THE POLITICAL EPISTEMICS OF THE RURAL POOR: CORRUPTION, COAL, CONSERVATISM, AND CONSENT IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

by

PHILIP GEORGE LEWIN

(Under the Direction of David Smilde)

ABSTRACT

While a great deal of literature has explored the conditions under which poor and disenfranchised groups mobilize against domination and exploitation, few studies have examined the processes through which such groups "consent" to ostensibly unfavorable arrangements. Those that do typically represent decontextualized veranda accounts that embrace flawed "false consciousness" narratives, reduce the poor's behavior to misinformation and/or stupidity, and construe political understandings as isolated, independent objects. In order to develop a more theoretically robust explanation of hegemony and consent, this dissertation synthesizes Glaeser's scholarship on political epistemology, Gramsci's hegemony theory and Bourdieu's practice theory in order to develop an approach to the study of "consent" that is rooted in the political understandings of social actors themselves. Drawing from nine months of ethnography, 40 in-depth interviews and a variety of historical methods, I examine three instances in which the rural poor have identified with economic and political actors who appear to harm them. I thus investigate why residents of Shale County, an economically distressed community located in Central Appalachia, exhibit support for officeholders who have openly abused local government; identify with coal mining despite the negative externalities that the industry has imposed upon their community; and vote

for Republican politicians who have targeted the economic aid on which they rely for elimination. Departing from existing work, which attributes the politics of the rural poor to culture war, religious extremism, media indoctrination, and false consciousness, my findings suggest that consent in Shale County has taken shape from the way in which "modernization" has unfolded in the county over the past 60 years.

INDEX WORDS: Appalachia; Poverty; Rural Sociology; Political Sociology; Modernization; Coal; Conservatism; Hegemony

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is for “David,” “Bruce,” “Max,” “Maria,” “Alexander,” “Dawn,” “Lauren,” “Amy,” and the many others who graciously welcomed me into their lives during the course of this study. I value and respect all of you immensely, and I hope that this dissertation honors you. Although you may not know it, I continue to grow everyday—as both a person and sociologist—as a result of your friendship and influence.

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PART ONE: THE POLITICS OF THE RURAL POOR

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Paradoxical Politics of the Poor

In his 2004 book, *What's the Matter with Kansas*, Thomas Frank argues that "people getting their fundamental interests wrong" is not only "what American political life is all about," but that the "tragically inverted…class consciousness" of U.S. voters forms the preeminent sociological mystery of our time (p.1). In a provocative and polemical analysis, he attempts to explain how Kansas transitioned from a hotbed of radical populism to one of the most politically conservative states in the country. He construes the shift as a signature expression of the "Great Backlash," which involves "a style of conservatism that…mobilizes voters with explosive social issues" rather than fiscal sobriety (p.5). In Frank's view, GOP strategists have separated material considerations from the construction of political interests, resituating social class along the jagged lines of culture. Culture war, he argues, has replaced "class" war, with Kansans defining their interests according to moral wedge issues (e.g. whether abortion is permissible and whether gays should be allowed to marry) rather than the pursuit of economic advantage. Unbeknownst to "value voters," Frank claims that conservative loyalties fail to pay off. Republican politicians "walk corporate" once in office, prioritizing the needs of big business while defaulting on their moral promises (p.6). The result is "a populist uprising that only benefits the people it is supposed to be targeting" (p.109):

> All [working class voters] have to show for their Republican loyalty are lower wages, more dangerous jobs, dirtier air, a new overlord class that comports itself like King

> Farouk—and, of course, a crap culture whose moral free fall continues, without significant interference from the grandstanding Christers whom they send triumphantly back to Washington every couple of years (p.136).

The notion of confused working class voters defecting, against their interests, from the Democratic Party is not new. Scholars like Phillips (1969), Ladd and Hadley (1975), and Edsall and Edsall (1991) began to question why economically impoverished voters had formed alliances with corporate power blocs in the late 1960s. Their observations took on renewed salience in the 1990s due to two notable events. First, James Hunter (1992) published his influential *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America,* which argued that American cultural values had undergone a profound moral and religious realignment, polarizing the country into two great camps: The "orthodox" and the "progressive." His work suggested that the camps held irreconcilable disagreements with one another over basic assumptions regarding truth, freedom and national identity that had for generations integrated Americans into a unified culture. Ending on an ominous note, he predicted that cultural divergence would subsume every base of American political conflict, and that tension between orthodox and progressive camps would grow ever worse.

