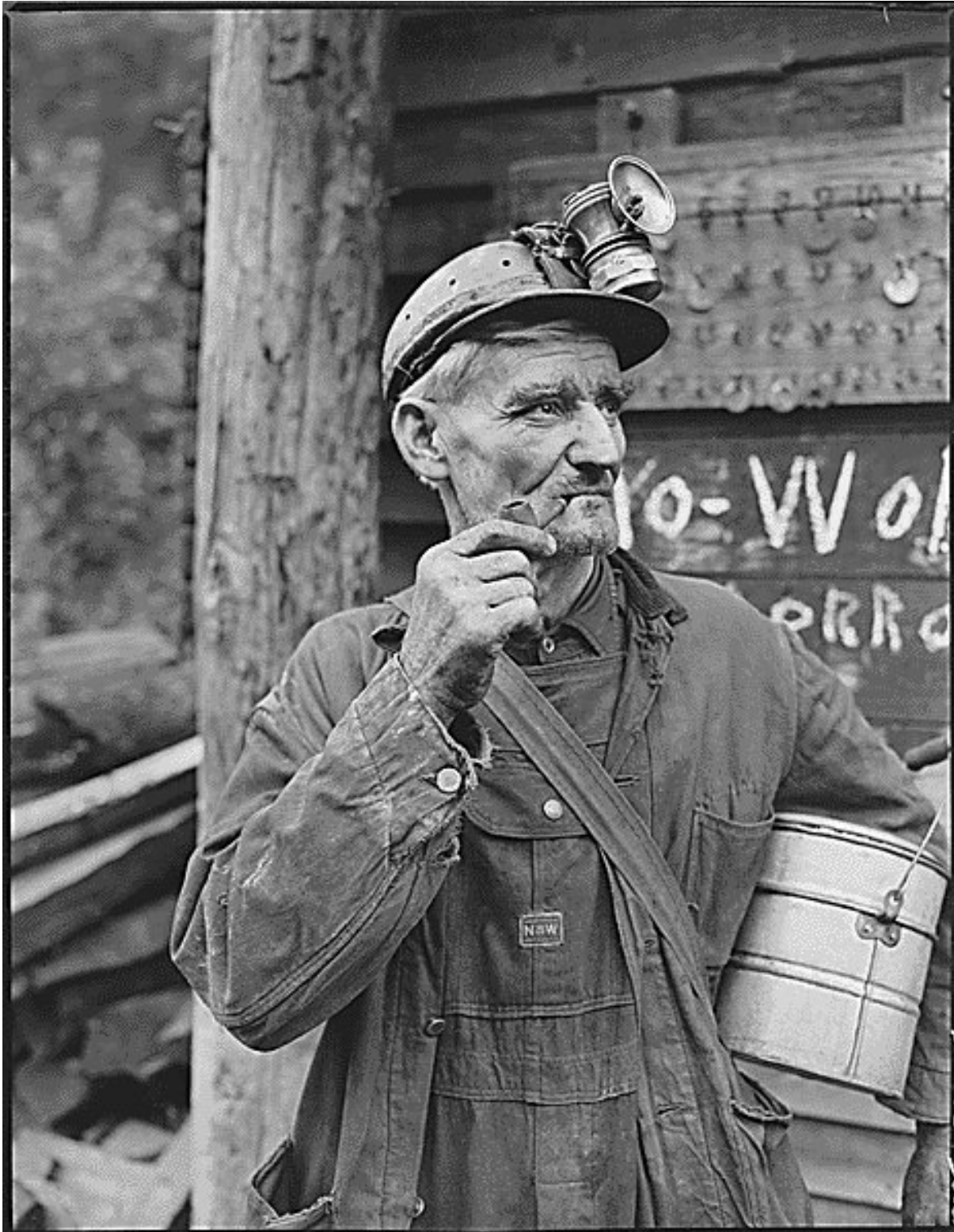
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<sup>270</sup> Corn, 2000: 4





*Figure 75. "Harry Fain, coal loader," Wheelwright, Floyd County, KY. Russell Lee, 1946.*



*Figure 76. "A miner," Lejunior, Harlan County, KY. Russell Lee, 1947.*

and Living Conditions in the Coalfields” using a similar methodology as the 1947 medical survey. Teams of field researchers and photographers were dispatched to coal fields across the American West and throughout Appalachia to investigate living conditions in coal mining communities. Having worked on the prior report, Lee was hired as the photography advisor. Lee had previously encouraged Corn to submit a proposal to work on the EPA project *Documerica*, and when it came time to hire photographers for the president’s report, he invited Corn to contribute to the project as well. Corn left *The Tennessean* in 1977 to join the faculty at Western Kentucky University as a photojournalist in residence. The coal report was an opportunity for him to continue the work he had done over two decades at the newspaper. The same year they began working on the president’s report, the two photographers also served together as faculty for the 29<sup>th</sup> Missouri Photography Workshop (MPW), held in Cassville Missouri. Inspired by the power of photographic storytelling of the FSA, Lee, along with Roy Stryker, helped photojournalism program director Clifton Edom establish the MPW at the University of Missouri in 1949. The workshop was founded with the mission to “promote research, observation, and timing as the methods to make strong story-telling photographs,”<sup>271</sup> all of which were methods Corn adopted in the development of his approach to social documentary work.

## INFLUENCES IN PLAY: CONTRASTING GENRES AND CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO DOCUMENTARY WORK

Genre is an efficient way to organize photographs into categories based on shared features. Categorization through genre can be useful in analysis at the site of the image to help reach understanding of what a photograph is showing, how it is being shown, why objects are

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<sup>271</sup> Missouri Photography Workshop

organized the way they are in a frame, and what the photograph is meant to do.<sup>272</sup> Establishing genre can also be useful in analysis of other photographic sites as well, such as considering how a photograph was made at the site of production, and who a photograph was made *for* in considering the site of the audience. There are many genres of photography: street photography, documentary photography, portraiture, photojournalism, sports photography, fashion photography, and illustration, to name a few, and they all possess particular features that afford inclusion into one category or another. Photographic genre, and the features that define them, are fluid, however, creating the possibility that genres can overlap; a photograph or set of photographs can belong to more than one genre; at times, sub-genres are necessary to further categorize a group of photographs; and a primary genre in one context may be a sub-genre in another. For example, photojournalism has many sub-genres, such as spot news or feature photography, and as a genre, photojournalism often overlaps with other genres such as documentary and sports photography.<sup>273</sup> This discussion focuses on two sub-genre approaches to social documentary: the photojournalism approach taken by Corn and the portraiture approach taken by Rogovin.

While the influence of photographers such as Hine and Evans can certainly be seen in Corn's and Rogovin's work, they both deviate from earlier aesthetics in different ways to show not only the miners *at work*, but also *at home*. Both Rogovin's "Appalachia" and "Family of Miners" series explore tensions between public and private personas, and he relied heavily on diptych portraiture to present contrasting views of the miners' lives. He would photograph them at work, soot-covered and stoic, following in Hine's tradition of miner portraiture; but he would also photograph them later the same day, or the following day, before or after their shifts,

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<sup>272</sup> Rose, 2016: 28

<sup>273</sup> Newton, 2008: 5



typically at their homes. Rogovin's style of portraiture was informal, but deliberate. Like Evans, Rogovin didn't talk a lot while photographing—wanting an element of spontaneity he left quite a bit to chance and took great care to not overly prompt or direct his subjects. In historian Michael Frisch's 1993 book *Portraits of Steel* a worker photographed (Figure 77) in his hometown of Buffalo, New York recalls her interaction with Rogovin. "It wasn't posed or anything, I was just doing my job. He didn't ask a lot of questions, just took the picture and asked could he come by my house to take another. And I guess it's a good thing he did, because nobody knew that 'before picture was me, until they saw the 'after.'"<sup>274</sup> Rogovin's portrait of the woman feels casual yet industrial. Rogovin uses depth of field to show the mechanisms central to the woman's workspace. But their inclusion in the frame is tertiary to the worker; the machines are present but not emphasized. A shadow of the woman's head wrap can be seen cast on the metal bin of parts behind her by Rogovin's flash. In calculating his exposure, he uses just enough artificial light to make the woman and her immediate station bright and stand out against the darker, shadowy mechanized world behind her. While he was careful in his control of light and composition, he is equally careful not to control the worker's pose. She is seen turning back toward the camera, as suggesting the moment was fleeting—a brief pause in her workday.

Not controlling every aspect of the image allowed for collaborative co-creation with his subjects. However, Rogovin was, like his mentor Strand, very deliberate with how his subjects were arranged in the frame. A diptych (Figure 78) he created of an Appalachian miner and his wife in 1987 is a good example of his simple but thoughtful approach to composition. In the portrait on the left, the miner sits on a bench wearing his hardhat, soot-covered overalls and coat, accompanied by his metal lunch pail and thermos. In the portrait on the right, he is clean,

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<sup>274</sup> Rogovin & Keller, 2005: 6





*Figure 77. "Working People, Markel Electric," Buffalo, New York. Milton Rogovin, 1979–1980.*



*Figure 78. Appalachian miner and wife. Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*

wearing pressed slacks and collared shirt as he stands holding his wife’s hand and possessing a softer, less austere expression. In the background is where Rogovin works to tie these portraits together. On the left, the darkness of a window occupies the frame above the miner’s right shoulder; on the right it is an open door in the same position. On the left, it’s the strong horizontal lines of the cinderblock wall and bench planks that guide the eye from one side of the photograph to the other; on the right it is the bright table stitched into the needlepoint depicting DaVinci’s “Last Supper” hanging on the wall behind them and the flat plane of the credenza top below it that offer a similar horizontal motion.

Corn also wanted to show not just the work, but the lives of miners, and did so to a far greater extent than Rogovin. Mining is hard. It’s dangerous, punishing, depriving, unforgiving, and devastating and in the end offers little in return, other than the pride the miner felt having endured the work. The physical, emotional, economic and environmental hardship of mining, however, was not experienced just by the miners, but by their families and community as well—and that is what Corn’s work shows. Corn’s photographs of the Clear Fork Valley are as

informational as they are intimate. Corn's approach as a photojournalist was what Stott suggests is the very foundation of social documentary work: to capture the particulars of social struggle in the context of a specific historical moment. Corn applied that approach to document the entire community, not just the miners, examining many particulars of struggle, as experienced by many people in that moment. Many of Corn's photographs don't show miners or mines; they are of children or infrastructure left in decay; the devastating effect of the poverty inflicted on the area once mining companies abandoned the towns they built. In one such photograph (Figure 79) titled "Snow Covered Appalachian Scene," Corn uses a railroad track to bisect the snowy scene. In the background, a cluster of rundown structures can be seen along with groupings of vehicles, trailers and other mechanical equipment near Clairfield, Tennessee. Below the tracks in the foreground is the Straight Creek. Overturned vehicles break the center line created by the railroad track spilling from background to foreground, littering the creek. Creating this sense of demarcation, Corn shows the encroachment of the human world and the natural world, and the affect complacency can have on the environment. Corn said that at this point in time people just didn't care anymore. The creek itself was highly polluted from mining run off, so they didn't see the harm in filling it with debris.<sup>275</sup>

Heavily influenced by the images produced by FSA photographers in the 1930s, Lee in particular, the intimacy and hardship they convey make Corn's photographs appear as though they could have been from the FSA era. Examine two photographs, one made by Lee (Figure 80), and one by Corn (Figure 81), for example. Both show children living in forlorn

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<sup>275</sup> Corn, 2019





*Figure 79. Snow covered houses, railroad tracks and creek in Clairfield, Tennessee. Jack Corn, 1964.*



*Figure 80. "Daughter of migrant in doorway of trailer, Sebastian, Texas." Photograph by Russell Lee, 1939.*



*Figure 81. Three Marlowe children stand in doorway of cabin. This photograph was used by LBJ as part of a speech to launch the Appalachian War on Poverty. Jack Corn, 1963.*



conditions, they are downtrodden and sullen in their expression as they peer out through the doorway of their ramshackle homes. A contact sheet (Figure 82), reveals that Corn made one exposure of this scene. The frame before it is of a miner, Lewis Teague, pushing a railcar loaded with coal out of a *dog hole mine*<sup>◇</sup> operated by his uncle Lewis Teague; the frame after is of the children's mother, Mabel Marlowe. Corn and reporter Bill Kovach went to the home, rented by the Marlowe family for \$5 per month, to talk to Mabel about her husband Ed. An electrician by trade, Ed Marlowe was paralyzed when the roof of a dog hole mine, similar to Teague's mine, collapsed crushing his legs and breaking his back on Nov. 22, 1963. Corn said he and Kovach were outside talking to Mabel, when he heard the voice of the oldest child Denise singing "Jesus Loves the Little Children"—he turned and snapped the picture.<sup>276</sup> Corn frames the scene tightly which allows the viewer to focus on the children who all bear a familial resemblance. Denise, the oldest child braces herself against the door. Her right arm reaches across her body and hunkers her in as her hand clasps the door frame. She peers with caution from the doorway as her younger brothers file in behind her. Their natural arrangement creates a perfect sense of geometry with the varying heights of their heads suggesting an aesthetically pleasing triangle.

Growing up along railroad tracks on the outskirts of Nashville in the 1930s, Corn said photographs of that era from FSA photographers reminded him of the world as it was in his childhood. He said it was striking that stepping into the Clear Fork Valley in the late 1950s and 60s was like stepping back into his childhood and seeing the world as it was during the Depression.<sup>277</sup> Corn's admission—that seeing the conditions people were living in across the

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<sup>◇</sup> Dog hole mines are very small, shallow mines typically operated by a single individual or small group of independent miners.

<sup>276</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>277</sup> Corn, 2000; Corn, 2019



Figure 82. Photograph of a contact sheet from a 1963 Jack Corn photoshoot in Clear Fork Valley, Tennessee.  
 Anthony Cepak, 2019.

Clear Fork Valley reminded him of the Great Depression—provides insight into the influence depression era photographers had on how he would approach documenting what he saw. Corn drew upon the direct and dramatic documentary style of his photographic idols Lee and Evans to produce a deep, thoughtful and intimate record of the lives of Clear Fork residents. Corn has stated that when he first visited the region, he began making a different type of picture and this reinforces the profound effect that both place and people had on what his photographs looked like.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE POSTMISTRESS PAVED THE WAY: ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE AND GAINING ACCESS TO SUBJECTS IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

“I don’t want to hear the words *lazy* and *shiftless* used. Anyone who crawls into a hole in the side of a mountain, to scratch out \$3 to \$5 a day, all the while taking a chance on the roof falling in and killing them is not lazy.”

— Louise Adams, 1964

This quote from a 1964 article in *The Tennessean* represents the relentless support for community, and suspicion of the press, held by Clairfield postmaster Louise Adams. An activist and community gatekeeper, Adams was well-connected in the community and used her status and authority as a federal employee to advocate for her neighbors. Local actors, such as Adams, across Appalachia are often an outsider’s way into isolated communities that are both geographically and socially hard to reach. To whom one of these actors decides to give access, and what they are providing access to, is an important consideration in making meaning of what is produced as a result of the access.<sup>278</sup> During the process of creating and assembling documents, writers, photographers, producers and even subjects themselves shape the narrative through their choices. For the documentarians, it is the choices they make through language, descriptive style, lenses, angles, what to include in a frame and what not to include, that can dramatically affect the document. For the subjects, it is the retention of their individual agency that adds a layer of meaning to the construction of reality represented in the documents. From this Foucauldian perspective, it is not just the observer but also *what* or *whom* is being observed that affects the reality represented in a social document. One way to look at documentary work, then, is as a receipt following the completion of a social transaction. Documentary work is

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<sup>278</sup> Coles, 1997

certainly, as James Agee, Robert Coles and William Stott all suggest, sharing of that which has been witnessed. But it is also a type of interpretive negotiation between observer and observed. In the case of photography, there is an inherent tension for control over representation. Visual communication scholar Julianne Newton describes this tension as an exchange, a transferring of *control, power, authority* and/or *intimacy* from one person to another.<sup>279</sup> This transfer can be collaborative, or it can be exploitive depending on the particulars of the interaction and the exchange, and the relationship established between the agents involved.

Whom a photographer photographs is critical in understanding the context and meaning of a photograph. It is essential, then, to understand how Milton Rogovin and Jack Corn accessed the people and places they photographed, and the tactics and approaches they used in developing relationships with their subjects. Both photographers worked in isolated environments, and this chapter addresses the effect their positioning as outsiders had on their approach to developing relationships with their subjects. Included in this discussion is consideration of local gatekeepers such as union leaders or mine management, or public officials who provided these photographers access to their subjects, and how what they gave access to influenced the visual discourse of mining in Appalachia. As detrimental as extraction is to the physical landscape, it is also big business. Corporations produced a variety of materials that emphasized the need for and benefit of coal to the nation and local communities. The discourse of these materials conflicts with the discourse found in materials produced by worker advocacy groups, unions, and environmental organizations. Corn and Rogovin were given access to and used materials from a variety of sources to inform their picture-making. Audience is also critical to examine in understanding the work of these two photographers. Corn and Rogovin gave those who viewed their photographs

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<sup>279</sup> Newton 2013: 35–36

vicarious access to the coal mining communities, just as their local contacts gave them access to their subjects. Rogovin was an independent documentary photographer whose work was viewed in galleries and museum exhibitions. As a staff photojournalist, Corn's work was viewed in a very different way. Exploration of the circulation and use of their photographs is vital to understanding their discursive power.