Second, in the 1994 midterm election, the Republican Party gained 54 seats in the house, eight seats in the senate, 12 gubernatorial seats, and 472 state legislative seats, which gave them a majority in the lower house for the first time in 40 years and control over the majority of state legislatures for the first time in 50 years (Gelman et. al 2008). The party establishment trumpeted the occasion as the "Republican Revolution," while a number of journalists lamented the results as the "year of the angry white male" who betrayed his own interests (Fiorina et. al 2011). Drawing inspiration from Hunter's commentary, the preeminent news storyline held that "white men under economic pressure were livid about gays, guns, immigration, affirmative

action, and Hillary, and turned in frustration to the Gingrich Republicans" (Fiorina et. al 2011: 2). As subsequent elections grew more competitive, and as Democrats continued to lose ground to Republicans in poor states—especially in the Midwest and South—a critical mass of scholarly work began to explore the relationship between working class politics and Republican ideological leanings. Almost all took the culture war thesis as their starting point (e.g. Hunter 2005; Green et. al 1996; McCarty et. al 2006; Lindsay 2007; Gilgoff 2007; Moreton 2009). Though somewhat nuanced in their analyses, the work typically upheld Hunter's thesis, decrying poor people's support for the Republican Party as:

> A panorama of madness and delusion worthy of Hieronymous Bosch: Of sturdy blue-collar patriots reciting the Pledge while they strangle their own life chances; of small farmers proudly voting themselves off the land; of devoted family men carefully seeing to it that their children will never be able to afford college or proper health care; of working-class guys in Midwestern cities cheering as they deliver up a landslide for a candidate whose policies will end their way of life, will transform their region into a "rust belt," will strike people like them blows from which they will never recover (Frank 2004: 10).

Although scholars such as Bartels (2006, 2008), Gelman et. al (2008), Fiorina et. al (2011), and Greeley and Hout (2006) have rejected the culture war thesis and challenged its proponents on the extent to which white working class voters have become more conservative and abandoned the Democratic Party, it remains popular among left-leaning pundits, cultural critics and much of the liberal electorate.

Regardless of whether poor voters have actually defected from the Democratic Party, questions regarding why the poor sometimes embrace conservative political positions remain. While researchers should neither presume to know the "interests" of the poor nor impose their own "interests" upon them, poor voters with conservative leanings pose a sociological puzzle insofar as they represent an empirical anomaly. Since the New Deal, poor and working class

voters have shown favor for the Democratic Party over the Republican Party due to their reliance social welfare programs and labor protections. Given conservative opposition to those entitlements and regulations, only three percent of Americans believe that the Republican Party favors the poor (Parker 2012).

If most Americans believe that the Democratic Party favors the poor, and if the poor typically support the Democratic Party in elections, what factors account for situations in which economically distressed voters cast their lot with Republicans? Through what set of processes do poor people develop conservative political understandings? And why do poor and dispossessed voters sometimes support—and even identify with—elite social, economic and political actors who exercise power over them?

1.2 Conservatism in Central Appalachia

Because the social relations in which one is embedded, the institutions into which one is integrated, the personal experiences that one accrues, the collective identity to which one subscribes, and the nature of one's socialization shape political understanding (Glaeser 2011), the causes of conservative partisanship vary. Attempts to identify monolithic explanations of political ideology represent "just-so stories" that lack empirical rigor. One can better illuminate the nature of political understandings by situating them within their context.

This study focuses on the context of Central Appalachia. Central Appalachia houses some of the most economically distressed communities in the United States but produces some of the Republican Party's most dependable bases of support. "Shale County," Kentucky, for instance, ranks as one of the poorest counties in the nation by almost every measure of poverty.[1] Tts residents, as such, rely heavily on federal and state entitlement programs. 41 percent of

[1] Shale ranks as the 18th poorest county in the United States in terms of per capita income ($9,716) and the fourth poorest by median household income ($16,271). The poverty rate hovers just below 40 percent.

Shale Countians draw from the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), nearly all of the county's students participate in the Federal School Lunch Program, almost two-thirds of those students are also enrolled in Medicaid, and more than 25 percent of the county's 18-64 year-old population collect Supplemental Security Income (SSI). At the county level, Shale has received millions of dollars in direct federal investment through the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA). Although much of that funding dried up in 1980s, the county continues to receive direct federal assistance through the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), which prioritizes the county for grant projects given its high level of poverty.[2] Federal dollars have thus funded the majority of the county's infrastructure and public resources.

Given its reliance on government assistance programs, and given the distress that neoliberal economic policies have inflicted, Shale seems like it should form a Democratic stronghold. Electoral data, however, convey a different portrait. 84 percent of voters cast their ballot for Republican Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential election, and 78 percent voted for John McCain in 2008. Republican congressional and gubernatorial candidates have received similar levels of support.[3] As with Frank's Kansas, Shale's alignment with the Republican Party presents an ostensible paradox. Since at least the Reagan era, Republicans have attempted to scale back social entitlement programs, defund agencies that invest in economically distressed localities and water down labor protections. By casting Republican ballots, Shale Countians appear to jeopardize the entitlement programs on which they rely, endanger the federal grant money that they receive, and dilute the labor standards that protect that county's workers. What accounts for the conservative partisanship that prevails in counties like Shale? Why do voters

[2] ARC invests in health care initiatives, technical training programs, higher education facilities, and road construction.

[3] The county has also remained anti-union. While Harlan and other proximate counties were marked by labor militancy throughout the 20th Century, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) never established a presence in Shale (House 2008).

endorse social and economic policies that appear to disadvantage them? When the county suffers from poor roads, ill-equipped schools, inadequate health care, and a lack of community institutions (Eller 2008; Billings and Blee 2000), why are federal aid programs spurned?

1.3 Embracing Industry: Making Sense of Coal

While scholars such as Frank (2004) have speculated that religious fervor accounts conservatism among the poor, a well-corroborated cause of Republican Partisanship in Central Appalachia is the party's warm relations with the coal-industry.[4] Because mining forms an important part of the region's economic identity (Bell and York 2010), voters tend to oppose the environmental and sustainable development policies of Democrats (Blaacker, Woods and Oliver 2012; Shear 2012; Howard 2012; Dwoskin 2012). This too presents an ostensible paradox, however. Almost all of the existing research shows that the coal industry's presence has damaged rather than benefited Central Appalachia.

Numerous scholars attribute Appalachian poverty and underdevelopment to the "internal colonialism" associated with extractive industry (Caudill 1963; Lewis, Johnson and Askins1978; Arnett 1978; Gaventa 1982; Eller 1982). Their studies note how outside business interests have laid claim to the area's abundant natural resources and converted the region into a locus of resource extraction for the benefit of absentee owners. Rather than paying workers generous wages and reinvesting profits in community institutions, the literature suggests that coal operators have expropriated community wealth and burdened residents with myriad negative externalities.

As Duncan (1992) notes, coal has not brought prosperity to Appalachia. Due to monopolistic markets and fierce competition, wages remained low and job security minimal

[4] The coal industry supports Republicans given their opposition to environmental regulation and labor protection, which in its view creates barriers to investment and profitability.

throughout most of the industry's tenure. Although the United Mine Workers (UMWA) and Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) reached an agreement in 1950 that raised wages (discussed in Chapter Three), it required the UMWA to endorse mechanization. This produced a 70 percent industry-wide productivity gain between 1950 and 1984, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of lay-offs and hence structural unemployment.[5] Companies also resisted efforts at taxation, undermined economic diversification and blocked investment in public goods (Eller 1982; Gaventa 1982; Arnett 1978; Seltzer 1985). As Duncan (1992) notes:

> Local economies were wholly dependent on the volatile coal industry for income and employment, and this dependency thwarted investment in non-coal private-sector ventures as well as public infrastructure (p.115).