#### THE VIEW FROM THE BALCONY DEPENDS ON THE VIEWER: EXPLORING INSIDER VERSUS OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVES IN DOCUMENTARY WORK

Revisiting the discussion around the difference between Harry Caudill and Agee from the previous chapter is a helpful entry point in understanding insider and outsider perspectives in documentary work. Caudill, an *insider*, observed and documented his home, Letcher County, Kentucky and surrounding areas; Agee a journalist from New York, was very much an *outsider* to the Alabama tenant farming communities he set out to document in 1936. These two perspectives and approaches—that of the insider and that of the outsider—were instrumental in the success and failure of Caudill and Agee's production of social documentary. It's not talent or intent that elevates Caudill's work; Agee was arguably a much better writer but struggled in the South and failed to complete his assignment for *Fortune* magazine. The difference between the two was a matter of perspective that comes from knowledge of place—it is his deep, undeniable connection to the Cumberland Plateau that provides the overtly authoritative precision found in Caudill's writing. He didn't just live in this vast Kentucky wilderness; his identity was formed by it, making his knowledge of the place felt, not learned. Five generations of Caudill's inhabited the land from which he was born, the land that elected him three times to represent it in the Kentucky Legislature, and on which he died in 1990. One of the most vital factors distinguishing



Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlandds* from Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, is the perspective and positioning of the observer.

Positioning is the source of one of Mary Louise Pratt's chief complaints in "Imperial Eyes," as discussed in chapter two. The outsider's position of view is fleeting, bringing the completeness of their witnessing into question. She discusses American essayist Joan Didion's rush to El Salvador to rhetorize the political uprising of the early 1980s. Pratt's discourse likens Didion to a conflict tourist and argues that her metaphoric view from the balcony of the San Salvador Sheraton hotel eroded her ability to fully see what was going on. Pratt writes: "The voice and authority of the metropolitan subject attenuate in *Salvador* to the point not of dissolution, but of disillusionment. Being there processes a sense neither of dominance (as in Burton and Theroux) nor self-realization (as in Kingsley and Wright). Repeatedly Didion depicts herself as seeing less than she expected, or averting her eyes when the expected unexpectedly occurs."<sup>280</sup> Pratt suggests that the lack of detail Didion provides in *Salvador* is an admission that true knowledge of the uprising was inaccessible to her from a position of western privilege and the limited view it affords.<sup>281</sup>

Robert Coles discusses privilege extensively in *Doing Documentary Work*. He explores the tension between George Orwell's inconsistent views of the proletariat in *Road to Wigan Pier*. Orwell strains to reconcile his admiration and heroic vision of miners in England's pre-World War II industrial north with the disdain of the inn keepers who housed him, and his perception that they lived with wallow and filth. More pointedly Coles uses his own experience doing fieldwork in Louisiana to illustrate how privilege and the temporality of an outsider's view affects relationships with subjects. Coles recalls sitting in the home of one of his patients, having

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<sup>280</sup> Pratt, 1992: 227

<sup>281</sup> Pratt, 1992: 229

coffee and cake when the patient's mother said to him: "We'll be missing you. We've got so used to you coming here, that we've forgot you're only going to be with us so long, and then you'll be on your way!"<sup>282</sup> Coles admits it was difficult for him to separate from the subjects of his fieldwork whom he had formed such close relationships with and the community he had developed an attachment to, but said understanding their roles helped him cope. He writes:

"An intense human connection was about to be concluded, an affair of the heart, often enough, put to rest, hence the sadness and apprehension. But in clinical work there is an entire tradition that helps one sort out such feelings and move on—the two of you are doctor and patient, or the group of you are a doctor and a family with whom you've tried to work, and you've done so in a clinic or an office, with the clock setting its own limits and helping define what is happening: a professional life, with its hours."<sup>283</sup>

Documentary work, like clinical fieldwork, operates in a similar structure of professional relationships, only instead of the roles being doctor and patient, it is photographer and subject. Respect, empathy or egalitarian motives aside, it is important to recognize that both Corn and Rogovin, like Didion, Orwell and Coles, were documenting an impoverished place while they occupied privileged positions. This acknowledgement doesn't suggest an inability to show understanding or compassion, or form real, meaningful connections with individuals; it simply underscores how the nature of their role and activity as documentarians relates to the subjects of their photographs and the temporary nature of their encounter.

## AQUIRING KNOWLEDGE OF APPALACHIA

Being outsiders, Corn and Rogovin needed to gain a deeper understanding of the places and people they documented. Both were committed to researching the culture and issues of the Appalachian coalfields to gain more meaningful contexts for the challenges and successes they

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<sup>282</sup> Coles, 1997: 62

<sup>283</sup> Coles, 1997: 62–63

witnessed there. They were given access to a wide variety of materials from the people they observed. They collected, studied and carefully considered folk life publications, music, art, technical materials related to the production of coal, union literature, and news clippings related to the region. Examining these materials contributes to understanding discourses that informed the way Corn and Rogovin saw the region. Corn subscribed to a Clear Fork Valley community newsletter called “What on Earth” (WOE) to stay connected with the valley in between visits. Produced monthly, WOE is one of the many initiatives born out of Cirillo and Adams’s Model Valley Project. Still being published, WOE is now produced by the Clearfork Community Institute (CCI), which Carrillo founded in 1997. The newsletter includes a community calendar and features on the outreach and advocacy work being done by the institute. Corn also subscribed to the *United Mine Workers Journal* and included a few issues that focused on black lung disease with research materials he used in preparing his assignment proposal for the *Documerica* project. One article urges working miners to take advantage of free lung x-rays that were provided as a provision of the 1969 Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. The article describes how, if the x-ray revealed signs of black lung disease, the miners were entitled to a transfer out of the mine to a different position which would be made available within the company at their current rate of pay. Another article outlines a U.S. Department of Justice investigation into the falsification of dust reports by Consolidation Coal Company (CONSOL) relating to its Hanna Division mines in Ohio. CONSOL was being accused of mislabeling samples taken during low production where low levels of dust was present, as being from peak production when coal dust levels were higher. It also was accused of opening samples and removing significant amounts of dust, to make the levels appear lower.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Stillman, 1974

The types of materials Corn collected for research are reflected in his work. Social justice issues such as access to education and the health and safety of miners are major themes that run throughout Corn's Appalachia photographs. Paying particular attention to the ever-present threat of mortality that miners faced as a consequence of their work, Corn was sensitive but direct in his approach to showing danger in the coal fields. His visual statements are bold, as in the case of his photograph titled "Big Rock at Clairfield, TN," which is dramatic scene symbolic in its representation of the omnipresence of death. The photograph (Figure 83) shows a large rock with the words "PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD" painted on the surface. Accompanying the words are a cross and a star, Christian symbols representing the crucifixion, sacrifice and wounds of Christ. Visible to those entering the mining area, the rock sits alongside a road in Clairfield used to access the coal tipple, which can be seen looming in the background beneath a mountain and an ominous sky. Corn's layering of religious and industrial imagery creates a foreboding message. The selective angle of view uses the road to put some distance between the tipple and message of death as if to offer some metaphoric protection to the miner. A clearing in the sky creeping up from behind the mountain carries an almost peaceful acceptance of the fate that befalls some miners.

This macabre fate is captured in some of Corn's photographs made for *The Tennessean* coverage of an explosion at the C. L. Kline mine in Scott County, Tennessee. In one photograph (Figure 84) a crowd can be seen gathered along a ridge watching as injured rescue workers and miners are pulled from the mine entrance below; the caption describes them as family members waiting to see if their loved ones are among the rescued. The tightness of Corn's frame along with the sparseness of the background focuses the viewers' attention on the huddled group of bystanders as they comfort one another. The implication of leading lines created by the gaze of

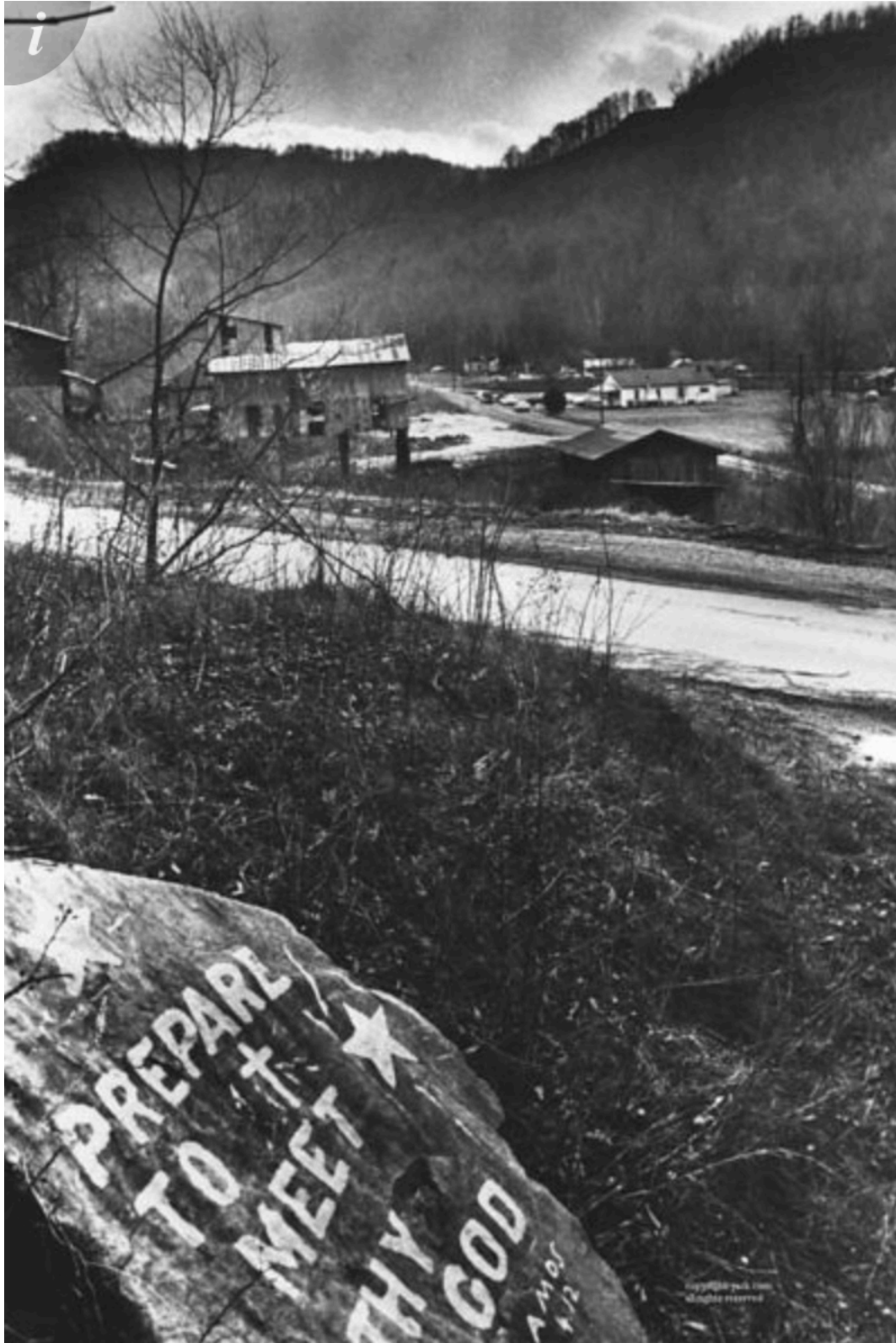


Figure 83. "Big rock at Clairfield, TN," Jack Corn, 1957–1978.



*Figure 84. "Family members wait for survivors to be rescued," Jack Corn, 1965.*



some of the bystanders looking toward two grieving women positioned in the center of the frame also draws the viewer's eyes inward.

Issues of mortality are also explored through Corn's documentation of south Appalachian ancestral burial practices, specifically *Decoration Day* rituals that underscore the European Christian ancestry of the early Appalachian mountaineer. The photograph titled "Louise Adams with Covered Graves" (Figure 85) shows the Clairfield postmaster visiting the burial sites of some of her extended family on King Mountain. Adams appears still, arms relaxed at her side as she stands with her back to the viewer looking upon a latticed structure called a *grave house*. These structures are common across southern Appalachia and were often built to protect the graves of loved ones from natural elements, ghouls and grave robbers.<sup>285</sup> In the foreground of the photograph a wooden post supporting a barbed-wire fence can be seen sequestering Adams and the covered graves from Corn's position. Inclusion of the fence in the bottom of the frame reinforces a sense of reverence and sacredness of the grave site. The pitch of the grave roofs mimics the downward slope of the mountain seen in the background and both work to draw the viewer to Adams. During ritual days family often gather at grave sites to plant flowers, decorate with mementos and have a picnic to honor their loved one's memories, much like the Día De Los Muertos celebrations common in Mexico. This is the scene being shown in Corn's photograph (Figure 86) titled "Two women at grave decoration." Unlike the photograph showing Adams in quiet reflection, this photograph is full of movement and life. Corn's use of a wide-angle lens opens up the frame to reveal plenty of the cemetery in McBurg, Tennessee—the setting for this celebratory scene. Emphasis is given to a pair of women walking to a gravesite by Corn's

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<sup>285</sup> Frederick, 1991



*Figure 85. "Louise Adams with covered graves," Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*



*Figure 86. "Two women at grave decoration," Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*

placement of them in the foreground, at the bottom and left-third of the photograph. The women seem well aware of Corn as they look at the camera but seem unbothered by his presence. The woman on the right smiles as she carries flowers, while the other carries baskets of food for a Decoration Day picnic. Corn's use of depth of field reveals another pair of women walking in the distance behind them. The stark whiteness of a sedan even further in the background at the far-right edge of the frame draws attention to an open car door as even more people arrive at the celebration. The complexity Corn has created in this photograph, through his use of angle of view and depth of field, gives the photograph energy that celebrates the ritual being depicted as a joyous occasion of remembrance.

Tradition is important in Appalachia, like the rituals surrounding death and remembrance. Corn realized this through his research and the interactions he had with his subjects. While at first, he may have been drawn to the region by social outrage, wanting to create change through documenting the poverty and pollution there, his body of work is broader than the romanticized pictures of poverty that are common of the region. He did not just focus on what he or other outsiders deemed to be important issues to document, he also took great care in documenting what was important to the people of the Clear Fork Valley, like music and craftsmanship. Corn's photograph titled "Fiddle player with child in door," (Figure 87) shows a man reveling in delight as he plays his fiddle outside his mountain home in Clairfield. Corn has created an abundance of movement in this photograph that is symbolic of the quick and angular movements associated with playing the fiddle. Holding the instrument under his chin forces the player's face to be turned down and away from the viewer. The direction of his stare leads the eye down the fiddle's neck to the movement of his fingers on the fingerboard. The perpendicular movement of the bow being drawn across the strings leads the eye over to an open black fiddle case resting on a chair.



*Figure 87. "Fiddle player with child in door," Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*



*Figure 88. "J. Hatfield quilting at home," Jack Corn, 1957–1978.*

The angle of the case moves the viewer's attention back up to child standing in an open doorway in the background. The great tradition of Appalachian folk art is well represented in Corn's work, as he photographed musicians, woodcarvers, crafters, metalworkers and quilters throughout the Clear Fork Valley and northeast Tennessee. The photograph titled "J. Hatfield quilting at home" (Figure 88), illustrates the resourcefulness of Appalachian artists in producing their craft. Using a wide angle of view, Corn shows a woman standing at a quilting loom suspended from a bedroom ceiling. Four beds can be seen beneath the meticulously stitched patchwork tapestry that appears to levitate in the center of the room. The dual purpose of the space as both sleeping and crafting quarters is indicative of the cramped and overcrowded homes often shared by multiple generations. Hatfield stares intensely at her hand as she stitches together bits of cloth illuminated by the globe-less pull string light fixture above. The visual complexity of Corn's image mirrors the complexity of the issue of space in many parts of Appalachia. Cirillo said that housing options are scarce in the Clear Fork Valley. With most of the land leased by coal companies, there is simply not enough space for houses. Generations of one family are forced to cram into small houses on tiny plots of land, or in many cases, share the same house.<sup>286</sup>

Rogovin took a similar approach to Corn in his research by immersing himself in literature from the region. Like Corn, he collected copies of the *United Mine Workers Journal*, and a variety of pamphlets and folk life publications from Appalachian cultural and advocacy groups. Rogovin was also heavily influenced by news media reporting of coal mining communities throughout Appalachia. A file folder called "background material" full of newspaper clippings are among Rogovin's textual archive at the Library of Congress. Among the materials Rogovin collected was a 32-page investigative report titled "The Ugly Mark of

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<sup>286</sup> Cirillo, 2019



Strip Mining” (Figure 89) published by *The Tennessean*. The special publication contained a series of articles and editorials written by science news editor William Greenburg and was illustrated by 16 of Corn’s photographs from the Clear Fork Valley, along with editorial cartoons, line drawings, diagrams and charts. This publication, containing Corn’s photographs, helped inform Rogovin’s photographs in Appalachia and creates an undeniable connection between the work of these two photographers. This connection is best seen in Rogovin’s early Appalachia photographs which depart from his signature diptych portraiture style he developed photographing workers around Buffalo, New York. Photographs from his first trips to West Virginia in the early 1960s and early 70s mirror the scattered impressions of the area found in his sketches. Rogovin used his labor contacts to get him access to mines in West Virginia and Kentucky through United Mine Workers. Letters to local union leaders and community activists suggest he was seeking to specifically photograph poverty in eastern Kentucky and West Virginian coal fields. But his vision was met with mixed reactions locally.