While coal fueled development in the Northeast and Midwest, it thus left mountain communities poor and broken.[6]

The boom-bust cycles associated with mining, moreover, resulted in massive out-migration and population instability (Rice and Brown 1993; Schwarzweller et. al 1971). Between 1950 and 1960, for example, West Virginia lost more than seven percent of its population due to a bust period in the coal industry—a time when nearly every other state in the union gained population. These dramatic population shifts destroyed social capital and undermined stability in mountain communities (Bell 2009). The violent labor struggles that exploitative mining practices brought exacerbated the situation enveloping the mountains in conflict, disorganization and fear (Duncan 199; Corbin 1981; Jones 1985; Seltzer 1985; Bell and York 2012; Gaventa 1982). Mountaineers have long experienced intimidation and division

[5] Employment opportunities continue to erode today. Due to changes in mining processes, most coal-related job openings require sophisticated skills and that are advertised for on a national market. Poor, uneducated Appalachian youth cannot obtain the mining jobs that they might have 50 years ago.

[6] Duncan (1992), for instance, cites a 1935 study by the US Department of Agriculture as proof. It states that while the prospect of mining brought thousands into the region and kept thousands more who would have otherwise emigrated there, it had an "unwholesome" effect on communities and failed to provide stable work, income and development.

while attempting to organize for better living conditions and greater control over local resources. The industry's muscular response to those efforts has eroded quality of life (Bell and York 2012), stunted the public sphere (Billings and Blee 2000), perpetuated racial and gender inequality (Tickamyer and Latimer 1993), and fueled social problems like alcoholism and drug abuse (Kobak 2012; Cleves and Estep 2013).

The industry also tends to poison the areas in which it is located. Bell and York (2012) argue that "coal may be responsible for more environmental harm than any other energy source" (p.359). Mountaintop removal mining (MTR), which defaces blast sites, kills ecosystems and pollutes water sources, is particularly destructive.[7] MTR also causes noise pollution, damages material infrastructure and sometimes results in deadly landslides (Eller 2008). The tipples that process coal, moreover, produce massive quantities of dust, which erode air quality. Processing generates millions of gallons of toxic slurry as well, which often leaks from dams into nearby water sources and sometimes results in deadly floods (see Erickson 1976).[8]

The cumulative pollution that mining engenders puts residents of extractive communities at risk for developing numerous health ailments. A study by Ahern et. al (2011) found higher rates of birth defects and premature death from respiratory, heart and kidney diseases near MTR sites. Hendryx and Zullig (2009), similarly, observed higher rates of cardiovascular disease, angina and heart attacks among those living in coal camps. Hendryx (2011) found higher rates of both mortality and socioeconomic distress in MTR communities. Even when controlling for

[7] MTR is a method of coal extraction that involves blasting away the ridgelines of standing mountains in order to access the coal seems that are underneath them. The surface layers of rock, which form the mountaintops, along with whatever the soil and foliage that rest on top of them are subsequently disposed of by dumping them into proximate valleys and streams.

[8] The most dramatic examples of such disaster include the Buffalo Creek Flood, which occurred in Logan County, West Virginia in 1972 and killed 125 people while injuring an additional 1,121 and leaving more than 4,000 homeless. A similar disaster occurred in Martin County, Kentucky in 2000, releasing an estimated 306 million gallons of toxic slurry into the natural environment—30 times more waste than what was released during the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989. In 2014, an accident at a slurry impoundment maintained by Duke Energy released millions of gallons of toxic slurry into the Dan River in North Carolina.

variables like income and education, coal mining communities have higher rates of hospitalization for many respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular conditions, birth defects, cancer, chronic illnesses, and mortality than non-mining communities (Bell and York 2012). The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, to put the damage in perspective, ranked coal dominated West Virginia dead last out of the 50 US states in "Physical Health," "Emotional Health," "Life Evaluation," and "Overall Well-Being" in both 2009 and 2010. Coal-dominated Kentucky was not far behind.

Beyond these local effects, the negative externalities of coal extend far beyond the communities in which it is mined/processed. Because of coal's high carbon content, coal-fired power plants emit more CO2 than any other energy source and are thus a major contributor to anthropogenic climate change (Bell and York 2012; Wishart 2012). The burning of coal also emits tremendous amounts of sulfur dioxide and nitrous oxides, which cause acid rain.[9] Fine particle pollution from coal-fired plants, moreover, is responsible for more than 20,000 premature deaths in the United States each year, not to mention thousands of hospital admissions and emergency room visits (Bell and York 2012).