In 1969, he wrote a letter to Dr. Donald Gatch of Bluffton, South Carolina outlining his Appalachia project. Known as “The Hunger Doctor,” Gatch had gained a national reputation by speaking out about widespread chronic malnutrition in southern Appalachia. His fight against hunger positioned him as a target for state officials who found his advocacy for the poor inconvenient and contradictory to the image of South Carolina they wanted to project. Finding his calls for better nutrition counterproductive to attracting new business and tourism, South Carolina Governor Robert McNair and U.S. Senator Ernest Hollings lead efforts to have his medical license revoked.<sup>287</sup> His unseemly warnings of the spread of hunger-based diseases such as scurvy and rickets also led U.S. Representative Jamie Whitten of Mississippi to call for an FBI

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<sup>287</sup> Nolan, 1971



# THE UGLY MARK OF STRIP MINING



## A Series of Investigative Reports

By WILLIAM GREENBURG  
Science News Editor

Photos by  
JACK CORN

From the Pages of  
**THE NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN**

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*Figure 89. The Ugly Mark of Strip Mining, 8 ½ x 11 inches. The Tennessean, Nashville, TN. Sept. 12, 1971.*

investigation of Gatch's medical practice.<sup>288</sup> On Gatch's behalf, Rogovin received a response from a University of California, Santa Cruz student named Carrall Seron.<sup>◇</sup> Seron, an American Studies undergraduate working with the malnourished community Gatch's practice served, warned Rogovin against making poverty the focus of his project. In a letter dated April 6, 1969 Seron writes: "Many people have been very interested in doing a photo essay of this area. It's hard to argue that it is not a good idea as pictures so very often speak better than words. Yet I feel that I can pretty safely say that the people here are very tired of being photographed over and over again."<sup>289</sup> She suggests that advocacy and social change should begin in one's backyard, in their own community, and that perhaps Rogovin could look for poverty in Buffalo to photograph. She continues: "Perhaps using the expose of this community as a beginning, and then blowing your own area open might have more meaning for your neighbors. One always feels safe when poverty is far away, but the shock of seeing it near home might light a spark in some apathetic individuals."<sup>290</sup> Seron's suggestion of looking a little closer to home underscores Don West's notion that for visitors there was a mythical and quasi-romantic draw to Appalachian poverty—it was easily romanticized by those that could be a temporary witness but then look away with longing and affection.

Like Corn, early on Rogovin appears to fall victim to romanticism and his photographs fulfill the outsider's view of the Appalachia he sought—focusing more on the structure of poverty than revealing the human spirit that dwelt there. For example, his untitled photograph of the Helen, West Virginia Post Office (Figure 90) shows a building in disrepair; its paint is

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<sup>288</sup> Nolan, 1971

<sup>◇</sup> Carroll Seron is a sociologist and currently a professor of Criminology, Law & Society at The University of California, Irvine.

<sup>289</sup> Seron, 1969

<sup>290</sup> Seron, 1969



*Figure 90. Untitled Helen, West Virginia. Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*

peeling, and a sheet of steel mesh covers the window showing signs it has been forgotten and neglected. Rogovin's composition takes on an almost neo-classical appearance with the stacked main elements falling within column like spaces horizontally spanning the frame. The sign stacked above the letter box; the sign stacked above the door; the long downward drape of the flag; the gridded window all reinforces the photograph's structure. Fighting against the vertices of the columnar structure are the thin horizontal lines of the clapboard siding, which create visual tension within the composition across the frame. The photograph is cold and humanless—far from the aesthetic that celebrates human laborers in both his earlier and later series. This and other images of derelict structures show the early vision Rogovin had for his mining project. Aesthetically they seem to pay homage to his mentor Paul Strand in their detail and characteristically ridged composition. For example, Rogovin's photograph (Figure 91) of a young boy shirtless and expressionless as he sits at a small table, reads like Strand's "The Lusetti Family, Luzzara, Italy, 1953" (Figure 92) with the grid-like precision of its composition—every element is exact in its placement in the frame. Like in his photograph of the post office, this image is an exploration of tension. The portrait reveals an expansion of Rogovin's experimentation beyond the tensions of competing structures as with the post office, to explore conflict between spiritual and humanistic symbolism. The top half of the frame is a religious tableau saturated with Christian symbolism. There is a framed likeness of Jesus Christ whose hands appear open and welcoming. Affixed to the image is a drawing of a bunny carrying some eggs, which suggests perhaps the photograph was made around Easter. Hanging next to the painting of Christ is a painting of the Virgin Mary that appears to be wrapped in some type of crinkled plastic. Stars, flowers and other decorations hang from the frame embellishing the image of the infantless Madonna. The photograph is balanced on the bottom half of the frame





*Figure 91. Untitled, Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*



*Figure 92. "The Family, Luzzara, Italy," Paul Strand, 1953.*



with items symbolic of cultural humanism. A crocheted cloth adorns a small table, which anchors the photograph. Sitting on the table, the viewer sees a tin of Bugler Turkish blend cigarette tobacco next to a box-style record player with the turntable folded down. In front of the turntable a record album can be seen, which given the apparent piety of the family, could possibly be filled with gospel albums. On top of the record player sits a hinged frame; the opening on the left houses another image of Christ, and on the right a photograph of a woman who appears to be middle aged. Rogovin's composition relies upon the cultural and technological imagery of the folk-art tablecloth, the record player and the tobacco to create tensions with the religious imagery positioned above. This tension exists as the physical plane breaches the spiritual one; stuck in between these two planes, a shirtless boy sits awkwardly looking as though he not quite sure what he is supposed to be doing. Rogovin's photograph of the boy exploits an unbalanced dynamic of power between photographer and subject not found in his more collaborative portraiture. Both the photograph of the boy and the photograph of the post office depart from Rogovin's early diptych style of portraiture. This departure reveals both a maturing artist displaying the confidence to experiment, but also the influence other photographers and individuals have on his work.

Conditions shown in Rogovin's early Appalachia photographs were isolated and sporadic, at odds with the conditions that existed throughout most of West Virginia, which was still flourishing economically from heavy coal production. In a 1969 letter, West Virginia civil rights activist Genne Kuhn is supportive and complimentary of Rogovin's work; however, she attempts to manage his expectations as to what he would find upon arrival. She writes: "As you

might not know, most miners today live in modern, and well kept up homes. As we worked in Mannington last January, we noticed that the miners spent a good deal of their money on repairs, painting, modernization of their houses. It was a pleasure to see the effort they had to extend.”<sup>291</sup>

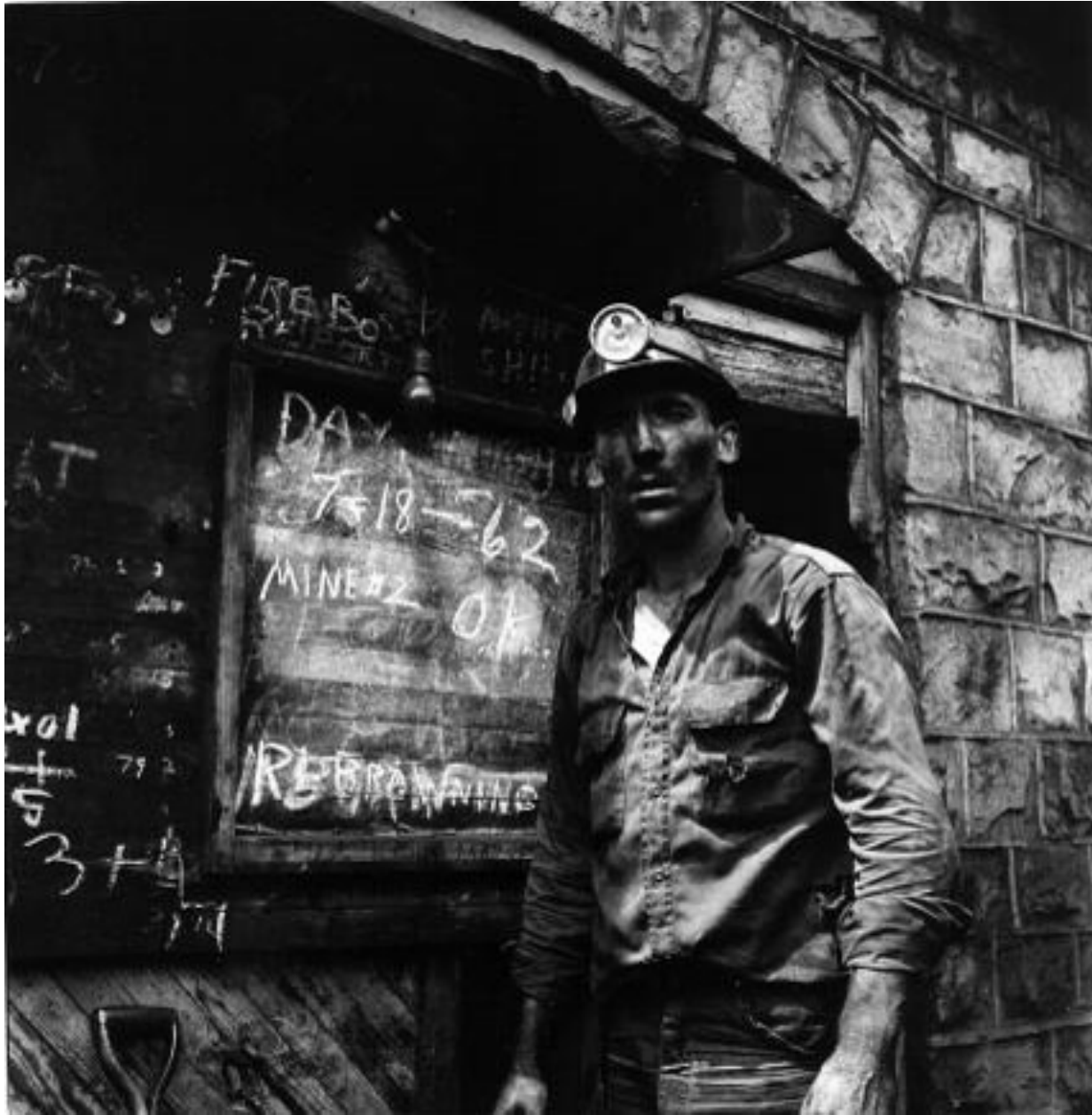
In the mid- to late-1970s and throughout the '80s and '90s, Rogovin's interest in miners expanded beyond Appalachia. Funded in part by a 1983 fellowship from the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Fund, his celebrated Family of Miners series took him to Scotland, Germany, China, Mexico, Zimbabwe, Spain, Cuba and Czechoslovakia to make his signature diptych portraits of miners. Photographs he made in Appalachia for this series abandoned his early vision of poverty to return to his signature aesthetic of the individuality of the American worker. Rogovin's portraits of miners in Appalachia fit seamlessly with his portraits of miners from Central America, Asia, Africa and Europe, suggesting that mining possesses a universal aesthetic, with one important carveout. Many of Rogovin's portraits of European miners show them only partially dressed, or completely naked, while at work in the mine. It was customary for miners to work naked or nearly naked because in many cases mines were not adequately ventilated, making temperatures unbearable for wearing clothes.<sup>292</sup>

Despite similar working conditions, U.S. miners did not share in that tradition; even immigrants who had worked in mines in their native lands abandoned the custom to assimilate into social norms. Examine two portraits, one made of a miner in Appalachia (Figure 93) and the other of a miner in Czechoslovakia (Figure 94), as an example of this contrast in mining tradition. Both photographs focus primarily on the miners' torsos in a similar stance slightly turned away from the camera. The miners share the same expression, are in the same industrial setting, and are covered by the same soot; but the Czech miner is bare-chested with his pants

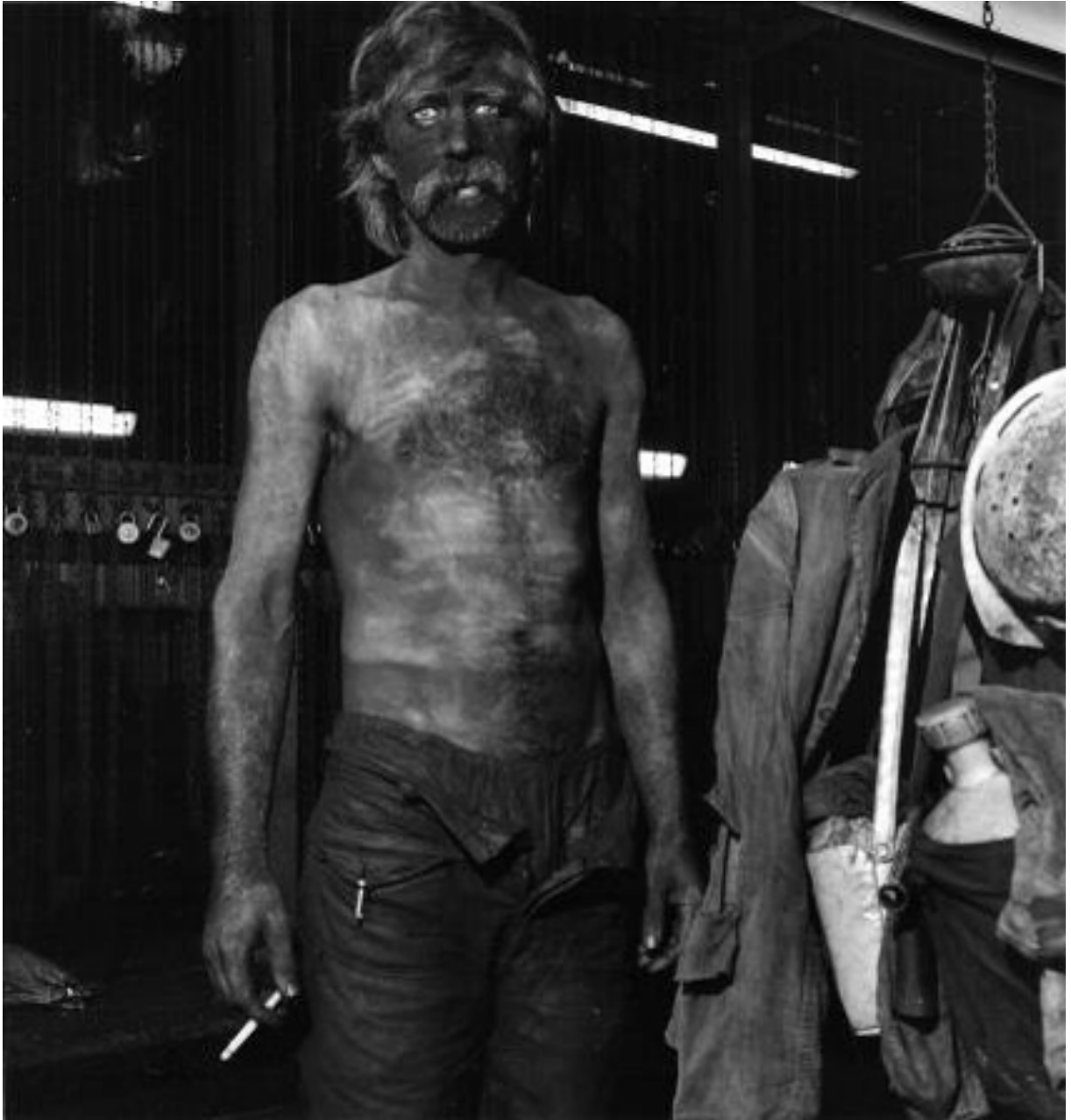
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<sup>291</sup> Kuhn, 1969

<sup>292</sup> Orwell, 1937



*Figure 93. Appalachian miner from “Family of Miners” series. Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*



*Figure 94. Czechoslovakian miner from "Family of Miners" series. Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*

undone, suggesting a relative modesty in the American counterpart. The modesty of the U.S. miner by comparison to miners in other countries in Rogovin's series underscores the country's Puritan heritage.<sup>293,294,295</sup>

## ACCESS AND INTIMACY: DEVELOPING SUBJECT RELATIONSHIPS

Both Corn and Rogovin were outsiders when they began photographing miners in Appalachia. By chance of assignment, Corn first visited Appalachia in 1956 while working at *The Tennessean*, but developed an affinity, passion and deep respect for the people of the Clear Fork Valley. In the documentary "Picture Man," Rogovin said he was drawn to photograph miners after reading news coverage of the struggles of coal communities in Appalachia in 1962—coverage to which Corn and others at *The Tennessean* contributed. To gain access, both outsiders relied on the help of insiders to make arrangements and introductions for them. In the 1930s and '40s, Rogovin's practice as an optometrist catered to the working-class laborers in the steel mills and stamping plants of South Buffalo. Through photography and his political activism, he began to develop strong relationships with labor organizers and union leaders in the Buffalo area, which led to him beginning his highly celebrated "Lower West Side" series celebrating laborers.<sup>296</sup> It was through union officials that he began getting access to local mines and miners in West Virginia. In the case of Beckley, West Virginia, Rogovin enlisted the help of a local physician, Dr. Donald Rasmussen, who was researching links between black lung disease and coal dust to gain access to the community.<sup>297</sup> In Kentucky, Rogovin forged a relationship

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<sup>293</sup> Kangasluoma, 2018

<sup>294</sup> O'Brien, 1996

<sup>295</sup> Foster, 1981

<sup>296</sup> Herzog, 2006

<sup>297</sup> Herzog, 2006

with Caudill, who used some of his mining photographs in the 1971 book *My Land is Dying*. Using local contacts, Rogovin and his wife Anne would spend a week or two each summer between 1962 and 1971 photographing miners and Appalachia. In addition to local contacts, Rogovin sometimes used poetry to connect with his subjects; writing poems himself or asking his subjects to write poems to give voice to the portraits he had made of them.<sup>298</sup> For example, Rogovin wrote the poem *My Theme Boy* about a photograph (Figure 95) he made during his first visit to Appalachia in 1962. The poem lyrically reinforces the most striking aspect of the photograph—the boy’s haunting gaze—and expresses the sense of longing the photograph evokes.

*His land is dying  
    You can see it  
        in his eyes  
The mines are closing  
    This too is in his eyes  
Look into his eyes  
    They will tell you lots – lots more  
        Of mountain tops – stripped and gouged  
        Of streams polluted  
        Of fish destroyed  
Remember America  
    This should be  
    This must be  
        The land of opportunity and equality  
            for all  
            Including this little boy*

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<sup>298</sup> Herzog, 2006: 60





*Figure 95. "Appalachian Boy," Milton Rogovin, 1962–1987.*

Through reporting for *The Tennessean*, Corn also developed relationships with insiders that helped him gain access to the subjects he photographed. After reporting on the reunion of a boy, Charles Reagan, with his parents in Fentress County, Corn was introduced to Louise Adams, post mistress of the Clairfield, Tennessee post office and Sister Marie Carrillo of Fatima of the Glenmary Sisters, who was doing missionary work in the Clear Fork Valley through the Catholic Diocese of Knoxville. Over the course of two decades, Adams and Carrillo would become Corn's gateway to Appalachia and his close personal friends. For example, it was Adams who sent Corn and Kovach to meet with the Marlowe family, and Cirillo showed Corn around the valley's crumbling schools and medical facilities. Being an outsider, Corn doubts he would have gotten the access and made the images he did in Appalachia without Adams and Carrillo. For example, Corn recalls needing Adams' help in arranging introductions for a story in 1964. Corn and reporter Gene Graham headed to the valley after receiving a call from the Associated Women's Club of Tennessee that there was group of school children in Crawford walking to school every day barefoot. Corn writes: "Louise had warned me that the people did not like the press, after a Knoxville journalist had done a story on Clairfield, and called one woman a toothless old crone."<sup>299</sup> The woman was the county's midwife and a local hero after she had crawled into a mine to give medical attention to Ed Marlowe after the roof collapsed on him—the Knoxville article was referring to the same disaster Corn had covered the year before. "The reporter had written a colorful story without sympathy for their wretched condition. The local people were furious at his description."<sup>300</sup>

Though Corn began in 1956 as an outsider, a strong argument can be made that over the course of nearly three decades, he gradually became seen by at least some in the Clear Fork

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<sup>299</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>300</sup> Corn, 2000

Valley as an insider. With the help of Cirillo and Adams, Corn used his devout faith, his status as a veteran, and his upbringing as a fellow Tennessean to find commonality with his subjects in the Clear Fork Valley, many of whom he developed long friendships with, visiting them year after year. Corn said the underlying principle to his approach was respect, writing: “I wanted a photograph that would be honest, not posed and to never strip the dignity from my subjects. I tried to develop empathy with the person being photographed which was sometimes difficult.”<sup>301</sup>

That the world came to know the story of the Marlowe family is as much a product of Adams’ actions as they are Corn’s photographs. Adams was a gatekeeper and allowed Corn to show the world the Clear Fork Valley she wanted them to see. Cirillo said that Adams’ power and authority stemmed from her position in the community. Being postmaster, she knew everyone, knew their relationships to one another and their place within the politics of coal. Intimidation and coercion through the threat of violence was a common tactic used by coal companies and coal supporters to arrive at favorable outcomes. Corn said that violence was always just below the surface in the Clear Fork Valley.<sup>302,303</sup> There was the violence inherent to the processes of removing material that had been undisturbed under the Earth’s surface for tens of millions of years, and the violence associated with ensuring that those processes proceed unimpeded. Cirillo said there were a number of occasions when coal companies, or other vested parties, would send people to scare her into backing down from initiatives that may interfere with mining operations.<sup>304</sup>

One initiative was founding a land trust to preserve the little unleased land that remained in Claiborne County for the people of the valley. When the trust began buying parcels of land in

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<sup>301</sup> Corn, 2000: 4

<sup>302</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>303</sup> Corn, 2019

<sup>304</sup> Cirillo, 2019

the valley, she said rocks were thrown through the windows of her house, and someone attempted to burn it down.<sup>305</sup> Despite the widespread tactics of intimidation, Cirillo said “no one messed with Louise.”<sup>306</sup> As postmaster, Adams was a federal employee, and any threats against her would involve the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), rather than local law enforcement officers who were often sympathetic to the coal companies. Adams wielded her power and influence in advocacy of the people of the valley. She worked closely with Cirillo on the Model Valley Project and other initiatives and was instrumental to Corn’s picture-making activities in the region. She arranged for local guides to drive Corn around and introduced him to the Marlowe’s, the Huddleston’s, the Miller children, the Teague’s, and Cirillo; she suggested he visit schools in Clairfield and Buffalo Creek; and called him with news tips when issues or events were happening in the valley. Many, if not most, of the images Corn selected as being the most important of his work in Appalachia are the result, in some way, of Adams’ involvement as a gatekeeper.

#### AUDIENCE AND MEANING: UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCE IN THE SITE OF CIRCULATION

On Sept. 14, 1972, the first exhibition of photographs from Rogovin’s *Appalachia* series opened at the Center Lounge Gallery at the State University of New York, Buffalo (Figure 96). That year, Caudill published *My Land is Dying*—a dystopian follow-up to *Night Comes to the Cumberland*—which featured two of Rogovin’s photographs as a frontispiece. The first photograph uses the full bleed of the 6 ¼ x 8 ½ -inch page to the left of the title page. Like one of

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<sup>305</sup> Cirillo, 2019

<sup>306</sup> Cirillo, 2019

Corn's aerial strip-mining photographs (Figure 97), Rogovin's image (Figure 98) shows a landscape carved of roads and trenches winding from foreground to background. Viewed together the two images appear to be a reverse of one another, as though the contours of one could fit in the other if turned upside down. In Corn's photograph the destruction rises up from the bottom of the frame, as the areas of strip-mining steps up the side of the mountain to the summit. The movement in Rogovin's photograph is the reversed of the movement in Corn's—it is anchored at the top of the frame, with areas of strip-mining cascading down the side of the mountain into a deep trench that effectively cuts the photograph in half. Though not intentional, the contrast between the two photographs symbolically speaks to the contrast between the two photographers themselves and their approach to social documentary—they are as complementary as they are different. Both images speak to Caudill's bleak outlook of the future. In *My Land Is Dying* Caudill warns that "the coming devastation of the rest of the continent—the creation of an American Carthage, plowed and salted—as millions of acres in the Mid- and Far West [...] fall before the blades of giant earth-destroying machines."<sup>307</sup>

The other photograph (Figure 99), smaller in comparison, measures 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. In a similar sparse and straightforward arrangement as the "theme boy" portrait, the photograph shows a child sitting barefoot and shirtless on a ragged couch on a porch. On the page to the right of the photograph is a dedication that reads: "That they may know some cared, this book is dedicated to all those unborn millions who must someday inhabit America's spoil banks."<sup>308</sup> Rogovin saw himself as purely an artist, an informant to the activist and intellectual elite who visited the galleries and read the books that contained his images. He viewed the art exhibition as the primary showcase of his work as he explained in one letter dated May 3, 1969 to a local

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<sup>307</sup> Caudill, 1972

<sup>308</sup> Caudill, 1972

*Milton Rogovin*  
**APPALACHIA**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: MILTON ROGOVIN



**CENTER LOUNGE GALLERY**  
**Norton Hall, State University of N. Y. at Buffalo**

**You Are Cordially Invited To A**  
**Preview: 7-10 P.M., Monday, Sept. 14**  
**Exhibition Continues to Sept. 30** 1972

Figure 96. Gallery Exhibit Preview Invitation. Milton Rogovin's "Appalachia," Sept. 30, 1972.





*Figure 97. Aerial of strip-mined mountain in Campbell Co., TN. Jack Corn, ca. 1969.*





*Figure 98. Untitled from "My Land is Dying." Milton Rogovin, 1972.*





*Figure 99. Untitled from "My Land is Dying." Milton Rogovin, 1972.*

contact, Lela Holcomb of Webster Springs, West Virginia, eliciting her help with introductions. Rogovin writes: “I feel certain that the people would welcome us once they see the unusual quality of my work. The photographs are done primarily for museum exhibits and not for any newspapers or magazines.”<sup>309</sup> When Rogovin’s work does appear in periodicals it is to promote an upcoming exhibition or published as a portfolio, not accompanying editorial content, as in *Aperture*, or *Laborer’s Heritage* magazine.

Rogovin’s vision of himself as purely an artist, contrasts with Corn’s idealism of journalists being agents of social change. Rogovin’s documentary, although thought-provoking and conceptual, is not accompanied by any real call to action. Corn, however, thought through reporting he was directly helping to illuminate the issues facing miners, their families and the community. As a staff photojournalist, Corn’s assigned work, which varied from human interest features, to spot news, to sports was published daily in *The Tennessean*, and distributed over wire services such as the *Associated Press*, and *United Press International*. His work in Appalachia accompanied news stories, or as a part of special coverage, such as the strip-mining supplement, or breaking news of the mine collapse at the C. L. Kline mine in Scott County, Tennessee.

On May 25, 1965 miners were trapped 3,000 feet below the surface of Brimstone Mountain when coal dust combined with a pocket of methane gas released from digging ignited and caused an explosion. In the dramatic lede of the story reporter John Hemphill writes: “BRIMSTONE COMMUNITY, Tenn.—Weary, coal-blackened rescue workers located last night the bodies of the last three victims of Monday’s mine explosion here.”<sup>310</sup> *The Tennessean* dedicated most of the Wednesday, May 26, 1965 front page to the accident (Figure 100). In two separate stories, accompanied by three photographs, Hemphill, in almost lyrical prose, describes

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<sup>309</sup> Rogovin, 1969

<sup>310</sup> Hemphill, 1965



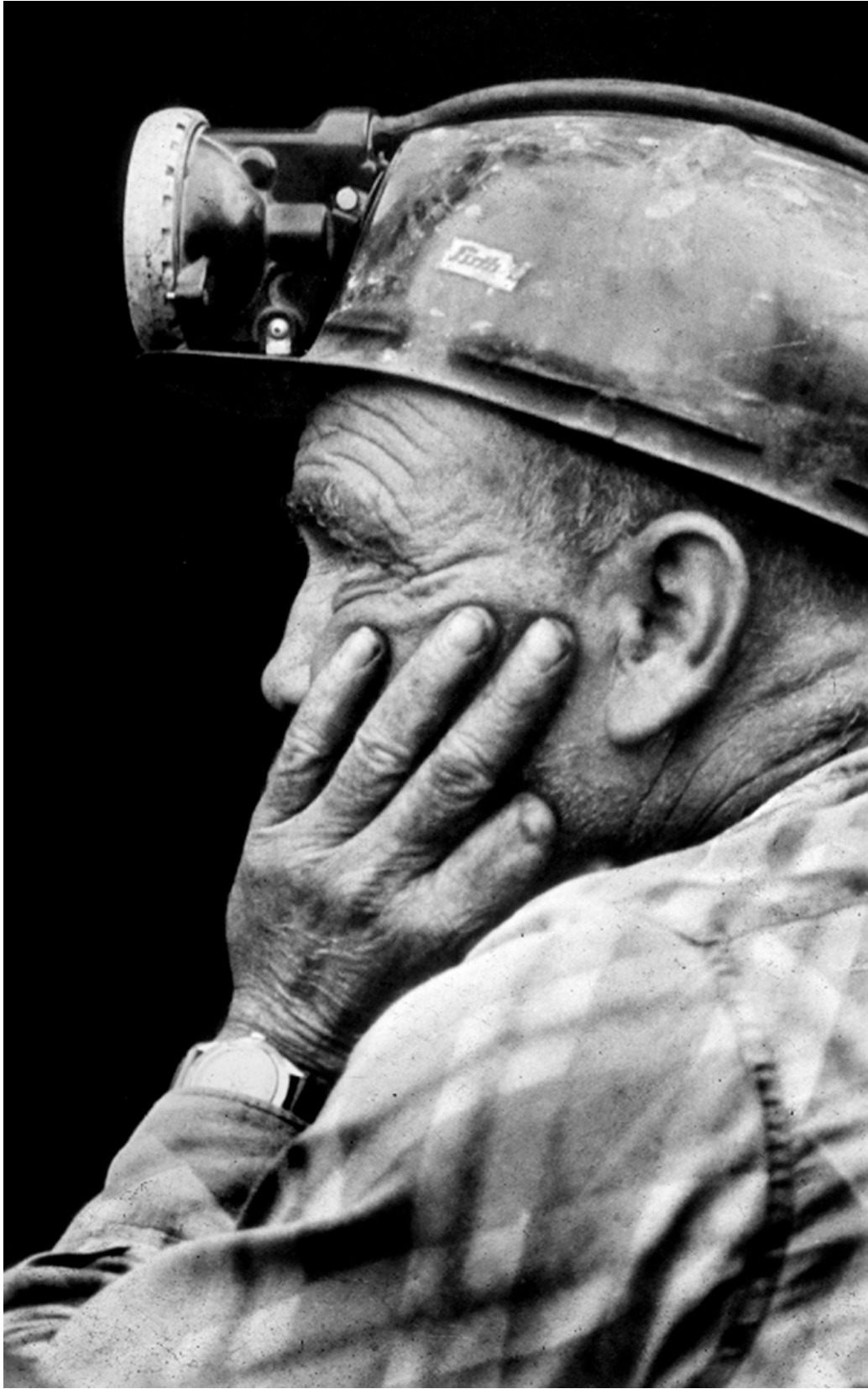
in vivid detail and texture the scene unfolding at the mine just outside the town of Oneida in northeast Tennessee. He writes: “The crowd was silent, but lightning flashed, and thunder rumbled ominously through the hills as the bodies, completely wrapped in white sheeting, were carried across the mine yard to waiting ambulances.” What Hemphill’s language is doing, is taking readers to that place. He relies on imagery familiar to those living in coal producing regions such as of soot covered miners emerging from beneath the Earth, to illicit an emotional response from his readers. On covering the event Corn wrote: “It rained a hard Tennessee, month-of-May rain that soaked everything and everyone.”<sup>311</sup>

Corn’s photographs of the event capture the emotion of the people involved with the rescue. One photograph (Figure 101) shows the furrowed brow of a miner in profile, his hand pressed firmly against his cheek watching the rescue of his co-workers. Corn uses a tight frame and dark background to not allow the viewer’s attention to focus on anything but the intensity of the miner’s chiseled gaze. Another photograph (Figure 102) shows another aspect of the recovery effort and Corn’s skillful use of composition. Again, in this photograph Corn demonstrates his mastery of implied movement through geometry and the aesthetically pleasing triangle. The viewer’s eye naturally moves across, down and back up the frame, following the implied line of the subject’s gaze. Beginning with the left, the attention moves across the father’s piercing stare to Scott County Sheriff Jack Laxton who is staring down as he attempts to resuscitate unconscious rescue worker Edker Hunnicutt, who if his eyes were open, would be staring back up at his father. Corn’s use of implied lines to create motion also create intensity and intimacy in this powerful image.