For all of the social, political and ecological damage that mining generates, it provides little if any economic stimulus. Although coal production has steadily increased from 1900 to 2000, coal-related employment has steadily diminished every year since the 1940s (the period from 1971–1978 is an exception). In 2010, mining accounted for only about three percent of the state of West Virginia's total employment. In the state of Kentucky, it accounted for less than one percent of total employment (Blaacker, Woods and Oliver 2012). Mining's share of employment is projected to diminish even further over the next decade. As Cheves and Estep

[9] US EPA testing reveals that coal burning power plants release 67 different toxins into the air, 55 of which are known neurotoxins that can cause developmental problems in the young, and 24 of which are carcinogens (Bell and York 2012).

(2013) note, the coal jobs that once fueled Central Appalachia's economy are "perhaps gone for good."[10]

Even if the coal industry was able to generate new employment and cheap energy, McIllmoil et. al (2010) argue that if the negative externalities of coal production are accounted for, mining reflects net losses for the states in which it predominates. At the community level, Perdue and Pavela (2012) have shown that localities with mining activity—regardless of extraction technique—have poorer socioeconomic outcomes relative to non-mining communities (see also Rural Sociology Task Force 1993).[11] Several other studies regarding the "resource curse" (i.e. why resource rich areas often suffer from poverty and underdevelopment) have reached similar conclusions (e.g. Elo and Beale 1985; Freudenberg and Wilson 2002; Krannich and Luloff 1991). Freudenberg (1992) has sarcastically compared the logic of policymakers who pursue extractive industry to the logic of addicts who prioritize the fleeting "buzz" of drug use over its long-term consequences. He argues that resource extraction results in "addictive economies," which, despite their short term benefits, ultimately devour themselves.

Despite the ostensibly damaging role that mining has played in Central Appalachia's history, and despite the limited economic benefit industry investment brings, the literature shows that public perceptions toward the coal industry within extractive communities tend to be overwhelmingly positive (Bell and Braun 2010; Bell and York 2010; Blaacker, Woods and Oliver 2012; Cabrejas 2012). Residents of mining communities not only believe that economic

[10] Much of this is because the externalities noted above have increased the cost of producing Appalachian coal while lowering the price that markets are willing to pay for it. Obtaining Clean Water Act permits has become more difficult, and new Clean Air Act standards, which monitor for CO2 emissions, have caused power companies to prioritize non-coal sources in order to facilitate compliance (Purdue and Pavela 2012). Additionally, due to the Kingston slurry disaster in 2008, processing plants now face more scrupulous standards for maintaining slurry impoundments, which has created additional costs. As consciousness around global warming grows, coal will only continue to become less palatable as an energy source (Perdue and Pavela 2012).

[11] Using a fixed-effects model, they regressed extractive method on poverty, per-capita income and unemployment rates over a 13 year period in order to examine whether method of coal extraction (i.e. underground mining vs. MTR) affected the socioeconomic outcomes of mining communities.

development, job creation and community social services depend on coal, but that mining represents a "way of life" that reflects the region's cultural lineage.

When few if any statistics support the proposition that the coal industry serves as the economic anchor of the Appalachian region, however, why do so many people believe in its economic import? When an overwhelming consensus of historical and contemporary research shows that the industry's presence has damaged rather than built up the communities in which it is located, why do so many Appalachian residents embrace—and even identify—with coal as a marker of community identity?

1.4 Identifying with the Local State

One potential factor driving pro-coal sentiment in extractive communities is the cheerleading efforts of "local elites" who are tied to the industry. In most Central Appalachian localities, outside interests have relied on powerful community members, which Arnett (1978) calls an "infrastructure of dependency," in order to establish a presence (Arnett 1978; Gaventa 1982; Eller 2008). Although absentee owners directed Appalachia's process of coal-driven modernization, local property owners, politicians, lawyers, and businesspeople secured a portion of the spoils by serving as land agents, attorneys and government liaisons for the industry (Arnett 1978; Gaventa 1982; Eller 2008). Because they came from "good" families with influence in their communities, they also played a key role in legitimating the industry among residents (Fitchen 1981; Duncan 2000).

In addition to facilitating property speculation, dispossession, low property tax burdens, and strike-breaking for coal operators, however, local elites forged a legacy of employing fraud in order to secure elections, embezzling state and federal development funds, using public goods as private spoils, and employing the police and courts to subdue dissent (Perry 1971; Arnett

1978; Eller 2008; Gaventa 1982). Indeed, a defining feature of much of Appalachia involves the way in which officeholders have use local government in order to establish a corrupt and nepotistic spoils system. Local officials routinely divert state and federal monies into their own pockets, use municipal services as political bargaining chips, and extort kickbacks from contractors (Billings and Blee 2000; Eller 2008; Duncan 2000; Shiflett 1995; Auyero 2000).[12]

Nowhere do these observations hold truer than in Shale County. By the county's advent, elite families had already appropriated the local governing and political apparatus as an instrument of communal domination. Across the vicissitudes of intergenerational familial control, Shale's officials used local government to facilitate private gain rather than serving the public good, with "elected" officials often pocketing state and federal money. Billings and Blee (2000) argue that this undermined economic development, deepened local inequality and had a ruinous effect on the county's civil society,

The corruption has continued into present day. An FBI probe that began during the early 2000s, for example, resulted in the conviction of more than 50 local officials on federal corruption charges, including extorting kickbacks from contractors, laundering money for a drug dealer and buying votes on a grand scale (Estep 2011). The conspirators included, among others, the former mayor, several county magistrates and city councilpersons, local judges, the 911 director, the sheriff, the assistant police chief, and many others. The abuse of local institutions has not been secret and has not persisted due to ignorance. Rather, through sustained control of

[12] Eller's (2008) reveals how "powerful families and special interests contro[l] the social service agencies, the schools, and most other means of employment" in a place in which employment and resources are extremely scarce (p.143). Many people are expected to vote for pre-approved slates of candidates in local elections in order to ensure that they continue to receive their government benefits (Billings and Blee 2000).[12] Clientelism has also catalyzed entrenched corruption, as elites have learned about the "revenue-generating potential of county government and the advantage of being on the right side of its controlling faction" (Billings and Blee 2000: 134).

the county's economic wealth and political institutions, local elites achieved a situation in which they could essentially operate as they wished with impunity.

Despite this legacy of abuse, few challenges have been levied against local power brokers. Although this is perhaps unsurprising given the threat of retaliation, what is surprising is the active support and spontaneous consent that elites have been able to mobilize among ordinary residents (Gramsci 1991). The aforementioned FBI investigation took years to achieve results because agents received little cooperation from local residents. Even after the convictions, many Shale Countians asserted that the convicted officials received overly-harsh sentences and were, at heart, "good people." Some even lamented their removal from office, asserting that the county had fared better under their leadership.

This poses a third paradox. Why do many Central Appalachians express support for community who have corrupted elections, embezzled development aid, abused their positions of authority, and forged a nexus with exploitative absentee industrialists? Why does quiescence and consent prevail in situations such as these, wherein we might expect discontent if not mobilization?

1.5 Rationale of the Study

Questions with regard to how and why poor people develop conservative political preferences, why they sometimes embrace harmful industries and institutions, and why they sometimes identify with corrupt political actors form the rationale for this dissertation. Those questions reflect a broader set of concerns in the social sciences regarding why subordinates sometimes consent to domination (Gramsci 1991), why quiescence often occurs in situations of glaring inequality (Gaventa 1982), and why people sometimes appear to participate in the

intensification of their own exploitation (Burawoy 1979). In order to inform them, this dissertation reports on the results of a community study of "Shale County," Kentucky.

Shale was selected as a theoretical case for two reasons. First, it provides an excellent vantage point for study because it "is representative of the depth and duration of poverty in the Kentucky mountains as well as the cultural, economic, and political conditions that surround it" (Billings and Blee 2000: 17). Moreover, a great deal is already known about it. Sociologists have carried out four previous studies the county, documenting nearly every phase of its historical "road to poverty" (Billings and Blee 2000). Second, the county exhibits three ostensible instances of consent. First, despite relying heavily on government aid, the county marks one of the politically conservative areas in the country. Second, despite suffering massive negative externalities from the presence of mining, the county demonstrates overwhelming support for the coal industry. And third, despite engaging in open malfeasance and entrenching underdevelopment, the county exhibits active support for the corrupt incumbents of local government, almost always withholding cooperation from investigators and reformers.