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<sup>311</sup> Corn, 2000





*Figure 101. "East Tennessee miner," Jack Corn, 1965.*



*Figure 102. Sheriff Jack Laxton administers oxygen to rescue worker Edker Hunnicutt. Jack Corn, 1965.*

Though they were distributed widely via the circulation of *The Tennessean*, Corn also believed the photographs he made belonged in the places he made them. He developed a habit of making prints and delivering them to his subjects whenever he would visit the area. To this day, 43 framed and signed prints Corn made in the valley hang on display at Clear Fork Community Institute in Eagan, Tennessee. Looking at the photographs in the institute's entrance hall (Figure 103) Cirilo suggests that the people were appreciative that they were portrayed fairly, with respect and dignity and that Corn brought the images back to where they were made.<sup>312</sup> Corn's Appalachia photographs were also the subject of two major exhibitions. In 1969, "The Valley of Despair" exhibition ran from Feb. 2–23, at the Parthenon in Nashville. In an article previewing the one-man show, *The Tennessean* art critic Clara Hieronymus writes: "the pictures are both a loving and chilling look at the current decade in a strip of Tennessee forming a broad band across the upper part of the state [...] If the sequence of photos, which could be called "The Life and Death of a People and Mountain," speaks quietly of desolation, it also makes a case for dignity and goodness."<sup>313</sup> Corn's photographs were also the subject of a 2015 "Picturing our World" exhibit at the Jean and Alexander Heard Library at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. The exhibit consisted of images from materials Corn donated to the library in 2012. Of the significance of Corn's images to Tennessee history, Vanderbilt University Provost Richard McCarty wrote: "Jack Corn's exceptional talents and insights bring to light the lives of those miners whose hard work heated our homes, even while their families paid a terrible price. [...] These dramatic images tell the story more clearly than any text I could imagine."<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Cirillo, 2019

<sup>313</sup> Hieronymus, 1969

<sup>314</sup> McCarty, 2012



*Figure 103. Marie Cirillo looks at Jack Corn's framed photographs of the Clear Fork Valley on display at the Clear Fork Community Institute. Eagan, TN. Anthony Cepak, 2019.*

Both Rogovin and Corn's photographs are important historical records of the social and physical sacrifice coal miners made for the good of society, capitalism and national progress. But they are also documentation of the destruction mining has on the physical world and social fabric of community. Both photographers entered these areas of Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia with idealized visions of what would be found and what should be documented. But being in these places, acquiring the knowledge they did through the people they met, and the materials they collected and consumed changed both of their perspectives. Rogovin went to West Virginia expecting to find systemic, wide-spread poverty, fulfilling an idealized vision of the poor down-trodden miner aesthetic. He did encounter miners out of work, and communities left behind after mines closed; however, local contacts helped him re-imagine the coal miner as a working-class laborer living in modern houses, with modern conveniences. This re-positioning is an important contribution to the visual discourse of mining; Rogovin's portraits celebrated the worker rather than the work. Similarly, Corn was outraged by the injustice of poverty and began photographing life in Appalachian coal communities to bring attention to the issues the region faced. Through the contacts he cultivated and subjects he photographed, Corn came to realize that while the coal companies stripped the Clear Fork Valley of land, natural resources and the revered beauty of the mountains, they could not strip the people of their spirit, or proud heritage. While at first Corn may have pitied those living in the valley, advocates like Adams and Cirillo commanded his respect and showed him how change was possible from within. The images these two photographers produced, and the indelible mark they make on history, would not have been possible had two outsiders just shown up and started making pictures. Both researched the issues and culture of the people they photographed and relied upon the help of locals to gain

access to these often-reluctant and guarded communities. As much as the vision and eye of the photographer, the willing participation of insiders like Rasmussen, Adams and Cirillo helped shape what these images represent.



## CHAPTER 7

### VISUALIZING THE ENVIRONMENT: THE EPA'S *DOCUMERICA* AND THE LASTING LEGACY OF A PROJECT THAT FAILED TO LIVE UP TO ITS PROMISE

“...we have recklessly plundered our continent, raiding it for beaver, for buffalo,  
for timber, for gold, for grass, laying waste to forests and hillsides and river valleys  
without regard for the needs of future generations.”

— Stewart L. Udall, 1962

Stewart L. Udall wrote this passage while serving as secretary of the Department of Interior during the administration of President John F. Kennedy. The passage is from a forward Udall penned for historian and environmentalist Harry Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, a century-long look at exploitation and degradation of the people and land on the Cumberland Plateau in southeast Kentucky. Udall was an outspoken activist and frustration often manifests in writing. The frustration stemmed in part from being the head of an agency that oversaw the nation's natural resources at a time when federal oversight was piecemeal and ineffective at enforcing environmental laws. During this time, most of the actual power for regulation and enforcement of issues related to industry and the environment resided with individual states that often placed economic interests over environmental concern. In *The Quiet Crisis*, a 1963 call for social intervention, Udall warns of a disappearing quality of American life. He writes: “America today stands poised on a pinnacle of power, and yet we live in a land of vanishing beauty, of increasing ugliness, of shrinking open space, and of an overall environment that is diminished by pollution and noise and blight.”<sup>315</sup> *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, along with biologist Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, helped illuminate what Udall warned against. Both books, published in 1962, document the devastation a century of unchecked industrialization and globalization was having on the quality of air, water, soil, plants, wildlife

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<sup>315</sup> Udall, 1963: viii

and on human health and wellbeing. *Silent Spring* in particular, which examines the erosive and toxic effect of prolonged large-scale pesticide use in agriculture, attracted widespread attention—requiring six printings in its first year of release—and has been attributed as being the spark to ignite the environmental movement. Of *Silent Spring*, Udall writes: “A great woman has awakened the Nation by her forceful account of the dangers around us.”<sup>316</sup>

The decade following this awakening saw rise to a tremendous force of activism centered around demands for political, environmental and social change. It was the era of the Vietnam War, the civil rights and women’s rights movements. Enmeshed in these social forces was a rapidly growing concern for the denigrated state of the environment. Historian Adam Rome opines that too often environmentalism gets lost in the decade and becomes a footnote to histories of 1960s activism. He argues that anti-war activism, civil rights, women’s rights and environmentalism are all intrinsically connected and cannot easily be parsed out from one another.<sup>317</sup> As scant as histories are of environmentalism in the 1950s and 60s, even less has been written about the connection between journalism and the environment in this period. The movements of the 1960s grew and gained power, in part, through press coverage of policy debates, political campaigning, protests and demonstrations with activist organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), League of Women Voters, Women Strike for Peace, Greenpeace and the Sierra Club, as well as the formation of local and regional grassroots groups such as the Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning (TCWP) and Save Our Cumberland Mountains (SOCM)—all advancing social and environmental agendas via the press. The following discussion examines the role of the U.S. news media and the illustrative power of photography leading up to and during the emergence of the 1960s activist culture. This

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<sup>316</sup> Udall in the accolade’s material of *Silent Spring*’s 1964 printing under the Crest Book imprint

<sup>317</sup> Rome, 2003

discussion will examine two distinct cultural themes: the rise of a new liberal ideology amidst post-World War II American prosperity and a rising skepticism of purely objective journalism in an increasingly complex world. These two themes, like the articulating hands on a watch, came into alignment in the 1960s amidst the spreading of environmental awareness and activism in a tumultuous decade of unrest.

This chapter examines the U.S. government-sanctioned work of Corn. His independent and newspaper work will be compared and contrasted to his work on *Documerica* and the President's Report on the Coal Industry, highlighting differences in intimacy and aesthetic he was able to achieve. Discussion around *Documerica* and other photographic surveys is aimed at building the argument that Corn and Milton Rogovin were approaching documentation of Appalachia from an environmental perspective long before the launch of the project. This argument repositions their work as being significant environmental documents before environmentalism entered the public discourse.

## THE DAWN OF A NEW DECADE, AND DAWN OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ERA

On January 1, 1970 with a handful of politicians, reporters and photographers looking on, U.S. President Richard Nixon signed (Figure 104) the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The first official act of the new decade aimed to establish a set of national environmental policies. The key goals of these policies were to, among other things, foster efforts to prevent and repair damage already done to the atmosphere and the environment and build understanding of ecological systems and natural resources “important to the nation.”<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Lewis, 1985: 2



*Figure 104. U.S. President Richard Nixon (left) after signing the National Environmental Policy Act, Jan. 1, 1970.  
Photographer Unknown, Richard Nixon Library.*

NEPA consolidated environmental regulatory functions previously spread across multiple offices and agencies, into one new cabinet level authority. This new agency would set federal regulations and oversee state compliance over their enforcement. Nearly a year after NEPA was signed, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was formed; placed at its helm was a state environmental regulator from Indiana, William D. Ruckelshaus.

Philosophically, the environment was not a priority for Nixon, or even an issue.<sup>319,320</sup> He was skeptical of the environmental movement and believed it to be just a tentacle of the emphatic anti-war movement. Setting Nixon's disdain aside, the two movements were connected, both in terms of an underlying social anxiety and especially around the environmental impacts of the Vietnam War. EPA historian Jack Lewis notes that anti-war and environmental activism

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<sup>319</sup> Rome, 2006

<sup>320</sup> Ruckelshaus, 1993

coalesced around defoliation campaigns of the U.S. military in the jungles of Indochina.<sup>321</sup> Rome suggests that many Americans came to believe the war and corporate exploitation of the environment were all part of the same profiteering mechanism of global capitalism. He writes: “In Vietnam, Americans destroyed towns to ‘save’ them; at home, Americans degraded the environment to make ‘progress.’”<sup>322</sup> When people became aware of the tactics “they became more receptive to the ‘environmental’ ideas advanced by Carson and her countless imitators.”<sup>323</sup> In a 1993 oral history, Ruckelshaus recalls Nixon frequently warning him of the environmental “crazies” within the agency and to “not get pushed around by them.”<sup>324</sup> Nixon did not share the concern over environmental issues felt by a growing number of Americans at the time, but politically, taking action was a necessity. “He never once asked me ‘is there anything wrong with the environment? Is the air really bad? Is it hurting people?’”<sup>325</sup> Ruckelshaus said the EPA was created “because of public outrage about what was happening to the environment. Not because Nixon *shared* that concern, but *because he didn’t have any choice*.”<sup>326</sup>

Ruckelshaus served as counsel to the Indiana Stream Pollution Control Board and the State Board of Health in the 1950s and 60s and recalls that unless there was a significant public demand, there was a complete lack of appetite to address any environmental issues. This was not just the case in Indiana, but in many other heavily industrial states as well. In West Virginia, for example, where most of the state’s economy was tied to the extraction and transportation of coal, the public’s opinion of environmental issues was and continues to be especially complex.

Environmental sociologist Aysha Bodenhamer suggests that many West Virginians and those

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<sup>321</sup> Lewis, 1985: 1

<sup>322</sup> Rome, 2006: 547

<sup>323</sup> Lewis, 1985: 1

<sup>324</sup> Ruckelshaus, 1993: 11

<sup>325</sup> Ruckelshaus, 1993: 11

<sup>326</sup> Ruckelshaus, 1993: 11

living across Appalachia “face competing identities—one marked by loyalty to the coal industry and the other signified by an attachment to place.”<sup>327</sup> On weighing issues of economic prosperity versus destruction of natural places, Ruckelshaus asserts that “public opinion remains *absolutely essential* for anything to be done on the behalf of the environment. Absent that, nothing will happen because the forces of the economy and the impact on the people’s livelihood are so much more automatic and endemic.”<sup>328</sup> The fight over the public’s perception of environmental issues had been playing out in the U.S. press since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The entire public relations industry was born out of a need to persuade the public that meeting the interest of industry over social concerns was essential for economic prosperity.

#### VISUALITIES AND NATURE: THE AESTHETIC OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

Sensing the American malaise of the 1950s and fearing it would lead to a neo-liberal era of environmental regulation, a group of executives got together to form Keep America Beautiful (KAB); an organization to promote proactive environmental stewardship messages aimed at absolving them from culpability for pollution.<sup>329</sup> Packagers such as Phillip-Morris Tobacco and bottlers such as Coca-a-Cola, PepsiCo, and Anheuser-Busch funded KAB to promote the idea that the problem of littering was caused by consumer action, not corporate production.<sup>330</sup> In the 1960s KAB approached the Ad Council for help to produce its anti-littering campaigns. The Ad Council is a trade association of advertising agencies that produce pro-bono public service announcements (PSAs) for non-profit governmental causes, such as the anti-communist “Future of America” and “The People’s Capitalism” campaigns in the 1950s. The group is responsible

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<sup>327</sup> Bodenhamer, 2016: 1140

<sup>328</sup> Ruckelshaus, 1993: 7

<sup>329</sup> Lamb, 2001

<sup>330</sup> Beder, 2000



for creating some of the most memorable call to action messages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the lines “only you can prevent forest fires,” “friends don’t let friends drive drunk,” and “a mind is a terrible thing to waste” as well as iconic characters such as Smokey Bear and McGruff the Crime Dog.<sup>331</sup> The result of KAB and the Ad Council’s partnership was the “Every Litter Bit Hurts” campaign, which included the infamous “Crying Indian” PSA.<sup>332</sup>

First aired on Earth Day in 1971, the PSA begins with dramatic opening music—loud drumbeats as a Native American man is seen paddling his birch bark canoe down a river. The water is pristine as the man passes by factories briefly seen in the background (Figure 105). Finally, he arrives at the riverbank and steps out of his canoe to trash littering the shore. The setting transitions to an urban environment and a paper bag can be seen flung from the open window of a car as it passes by. The bag explodes against the pavement as it lands at the man’s feet; the PSA ends with a tightening zoom shot of the man’s face, with a tear running down his cheek and the narrator saying, “people start pollution, and people can stop it.” One can see similar vilification of material consumption over industrial production mirrored in contemporary contexts, with attempts at public shaming over the use of plastic straws, or one-time use plastic bags. The imagery here fights against the notion that Galbraith lays out in *The Affluent Society*—that capitalistic production was leading to the de-beautification of the landscape. In countering that notion, what the PSA accomplishes is the construction of a new relationship to place, a “posited state of affairs, a particular universe of objects and events.”<sup>333</sup> In this universe, as in *The Affluent Society*, the foundation of environmentalism is based on a visual esthetic of beauty; however, changes to that beauty are the result of the carelessness of individuals, not

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<sup>331</sup> Strand, 2009

<sup>332</sup> Ad Council, 2020

<sup>333</sup> Basso, 1996

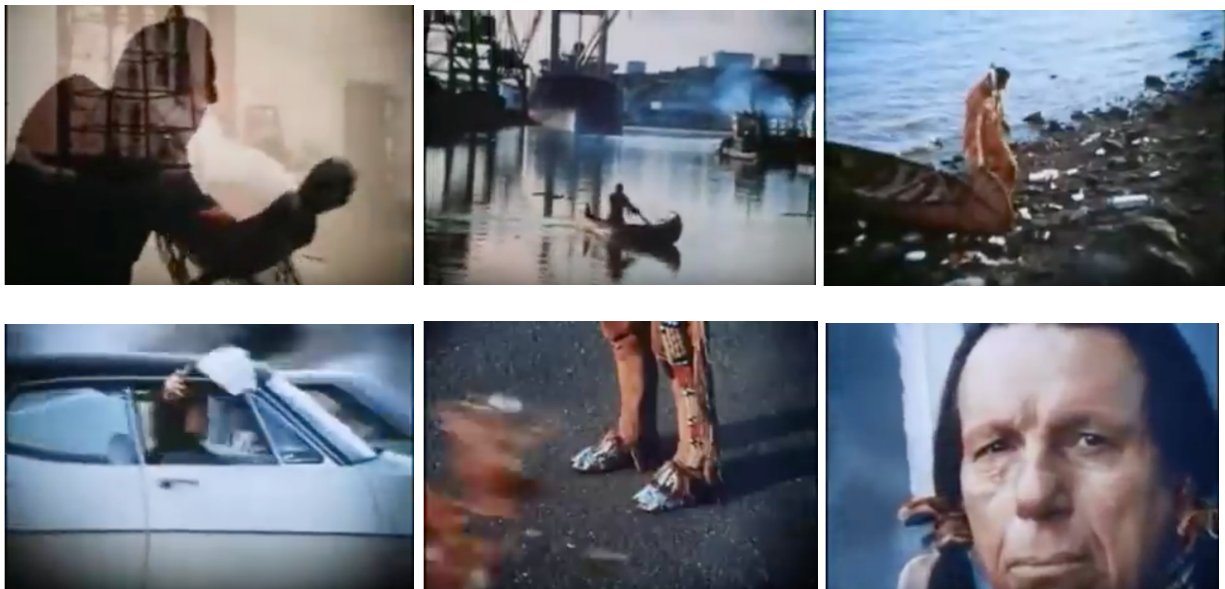


Figure 105. Screenshots of the Keep America Beautiful, 1971 Public Service Announcement campaign.