Drawing from nine months of ethnography, 40 in-depth interviews and a variety of historical methods, this dissertation investigates why Shale Countians often embrace conservative politics that appear to violate their economic "interests;" why they often identify with the coal industry despite its massive negative externalities; and why they often support local officeholders who engage in open malfeasance. In the process of answering these questions, I depict the lifeworld that the county's residents inhabit. Marked by socioeconomic transition, a growing informal sector, high rates of drug abuse, the residues of an agriculturally-oriented moral economy, and the weight of urban stereotyping and stigma, Shale Countians live within a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977) that resembles that of many other economically distressed

communities in the rural United States. Hardly peripheral to the questions at hand, I argue that this lifeworld—and the daily experiences that it generates—shape the political understanding that prevail in "middle America."

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Exploring the Culture War Thesis

A number of social scientists, not to mention myriad pundits and the public, have attributed Republican partisanship among the poor to the presence of a "culture war."[13] Although scholars began writing about the ostensible defection of working class voters from the Democratic Party several decades ago, Thomas Frank's (2004) *What's the Matter with Kansas* represents the paragon of the culture war scholarship. Not only does it capture the culture war thesis in ideal form, but it is one of the most well-cited and well-known pieces of work within the relevant literature, having spent 18 weeks on the *New York Times* best seller list.

Frank's thesis suggests that poor and working class voters have forsaken their liberal political ideologies, abandoned the Democratic Party in droves and replaced class politics with a misguided cultural politics. Two forces, he argues, have led to the manipulative repackaging of class as a cultural phenomenon: Religion, which divides those who should unite around common economic concerns along the lines of irresolvable moral disputes, and the false narrative of a "liberal elite" seeking to impose its values upon ordinary people. The latter,

[13] In their review of the exisiting literature regarding American conservatism, it should be noted that Gross, Medvetz and Russell (2011) identify two other potential motivations for conservative leanings. The first involves an effort to impose older conformities on the American body politic. In this view, conservatism is enacted by a majority that feels increasingly threatened by minority activism and social change. The second construes conservatism as support for free market capitalism. In this view, conservatism is forward rather than backward looking in the sense that it seeks imposition of a particular economic system. They, however, reject the notion that conservatism possesses a static essence or a monolithic cause, instead asserting that it is relational and depends on meaning-making processes and collective identity formation.

according to Frank, cements the divisions forged from the affected "public piety" of conservative politicians (p.114, 71).

Despite the cache of Frank's work, his contentions suffer from numerous analytical lapses, and the literature in most cases fails to support his claims. Although the poor sometimes do express resentment against the perception of a liberal elite, they have not made a mass exodus from the Democratic Party.[14] Religion, moreover, does not mechanistically produce conservative ideas. Beyond the empirical shortcomings of the culture war thesis, Frank, along with many other mainstream political sociologists, subscribe to outmoded epistemological assumptions with regard to how political understandings are formed. Specifically, they construe political understandings as isolated, independent objects, exaggerate the influence of "ideological state apparatuses" (especially the media), and falsely presume that rational action should drive political interests.

2.2 Religion and the Republicanization of the Poor

Frank and other culture war scholars depict the United States as a country that is polarized between "progressive" urban areas, which are tolerant, post-Christian and politically liberal, and "orthodox" rural areas that are intolerant, politically conservative and enmeshed in a puritanically religious lifestyle. The first problem with the culture war thesis involves the stereotypical cultural geography that its adherents propound. As Van Gundy (2006) notes: "Many people have an image of rural communities as peaceful, quiet and isolated places, far

[14] Although there is little evidence suggesting mass defection among the poor from the Democratic Party, there is some evidence that United States has become more conservative as a whole. Zernike and Thee-Brenan (2010), for instance, found that nearly a fifth of voting-age Americans identified with the Tea Party. Saad (2010) found that while self-identified liberals have risen, polls shows that there are twice as many conservatives as liberals in the voting age population. And British journalists Micklethwait and Woolridge (2004) have argued that, at its core, the U.S. is a "right nation." Part of the reason of the reason our understanding of the currents of American political ideology remain unclear is that sociologists have contributed little to the debate. Gross, Medvetz and Russell (2011) argue that sociologists have "fail[ed] to develop a comprehensive sociological view of the American right" (p.326).