Figure 106. 71 things you can do to stop pollution brochure produced by Keep America Beautiful and the Ad Council, 1971.

corporations. What the PSA does is pivot the onus for a clean environment to consumers not corporations. Other materials produced such as the “71 things you can do to fight pollution” (Figure 106) brochure reinforce the notion of individual responsibility that is central to the campaign’s message. While critical of the PSA, writer and activist Ginger Strand writes of the PSA’s enduring legacy: “The crying Indian wept for our sins, and from his tears sprang forth a new Green Age.”<sup>334</sup> It is the inherent deception of the PSA, not the sentiment, however, that has made it the target of criticism. Revelations that the man in the PSA was actually an Italian-American actor named Iron Eyes Cody, not a Native American, sparked outrage in environmental circles; as did knowledge that KAB was a corporate trade organization, not the environmental advocacy group it purported to be.<sup>335,336,337</sup> Despite heavy criticism in the decades since it aired, the PSA has been touted as one of the most memorable commercials and effective PSAs of all time.<sup>338</sup>

Reinforcing the role of gaze and materiality in environmental visualization, the landscape made visually unappealing through littering, is gazed upon by the Native American man and he weeps beholding the beauty that is lost as discarded materials, evidence of a rapidly growing consumerism, litter the landscape. This objectification of place has skewed the environment as a place and corrupted its inhabitability in social imaginary. Tying environmentalism so closely to natural aesthetics set in motion a narrative that 30 years later society is still grappling with how to approach and occupy. It is through this linkage of environment and aesthetic beauty that has made it difficult to unlink notions of nature as being the sole domain of “the Environment.” The

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<sup>334</sup> Strand, 2008: 2

<sup>335</sup> Strand, 2008

<sup>336</sup> Lamb, 2001

<sup>337</sup> Beder, 2000

<sup>338</sup> Cialdini, 2001: 280

environment is removed from being the space we inhabit, placing it in some *other* realm removed from our locality. In other words, in the context of environmental issues we think of the environment as existing somewhere other than where we physically are located in the present.<sup>339</sup> Other environmental campaigns of the past half century have contributed to this dissociative work. “Save the rainforest,” “save the trees,” “save the whales,” all objectify and materialize personified symbols that remove the environment from where we are spatially, creating almost an othering effect of place. It disassociates the environment as being omnipresent and existing where people live, creating a visual diaspora of the environment existing almost exclusively in the domain of nature.

#### RESURRECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY: *DOCUMERICA*

Realizing the power of images in showing environmental decay, the EPA launched a massive photographic survey project called *Documerica* to “pictorially document the environmental movement in America and create a visual baseline of images from which the environment could be measured.”<sup>340</sup> Project director Gifford Hampshire, a former *National Geographic* photo editor, hired 100 freelance photographers who produced more than 81,000 photographs between 1971 and 1977 depicting all manner of environmental phenomena from the effects of acid rain and smog to the erosion of beaches. Corn was one of those photographers. He used the project to continue his work of documenting the effects of mining on the people and lands of Appalachia.

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<sup>339</sup> Basso, 1996

<sup>340</sup> Berman and Cronin, 2018: 187

In his assignment proposal to the EPA (Figure 107), Corn emphasizes the large body of work he had already produced related to coal miners in Tennessee, and the relationships already established in mining communities. He writes:

“I propose to compile a photographic record of the coal industry today, with the same emphasis on people—the miners, their families and their communities—that characterized the excellent work done during the 30s by the Farm Security Administration. [...] I think I have one of the best collections of black and white photographs of this region in the entire country. I look forward to a chance to share knowledge of these people, people I have come to know and admire, with the rest of the United States.”<sup>341</sup>

Corn acknowledges the importance of coal as a vital source of energy while emphasizing that the environmental damage done by the industry was undeniable. He proposed photographing at sites in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia. He estimated it would take 20 days to photograph the assignment, and his *Documerica* contract indicates he was paid \$150 a day for shooting. Photographers were provided with some resources from the EPA such as branded notebooks for recordkeeping (Figure 108). They were however, expected to provide their own equipment and materials such as film and do their own processing, for which they were paid an additional \$75 per day for assignment administration.<sup>342</sup> Corn’s project invoice indicates that in total, he was paid \$4,675 for his work on *Documerica*.<sup>343</sup> The official description of his assignment from Hampshire reads:

Photographer will document the coal mining industry in western Kentucky and West Virginia. Emphasis will be on long wall and other progressive industrial developments for obtaining coal from deep mining operations efficiently, economically, and with due regard for industrial health and safety. Photographer will also document the lifestyles of miners emphasizing standards of living possible and typical of present wage-work standards. By contrast, photographer will document physical and social effects on miners due to past mining practices. Photographer will work with industry management (ie: Island Creek Coal Co.) and labor representatives (ie: United Mine Workers) and strive for

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<sup>341</sup> Corn, 1974

<sup>342</sup> Documerica Contract, 1974

<sup>343</sup> Documerica Invoice, 1974

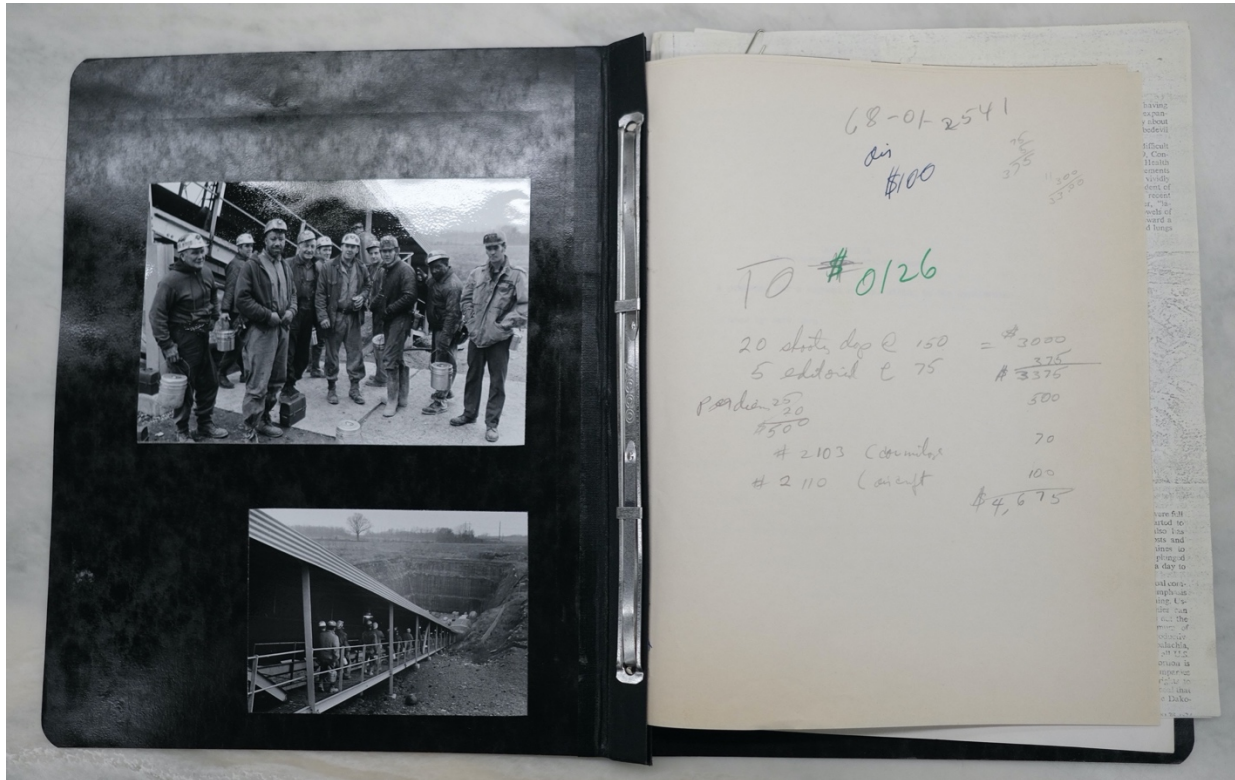


Figure 107. Jack Corn's 1973 proposal for the Documerica project. Anthony Cepak, 2019.



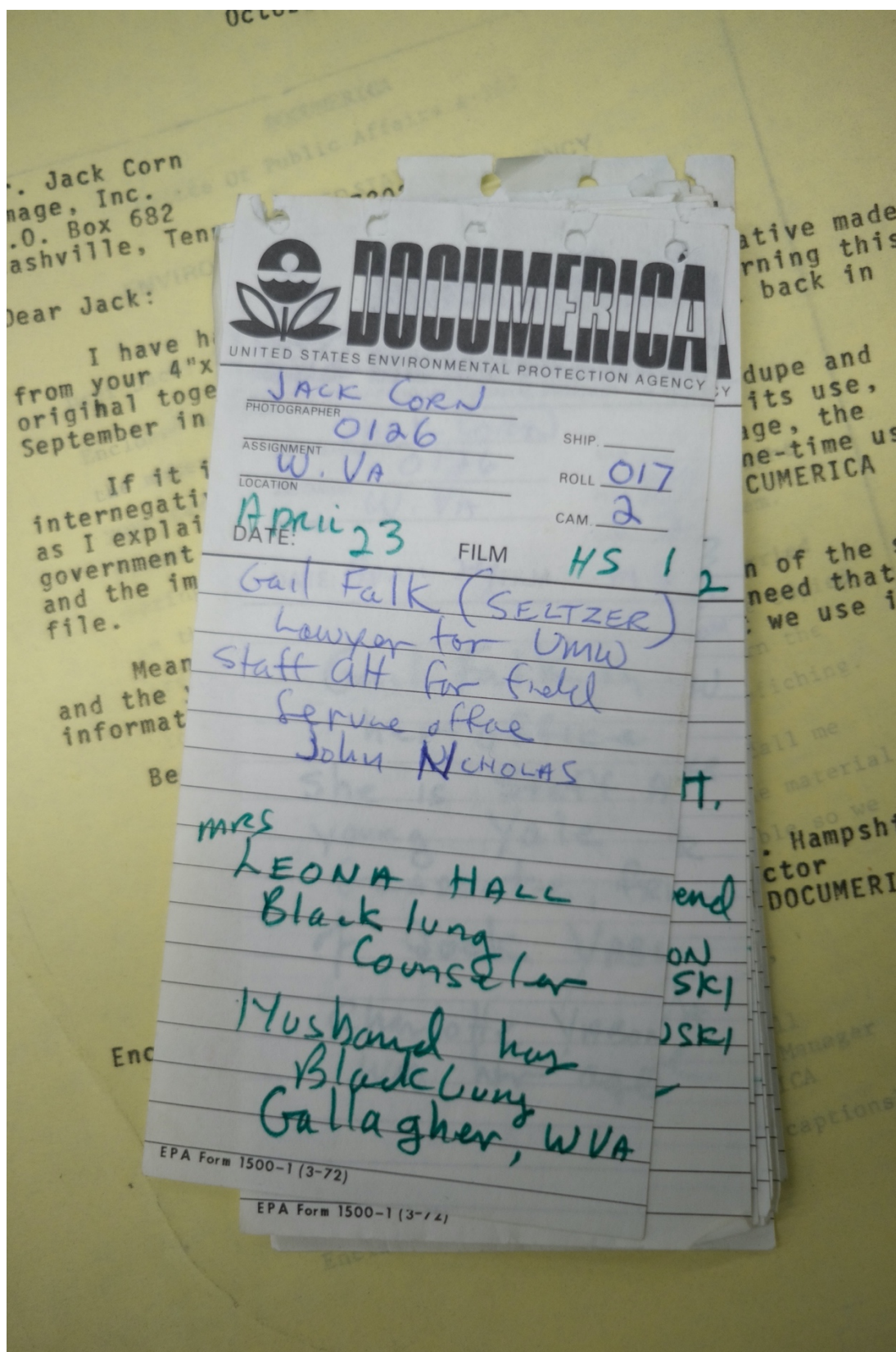


Figure 108. Jack Corn's 1974 assignment notes on branded Documerica notebook. Anthony Cepak, 2019.

objective documentation of above. This task will be carried out in keeping with the photographer's proposal of March 16, 1974.<sup>344</sup>

While Corn achieved a remarkable level of intimacy in his photographs of miners and their families in the Clear Fork Valley for *The Tennessean*, his work on *Documerica* is far less personal and more evidentiary than it is emotional. Many factors contribute to this contrast in his own work, including specifications of the project itself. All of Corn's independent work and work for *The Tennessean* was shot in black and white, while *Documerica* required the use of color film to capture the true nature of pollution. This causes an immediate departure from the FSA aesthetic Corn mentioned in his assignment proposal, an aesthetic he was able to achieve in his other Appalachia work. Other major factors were location and time. For *Documerica* Corn ventured out of his familiarity with Tennessee up to West Virginia, centering on the town of Rhodell. Once again, Corn found himself an outsider in an Appalachian coal community but lacked the time in West Virginia to build rapport. He shot the entirety of his *Documerica* assignment during a three-week extended vacation from *The Tennessean* in the summer of 1974. Corn recalls a similar struggle in gaining accesses in West Virginia that he did initially in the Clear Fork Valley. He recalls the difference he found between doing newspaper work and the suspicion he was met with while working on *Documerica*: "They understand when you say you're from a newspaper, but they don't understand [a photographer] working for the government."<sup>345</sup>

Aesthetic difference between Corn's independent and newspaper work compared to his *Documerica* work can be seen by studying two pairs of photographs of comparable scenes. Corn's 1969 photograph (Figure 109) of Ed Marlowe resting at home in bed has a more

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<sup>344</sup> *Documerica* contract, 1974

<sup>345</sup> Corn quoted in Parkinson, 2013



*Figure 109. Ed Marlowe crippled in a coal mine roof fall stares out his window. Portrait of President John Kennedy in chair. Jack Corn, 1969.*



*Figure 110. Ken Hatfield, 74, of Newton, West Virginia, near Charleston, in Mingo County. A World War II Veteran, He Began Working in the Mines at 18 and Was Employed Underground at Least 30 Years. A Sick Man, He Has Lost One Leg. He Receives \$78 a Month in Social Security. Jack Corn, 1974.*

dramatic use of light, stronger composition, and far greater degree of intimacy than his photograph of another disabled miner, Ken Hatfield, 74, of Newton, West Virginia (Figure 110) that he made for *Documerica*. Both Democrats, Corn recalls having a long conversation with Marlowe about politics the day he made the photograph. He said after first meeting Marlowe right after the accident in 1963, he became one of the people he visited with most over the years. Corn writes: “every time I came to the valley after this first eye-opening visit, I had to go see him. He would always know when I was in the Valley. Louise Adams or Marie Cirillo would tell me, ‘Ed wants to see you.’ I admired and respected him for his strength of character. I saw Ed for the last time in October 1979.”<sup>346</sup>

The demonstrated mastery of light, composition and moment present in the Marlowe photograph is not found in the Hatfield photograph, which reads more as being hurried and forced than a natural exchange. The man’s expression suggests the same level of mutual comfort between Corn and Marlowe was not achieved between Corn and Hatfield giving the photograph a stiff and uncomfortable feel. Two photographs of similar porch scenes further illustrate the contrast in Corn’s work. The photograph he made, titled “Huddlestons on porch” (Figure 111) shows brothers Jim and Steele Huddleston, along with Steele’s wife Pauline talking on the porch of their mountain cabin. Jim is leaning back in his chair, smiling as Steele looks to his wife who appears to be talking. The tightness of the frame creates a closeness with the Huddlestons and the ease of their postures makes it feel as though Corn, and by extension the viewer is part of the conversation playing out in that moment. Corn’s photograph (Figure 112) of a similar scene shows a group of miners talking on the porch of the Coal City Club, a local miner bar in Beckley, West Virginia. Compared to the photograph of the Huddlestons, the looseness of this

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<sup>346</sup> Corn, 2000





Figure 111. "Huddlestons on porch" Jim, Steele and Pauline Huddleston on porch of their mountain cabin. Jack Corn, 1957–1978.



Figure 112. Coal City Club in Coal City, West Virginia, a Part of Beckley All of the Men Are Coal Miners. Note That Some of Them Are "Hunkering Down" Rather Than Sitting. This Is a Familiar Stance to All Miners Who Use This Posture in the Mine Shafts Which Have Low Ceilings. Jack Corn, 1974.

frame places the subjects at a distance, creating a disconnect between them and the viewer. The light is flat, and half of the miners are in a dull shadow cast by a white-and-red striped awning extending from the building's façade over the porch, rendering the miners expressionless figures perched on the back of a wooden bench. Unlike the feeling of being on the Huddlestons porch, this scene seems transient and passive, as if Corn just raised his camera while walking by, rather than stopping to be in the conversation.

*Documerica* has been widely criticized for flaws in its execution. Photojournalists were hired who didn't have adequate time to spend on their assignments while maintaining the demands of their newspaper jobs, the scope of the project was too broad, and the directive given to the photographers too vague.<sup>347</sup> For a project modeled after the work of Roy Stryker and the FSA photographic survey he directed, little if any of *Documerica* resembles its inspiration. Media sociologists Dustin Greenwalt and Brian Creech argue *Documerica*'s broad scope lead to a fractured visual narrative that delivered a dichotomy of nostalgias. In one regard the images captured by photographers elicited a longing for a return to the post-World War II manufacturing boom while at the same time, a desire for an aesthetic of nature unspoiled by the activities of industry.<sup>348</sup>

As aesthetically different as Corn's *Documerica* work is, he still manages to present a similar social critique, one shared by *Documerica* photography from many photographers across the project. Historians Bruce Berman and Mary Cronin write: "Many of the images demonstrate the extent of environmental degradation to the nation brought about by large-scale industrial pollution, coupled with a hands-off regulatory approach for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The

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<sup>347</sup> Berman and Cronin, 2018

<sup>348</sup> Greenwalt and Creech, 2018



images, therefore, serve as testimony to what can happen in a laissez-faire political climate.”<sup>349</sup>

Despite its flaws, Corn said *Documerica* gave him the opportunity to see how mining was affecting the people and environment in other areas, especially where there were still coal jobs. Despite not living up to its ambition in the movement, *Documerica* photographers did leave an indelible visual record of environmentalism in the 1970s. And as much as the work of photographers such as Lewis W. Hine, W. Eugene Smith, Margaret Bourke-White and Sebastião Salgado work to illuminate exploitation and dangerous working conditions in mines, they also celebrate the heroism of labor.

With so much of the discourse of the environmental movement tied to aesthetics, the visuality of awareness, beauty and enjoyment of nature, photographs like Corn’s became an important reinforcement of what happens when that beauty disappears. The encroaching “ugliness” of the American landscape Galbraith and Udall lamented was indelibly captured by photographers across the country armed with Hasselblads, Rollicflexs, Leicas and Nikons. Photography historian and critic Howard Bossen and environmental journalism scholar Eric Freedman note that one of the challenges photographers sometimes face is that, depending on the nature of the environmental issue, evidence of devastation can appear “invisible and sites of contamination, at times, unremarkable.”<sup>350</sup> Visualizing issues of water contamination, for example, is not as challenging in situations where the devastation is easily seen, like towers of thick black smoke billowing off the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland as it burned, or a thick black stream of oil spreading across the surface of the ocean from an oil rig off the coast of Santa Barbara. When journalists from the *Chicago Tribune* covered the issue of silt deposits and other forms of contamination in the Indiana Harbor Ship Canal for a “Save Our Lake,” series, they had

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<sup>349</sup> Berman and Cronin, 2018: 187

<sup>350</sup> Bossen and Freedman, 2015: 75

to take a more illustrative approach and photographed their hands covered in muck suspended below the surface of Lake Michigan.<sup>351</sup>

## THE AMERICAN COAL MINER

As the 1970s drew to a close, Corn was contacted by his mentor Russell Lee to once again work on a government survey project. The President's Commission on Coal was preparing to do another exhaustive report on the coal industry, its first since 1947. Having worked on "A Medical Survey of the Bituminous-Coal Industry," Lee served as the new project's photographic advisor. Lee hired Corn along with photographers Kenneth Murray, Martha M Simmons and Theodore M. Wathen to document the contemporary life of coal miners across the country. Published in 1980, the commission's report, titled "The American Coal Miner: A Report on Community and Living Conditions in the Coalfields," provides an overview of contemporary mining as well as examinations of housing, health and safety, transportation, lifestyles, women in the coal mines and Navajo coal miners. As he did for *Documerica*, Corn focuses on the lives of miners in Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia. Unlike his photographs for *Documerica*, Corn's work for *An American Coal Miner* more closely resembles the aesthetic quality and intimacy achieved in his earlier Appalachia work. Corn shot 161 rolls of black and white film for the project. Freed from consideration of color, as was required in *Documerica*, and with a narrower project scope, Corn returns to the detailed depth and skilled seeing of his humanistic style; his compositions are more thoughtful and use of light more dramatic. For example, the candidness of his photograph of miner Robert Davis (Figure 113) is nostalgic of the comfort felt between Corn and his subjects seen in his photographs of the Clear Fork Valley. Using a tight

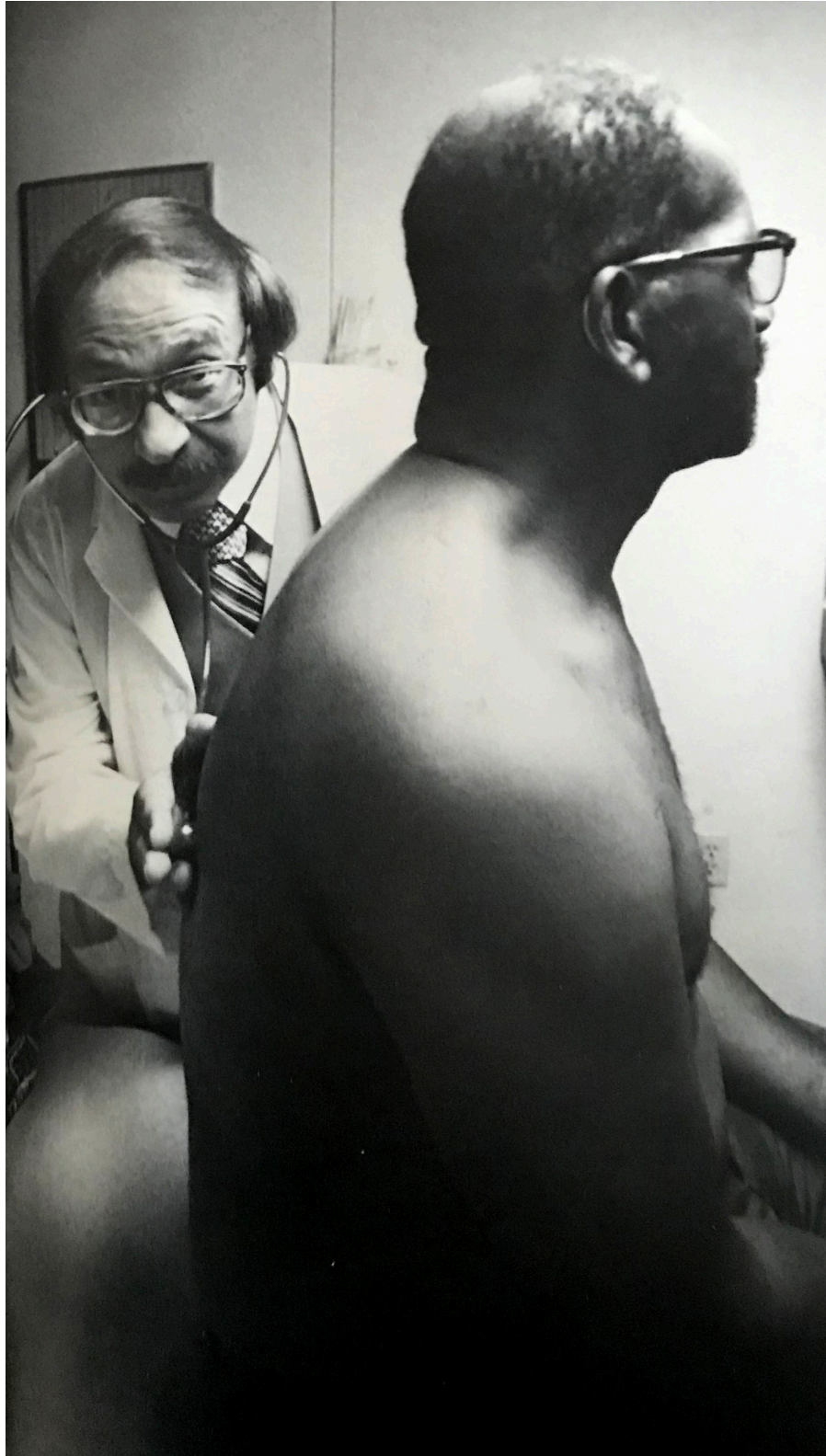
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<sup>351</sup> Neuzil, 2008: 185



*Figure 113. Miner Robert Davis greets his daughter, Mrs. Katherine Cook, and grandchildren after work in Man, W. Va. Jack Corn 1978.*





*Figure 114. Dr. Abdul Dahhan specializes in pulmonary medicine. A native of Syria, he has practiced in this country for the past 12 years. He is a member of the staff of the Daniel Boone Clinic in Harlan, Ky. Jack Corn, 1978.*

frame, Corn captures a spontaneous and unguarded moment as Davis hugs one of his granddaughters after completing a shift in a deep shaft mine near Man, West Virginia. Light bathes the embrace providing ample contrast and a warmth that reads through the monochromatic tones of the photograph. Davis's joy is shared by his daughter, Kathrine Cook sitting to his left. The photograph is used as a full page in the introduction, which sets up the major issues covered in 233 pages, as well as offering introductions to the areas documented in the report. Another photograph, while as intimate, depicts a more serious issue—health. Corn's photograph of Dr. Abdul Dahhan explores the issue of doctor shortages in Appalachia. The photograph (Figure 114) shows Dahhan, a pulmonary specialist, examining a miner at the Daniel Boone Clinic in Harlan, Kentucky. Dahhan left his home in Syria to come to Kentucky to fill a growing need for specialists who could treat illnesses such as black lung disease.

Corn and Rogovin both worked to move the aesthetic of mining photography away from heroics. For Rogovin, it was an effort to divorce the notion of what these miners did from who they were; for Corn it was illustrating the tragic effect over time of mining on the identities of a people and place, which he achieved in his independent, newspaper and *Documerica* work and have become his lasting legacy. Both photographers also predated *Documerica* in looking at the effects mining was having on the landscape. In 2000 Corn began reflecting on his work in Appalachia, writing a detailed chronicle he titled “Valleys of Despair” that spans five decades of his social and environmental activism through photography. Modeled after *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* and *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Corn offers a series of literary tableaux—textural portraits of the images he made documenting the particulars of the social struggle

experienced by miners and their families in Appalachia and underscoring the importance of such work. Corn writes: “After 50 years as a photojournalist, I am still outraged by humans’ indifference to the suffering of other humans.”<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Corn, 2000



**CHAPTER 8**  
**VIEWS OF A MODEL VALLEY:**  
**REFLECTING ON AESTHETICS OF HOPE, DESPAIR, AND ENVIROMENTALISM**  
**IN PHOTOGRAPHS OF APPALACHIAN COAL FIELDS (1956-1977)**

“Coal is a commodity utterly lacking in glamour. It is dirty, old-fashioned, domestic, and cheap. Coal suffers particularly when compared to its more dazzling and worldly cousin, oil, which conjure up dramatic images of risk takers, jetsetters, and international conspiracies. [...] Coal does not make us think of the rich, but of the poor. It evokes bleak images of soot-covered coal miners trudging from the mines, supporting their desperately poor families in grim little company towns.”<sup>353</sup>

— Barbara Freese, 2003

Writer and environmental policy analyst Barbara Freese vividly captured in the above passage from her book, *Coal: A Human History* one sentiment central to a popular discourse of coal explored in this dissertation. Her observation that coal is ordinary, mundane, and disposable is one that has often worked itself into visual narratives that also characterize those who heave the substance from the Earth. Freese’s assertion, however, is limited to a domestic perspective of the observed commonality and un-remarkableness of coal itself as an object. This perspective lacks consideration of the extraordinary power that society’s dependence on coal in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries allowed corporations to exert over people and land. All told, coal mining is a complex cultural and socio-economic phenomenon, accompanied by an equally complex legacy. Without it, the modern world would not look as it does. Coal’s effect on modernity lies both in terms of what it as a source of energy made possible, but also in terms of the scars left in its stead—scars that can be found deeply gouged into mountains and valleys on every continent, and in the lives and communities that were destroyed through its extraction. Their own writings suggest that Corn perhaps understood this complexity better than Rogovin did, or at the very

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<sup>353</sup> Freese, 2003: 2–3

least was more willing to acknowledge it from the onset. Rogovin arrived in West Virginia with a specific aesthetic vision informed by a very specific political ideology—this vision was to show the socio-economic effects of corporate greed that were impoverishing a region. Corn also was interested in documenting injustices and inequality; however, he also understood that coal was an important resource, vital for both industry and in providing livelihoods for those still employed by the coal industry. What the preceding examination has revealed in the Appalachia bodies of work of these two photographers is what former *New York Times* photography critic Andy Grundberg describes as parallel histories of photography and art.<sup>354</sup> In one regard we have in Rogovin an artist who made photographs; and in Corn, a photographer who happened to make art. Rogovin's affinity with painters such as Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier and Käthe Kollwitz and his combined use of photography, poetry and drawing in expressing his point of view reflect his self-identification as being purely an artist. Corn, on the other hand, identified as a journalist, yet his mastery of photographic technology and the photographic medium resulted in remarkably aesthetic visual reportage.

Over the past seven chapters, evidence has been laid out to support three main arguments made in this dissertation. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect upon the evidence presented to support those arguments by underscoring the analysis of source material related to this dissertation's guiding questions. Discussions from each chapter will be summarized to show how the evidence supports the arguments that Corn and Rogovin had significant impact in changing the way society understood coal mining through disruption of visual discourse of mining; that their work pre-dates *Documerica* in visually documenting the effects of human activity on the environment; and that in repositioning visual discourse of mining their work protests the

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<sup>354</sup> Grundberg, 2002: 29

conditions and hegemonic structures of power they encountered in Appalachia coal mining communities. The historical narratives and discourse discussed throughout this dissertation will also be examined in the context of contemporary issues related to the coal mining industry and the broader concepts of visualizing climate change and understanding climate change denial that underscores the importance, relevance and timeliness of this research.

## DISRUPTING THE COLONIAL DISCOURSE OF KING COAL

Both Corn and Rogovin initially arrived in Appalachia possessing a similar bleak, soot-covered vision of miners that Freese described. The notion of miners being dirty and disposable is a narrative that slowly formed over centuries of class politics. A 1906 postcard (Figure 115) from an anthracite mine near Scranton, Pennsylvania underscores the commodification of miners. It shows a miner on crutches down in the mine returning to work injured rather than being replaced. Coal mining was an apparatus for the rigid reinforcement of power the bourgeoisie held over the proletariat, but it also played a role in reinforcing negative nativist views of Slavic immigrants from Eastern Europe. Slavic immigrants, along with Italians, were often discursively positioned as being uncivilized, sub-human savages, and the little value their lives had was at work in the dangerous and often lethal coal mines.<sup>355</sup>

Photography, with its ability to accurately render the detail of a subject and scene, aided in advancing these narratives as photographers were drawn to the danger of mining as an exotic subject matter, and to its gritty aesthetics. Photographers were also drawn to the heroics of mining, illustrating its vital importance to the nation's industrial prowess and power. Advances in photographic technology such as the dark tent allowed for photography in remote areas,

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<sup>355</sup> Higham, 1967: 47–48; 88–89



*Slate Pickers, Anthracite Coal Mining, Scranton, Pa.*

Copyright

Figure 115. Postcard "Slate Pickers Anthracite Coal Mining, Scranton, PA.," 1906.

including the rugged mineral rich landscape of the American West; and the advent of flash powder allowed photographers to expand their view of mining below ground. These technologies allowed photographers to conquer the view and show their dominance of the land, both above it, and below. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, soot-covered miners locked in stoic stares, set against the dark, gritty industrial subterranean landscapes, became the prevailing aesthetic of coal mining. This aesthetic reinforced the discourse that miners were poor and identity-less drudges, laboring away in the dark, out of sight and unimportant. In a great irony of materialism, however, that which coal fueled was admired and romanticized—the ocean-going steamship, the locomotive, electric power all marveled over and celebrated as monumental achievements of industrial might.

Both Corn and Rogovin were able to look beyond the historic aesthetics to see a different nature and character of the people and place that lay beneath the soot. Throughout this dissertation, even in its title, there has been a notion of Appalachians living in valleys of despair. That characterization stems from the perceptions and discourses of outsiders, including reporters from *The Tennessean* and Corn himself early in his career. In concluding this dissertation, this chapter borrows its title from the hope and determination shared by those in Appalachia who believed that they alone could make their communities better. By improving living conditions, providing better access to medical care, educational resources, and spurring new industry individuals like Marie Cirillo, Louise Adams and Don Rasmussen worked to lift their communities from despair and transform them into model valleys. In the end, these tireless advocates helped Corn and Rogovin to see what was ultimately good in these places, when so many had focused on what was bad.

The expanded view of the Appalachian coal fields seen in Corn's and Rogovin's photographs repositioned their subjects in discourse. Corn's photographs show that while the rest

of the country was enjoying the benefits coal provided—ample heat, inexpensive electricity, the free movement of goods produced in a thriving economy—it was destroying lives and landscapes in the areas where it was mined. This disrupted and challenged a seemingly unimpeachable colonial notion of coal's role in American society from fueling prosperity to fueling the destruction of a people and place. Corn's photographs exposed this harsh reality that those living outside Appalachia were either blind to or chose to ignore. Equally as powerful, Rogovin's photographs reposition coal miners in a very different way. Rogovin challenged directly the soot-covered miner aesthetic by showing the miner both at work then completely outside of the context of the mine. He uses time and location as a mechanism to create movement and transformation in his subjects and their narrative. His diptychs begin with a more traditional view of a miner in a mining setting; then work to dismantle the miner's anonymity as an industrial worker to show the individuality and personality they embody in their domestic lives. Sometimes soot-covered, sometimes clean at the beginning of shift, the first portrait immediately conjures nostalgia for the historic mining aesthetic that the second works to destroy; this creates a powerful tension in Rogovin's portraiture.

#### AESTHETICS, ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM IN APPALACHIA

Corn and Rogovin positioned themselves as activists challenging the aesthetics of Appalachian coal communities and the discourses they historically supported. As much as Corn's photographs are a record that visually document the destruction perpetrated by the coal industry, they celebrate a resurrection of the independent spirit of the Appalachian people. It is inescapable that Corn, like many other photographers including Rogovin, was drawn to what writer Silas House describes as the natural aesthetic of poverty found in many parts



Appalachia.<sup>356</sup> But for Corn there was more to the story in Clear Fork than poverty; poverty was the result of the degradation of land and way of life through the exploitive practices of the coal industry, but just as important, poverty was also a beginning out of which rose advocates and leaders whose desire for change was equaled by their vision and ambition. Cirillo said that Corn's photographs did have a positive effect on the community. They appreciated seeing themselves portrayed as more than just poor hillbillies, and his photographs did influence change.<sup>357</sup> For example, the day after Corn's photograph (Figure 116) of children dancing on the crumbling porch of the Clairfield School was published in *The Tennessean* with a story about the school's deteriorating condition, Magistrate Carl Rice ordered the buildings be inspected by a state fire marshal. In a follow up article, the magistrate suggested he would order that they be condemned and demolished. He was quoted in the article saying that the buildings would "burn to the ground in a minute if they ever caught fire. [...] the children would have no chance to escape."<sup>358</sup> The school was demolished and a new one built on the site. The Claiborne County superintendent insisted the photograph had nothing to do with the school being rebuilt. Cirillo, however disagrees, and said that parents in the community had been complaining about the conditions of the two schools in the Clear Fork Valley for a long time, but nothing was done about it until the media attention forced the district's hand.<sup>359</sup>

Rogovin's Appalachian activism was more subtle. Being active in labor movements and demonstrations in Buffalo, Rogovin's socialist ideology led him to sympathize with Appalachian advocacy groups who were calling for a nationalization of the coal industry. Rogovin did not address health and safety issues of the miners directly in his photographs like Corn's did. He did,

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<sup>356</sup> House, 2018

<sup>357</sup> Cirillo, 2019

<sup>358</sup> Kovach, 1964

<sup>359</sup> Cirillo, 2019



Figure 116. "Boy dances on porch, Clairfield School," Clairfield, Tennessee. Jack Corn, 1964.

however, attend local demonstrations and town hall meetings with legislators and other policymakers regarding regulatory and public health responses to black lung disease. His notes on the back of a handout from a 1970 question and answer session with U.S. Representative Ken Heckler—who represented West Virginia’s 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District—include a sketch of a few others in attendance at the meeting. The sketch (Figure 117) shows a man standing with his arms crossed. In front of him the torso of a man who appears to have no legs is turned to look behind him, his left arm draped casually over the armrest of his wheelchair. It is possible the man in Rogovin’s sketch was Jack Smith (Figure 118), a disabled miner whom Corn photographed as part of his *Documerica* assignment. Smith, a resident of Rhodell, West Virginia—which would have been in the 4<sup>th</sup> District—was an outspoken black lung activist and often picketed with miners on strike out of solidarity.<sup>360</sup>

Rogovin’s efforts in Appalachia came from a desire to bring attention to conditions there and change people’s perception of the miner’s themselves. Rogovin was a prolific letter writer, and in letters he wrote to local contacts asking for help with access, he expressed his and Anne’s desire to help the people of the region. In letters to Robert Coles, he discusses his Appalachia project and asks Coles for insight and guidance in how to approach the issue of inadequate access to medical care in the region. After corresponding with Harry Caudill, Rogovin provided him images to illustrate his book *My Land Is Dying*. Many of the letters he wrote, to galleries, magazines, newspapers, and myriad of influential individuals were to promote himself and his work. Rogovin so closely sympathized with his subjects and identified himself by the work he produced that it is difficult to separate him from his work and work from the issues he cared deeply about. While promoting himself or a project he was also fiercely promoting awareness of

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<sup>360</sup> Corn, 1974





Figure 117. Sketch of a disabled miner at a black lung meeting in West Virginia. Milton Rogovin, 1970.



*Figure 118. Original Caption: Jack Smith, 42, Rhodell, West Virginia, Seated in the Beer Joint He Operates in a Wheel-Chair (sic) Bought for Him by His Friend Arnold Miller, President of the United Mine Workers Union. He Was Disabled at Age 21 after a Year in the Mines and Had to Wait 18 Years to Collect Workman's Compensation. He Stays Current on Union Affairs and Will Man a Picket Line. During the Strike for Black Lung Benefits His Wife Wheeled Him in Front of a Train to Stop It. Jack Corn, 1974.*



the issues and causes he worked to expose through his photographs such as inequality or the environment.

## SHOWING THE NEED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

Neither Corn nor Rogovin suggested that environmental concerns were initially part of what they aimed to document in Appalachia—their focus at the beginning was on the miners and their families. What they did not understand until they began their picture-making projects was how connected the people of the region were to the mountains, valleys and streams and that any issue they documented, was in fact an environmental issue. In his unpublished autobiography, Rogovin offers an unapologetic criticism of the destruction capitalism's need for coal was creating. Describing his observations of the troubling destruction of the land he and Anne witnessed and how it was affecting the people of Appalachia Rogovin writes:

But beyond the tragedies, Appalachia's people must live with every day—the hunger and malnutrition and high infant mortality rate and widespread joblessness—there is still another tragedy being enacted there. Thousands and thousands of acres of land have been, and are right now being, or soon scheduled to be cut into—STRIPPED is all too emphatic and suggestive and appropriate word—so that coal can be obtained and shipped to America's over needy industrial empire. Never mind that beautiful trees are felled. Never mind that the flowers and shrubs and meadows are covered over. Never mind that the clear streams and creeks and rivers become slowing moving monsters; acid kills fish; poisonous mud is deposited all over and kills grass, not to mention the wildlife that ordinarily sticks close to water. Never mind that farms are destroyed, and homes, and roads, and indeed entire hills, entire settlements of people. Coal is needed by factories and power companies and TVA, so coal will be obtained—quickly and efficiently and directly.<sup>361</sup>

Corn wrote a similar sentiment about his work in Appalachia in a 2012 post on his Facebook page:

The people of Appalachia are a proud people. They were very open and honest with me, welcoming me into their homes and to their tables. They loved the beauty and solitude of the mountains. I think I understood their love of the land. I felt the same enthusiasm for

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<sup>361</sup> Rogovin, 1997: 44



the rough terrain. Coal mining changed the landscape forever and the land was never again the same. A whole new society came into being with the coal camps. I began photographing during a time when the coal camps were disappearing. Their whole world had crumbled.<sup>362</sup>

Corn's environmental photographs, like the written narratives they accompanied, were meant to provoke society into demanding some type of change. Corn said that through years of picture-making, *The Tennessean* coverage and pressure from environmental groups including TCWP and SOCM, the Tennessee State Assembly began introducing legislation in 1973 aimed at tightening strip mining laws. The state's action was bolstered by a set of new federal regulations granted through the Water Pollution Control Act, which made stream pollution of any kind against the law.<sup>363</sup>

What Corn and Rogovin came to realize through their picture-making was what biologist Barry Commoner describes as the first law of ecology: Everything is connected to everything else.<sup>364</sup> While it provided jobs to some, coal mining stifled development of new industries, leaving those not employed by coal in poverty. Removing the coal required removing rock and soil that flowed down the mountains and fouled streams and farmland, tainted drinking water and strained local sources of food. Poor nutrition and exposure to pollution led to issues of public health. The mountainous terrain that provided the coal and employment for many also isolated towns and people and cut them off from access to vital resources and access to health care. While other photographers such as Lewis Hine, Marion Post Wolcott, Jack Delano, and Russell Lee episodically documented working conditions, living conditions, or poverty, their individual focus was limited to one aspect or another of life in Appalachian coal fields. Corn, and to a lesser extent Rogovin, addressed all of these interconnected issues in their photography. Considered

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<sup>362</sup> Corn, 2012

<sup>363</sup> Corn, 2000

<sup>364</sup> Commoner, 1971: 3–11

both together and separately, their bodies of work provide a much broader, more holistic view of the issues facing Appalachian miners, their families and their communities than had been achieved by photographers before them; and in addressing these issues, they approached mining from an environmental perspective before *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s, the environmental movement, the EPA, or *Documerica*.

## CONCLUSION

Project director Gifford Hampshire has been criticized for creating too broad a directive for *Documerica*. In the project's guidelines for photographers, Hampshire encouraged them to produce "documentation of what the people of the nation do, or are, or think, or feel, or whatever it is that's connected to everything else."<sup>365</sup> But it is the broadness of scope, echoing Commoner's first law of ecology, that allowed the project photographers to explore the complex relationship between mankind and the physical world. Though not initially a success, there has been renewed interest in *Documerica* among scholars and in the news media as the photographs illustrate the dangers un-or under-regulated industry pose to society. Step into one of Professor Nancy Langston's environmental history classes at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan and one will see her using *Documerica* images to dispel students' perceptions of what Lake Superior looked like before the Clean Water Act.<sup>366</sup> Headlines like "DOCUMERICA: Images of America in Crisis in the 1970s,"<sup>367</sup> "Do We Need A New Documerica?"<sup>368</sup> and "Documerica, a photo time capsule of the '70s, should be resurrected,"<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Hampshire, 1972: 4-5

<sup>366</sup> Langston, 2018

<sup>367</sup> Taylor, 2011

<sup>368</sup> O'Neill, 2013

<sup>369</sup> Sisson, 2017

underscore the importance of photographic documentation of the environment in historic and contemporary contexts.

Today, polar ice caps and glaciers are melting at an alarming rate;<sup>370,371</sup> sea levels are rising;<sup>372</sup> storms becoming more violent;<sup>373</sup> droughts more devastating<sup>374</sup>; and wildfires more extreme.<sup>375</sup> At this very moment billions of people are in self-quarantine as the world is crippled by the spread of a virus at pandemic rate, putting the lives of millions at risk. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, philosopher Michel Foucault writes about the importance of visuality played during another pandemic through his notion of panopticism. The visual inspection for symptoms of individuals presenting themselves at their windows forced individuals to obey quarantine and helped contain the spread of the bubonic plague that killed millions living in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe.<sup>376</sup> Visualizations of the plague have manifested in the visual lexicon of coronavirus through memes (Figure 118), and images (Figure 119) reminiscent of the menacing and macabre protective masks, goggles and hat (Figure 120) worn by doctors fighting the pandemic.

Investigating how society visualizes the environment and all the ways it is connected to daily life and well-being is vital to understanding historical and contemporary perceptions of environmental issues. The way that we see the world is heavily influenced by what we are able to observe. What we observe is fundamental in forming our conceptualization of the physical world, the societies that exist in that world and our understanding and perception of how these

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<sup>370</sup> Carrington, 2020

<sup>371</sup> Glick, 2020

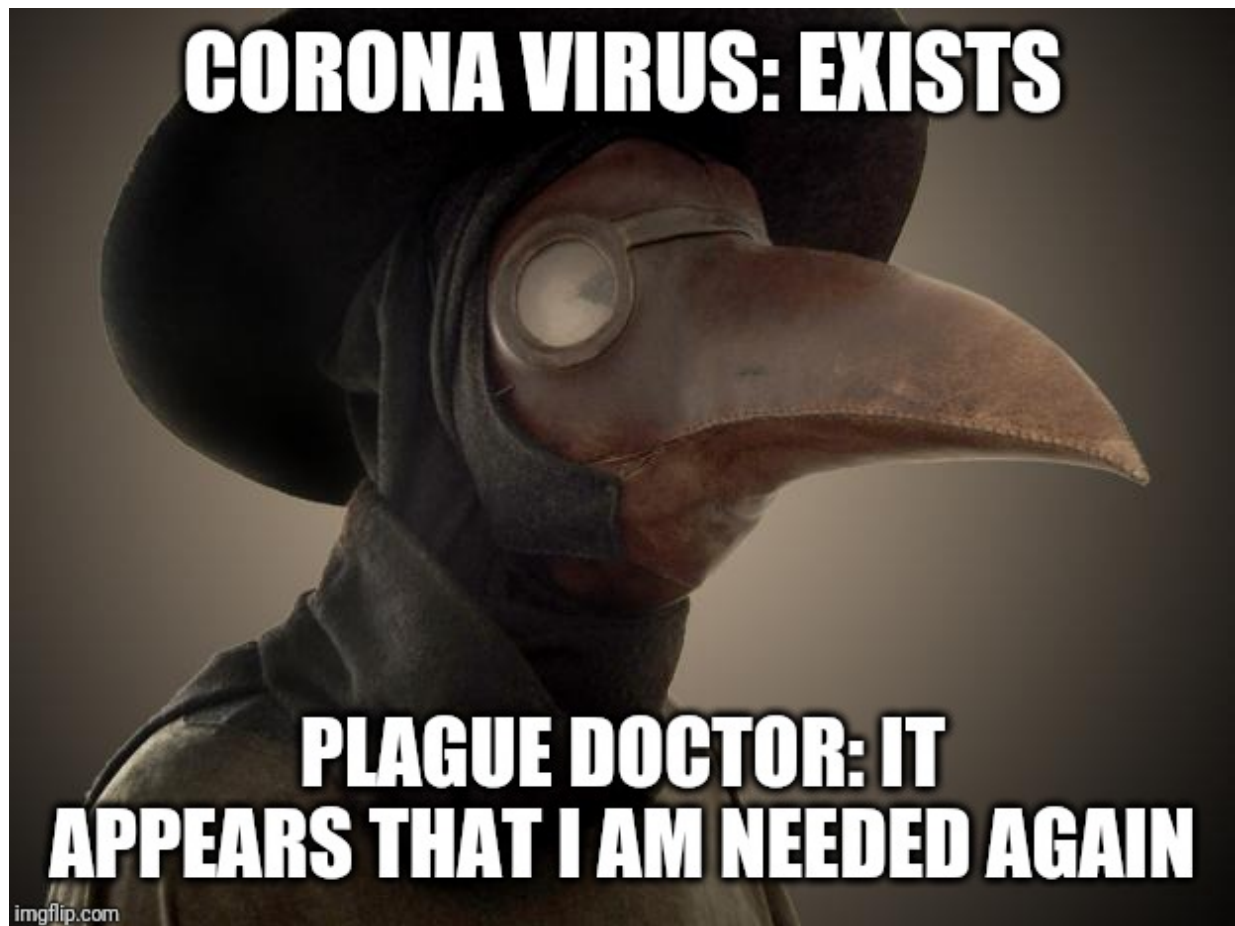
<sup>372</sup> Lindsey, 2019

<sup>373</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists, 2019

<sup>374</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists, 2014

<sup>375</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists, 2020

<sup>376</sup> Foucault, 1977: 195–199



*Figure 119. Plague doctor Corona Virus meme. Imgflip.com, 2020.*



*Figure 120. Medical staff transfer patients to hospital in Wuhan, China, on Jan. 17, 2020. GETTY IMAGES.*



*Figure 121. Venetian Doctor during the time of the plague. Pen, ink and watercolor on paper. Grevenbroeck Jan van Museo Correr (1731–1807). The Bridgeman Art Library, Venice, Italy.*



concepts interact. Exposure to visual messages, such as photographs, plays an important role in the process of socialization and belief building as they are a gateway to a broader reality beyond the physical limitation of what we are able to see in person.<sup>377</sup> This dissertation has examined how historical photographs of mines and miners illustrated environmental and social justice issues such as land use, poverty, education and health prior to the environmental movement, disrupting popular discourse of the time. The approach Corn and Rogovin took is important in understanding the connectedness between humans and their environment because they showed all of these issues being experienced in the same place by the same people. In Corn's unpublished manuscript, he wrote that he was proud of his small contribution to the environmental victories in the Clear Fork Valley when new state regulations limiting strip mining were enacted. In his account, Corn included a verse from a song that folk singer Billy Christopher wrote and performed at a series of demonstrations against surface mining. The lyrics, like Corn's and Rogovin's photographs, show how delicate trees, and even mountains, can be. This delicateness underscores the importance of the environment to society's spiritual, cultural and physical well-being, and how important it is to protect it.

*A million years to make  
A mountain.  
A hundred years to grow a  
Tree:  
A few short days with a Big  
Bulldozer,  
Will send it all down to the  
Sea...*

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<sup>377</sup> Berger and Luckman, 1966: 19–46

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