removed from the cities. But…rural and urban places today have similar rates of [social problems]" (p.5). Frank's portrait of the rural as a domain of idyllic tranquility wherein religious devotion prevails is misleading, if not wholly inaccurate. This holds especially true in the "red" region of Central Appalachia. Not only is religious participation low in many Central Appalachian localities, but "sinful" behavior often pervades community life. Although the Protestant traditions that predominate appear to discourage physical appetites and sins of the flesh (Brown 1988), rural areas—and Appalachia in particular—boast more alcohol and drug abuse and higher teen pregnancy rates than urban areas (SAMHSA 2012; Healy 2013).[15] These observations throw a wrench in Frank's narrative of rural piety.

Nowhere does this hold truer than in Shale County. The county has long battled alcoholism, drug addiction and drug-related crime. Often billed as part of the "pain and pill-popping capitol of world," prescription pill abuse, methamphetamine, marijuana, and other drugs have levied a horrific toll on the area. Hundreds have died from drug-related overdoses, and even more have become dealers. During the late 1980s, a *USA Today* story noted how approximately 40 percent of the county's residents were growing and selling marijuana. Shortly thereafter, a front page story published in the *Kentucky Herald-Leader* featured a notorious local drug dealer defiantly posing in one of his pot patches.[16]

Although Protestantism doubtless occupies an important place in Shale's local culture, the county's history has not been marked by widespread religious devotion. As Chapter Six will

[15] Numerous policy studies—not to mention the effusion of stories in regional newscasts—attest to the disproportionately high rates of substance abuse, alcoholism and drug trafficking that plague Middle America. In Central Appalachia, the Office of National Drug Control Policy has designated a multitude of counties in West Virginia, Eastern Kentucky and Eastern Tennessee as "High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas" (including Shale County). Many states in Central Appalachia have also created special task forces in order to combat escalating substance abuse problems, including Operation UNITE in Eastern Kentucky and the Meth and Pharmaceutical Task Force in Tennessee.

[16] While notorious among authorities, the man was well-liked by many in the county and community. Known as a Robin Hood-like figure, he often used his drug proceeds to give back to the community. Perhaps ironically, this often involved donating money earned through drugs to local churches.

discuss, feuding between elite families predominated social life in Shale from the 1850s until the 1920s. Many believed that the county's *lack of religious devotion* accounted for the violence. One former feudist founded a Baptist boarding school in the late 1800s, guided by the belief that exposure to God and education would put an end to the protracted feuding. Traveling preachers, similarly, undertook missions oriented toward saving county residents from the ostensible "wickedness" in which they lived. Most left soon thereafter, dispirited by their inability to affect positive change. One, whose diary entries about Eastern Kentucky were posthumously published, noted how in Shale:

> There is little or no religion among the people. The county has always been noted for wickedness…Brother Ragan has been preaching here three or four years with no visible results… He says he had never had but one person to claim to be converted since he has known the town…

This situation carried on into the future. When Brown (1988) conducted his ethnography of Shale County in 1942, he reported that while elite families espoused religious devotion, poor families tended to have marginal ties to the church and were far more likely to violate the prescriptions of Christian piety.[17]

I observed a similar pattern during my own fieldwork. Although most upper-class Shale Countians belonged to a church, and although many poor Shale Countians subscribed to Christian ideals in vague way, few vigorously participated in organized worship. A recurring theme among religious participants in my study was that the church was "dying." Although their commentary represents emic understanding, several trends suggest that their assertions harbored a kernel of truth. The Kentucky Baptist Convention, for one, released a report while I was in the

[17] Despite low church attendance and the presence of impiety, Brown did note that puritanical ideals played an important role in community life. Shale Countians, he found, tended to view the bible as an absolute authority and frowned upon the "physical appetites" and "sins of the flesh." Piety, however, did not necessarily prevail. In my reading, religious belief functioned more as a means of legitimation—perhaps even as a form of symbolic violence—for "high class" families. That is to say, Brown classified those who conformed to the community's cultural ideals were considered "high class," while those who appeared to have "lax morals" were considered low class. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

field showing that church participation in the area was dwindling. Hardly thriving, most of the churches that I observed consisted of fewer than ten congregation members, and almost all struggled to make ends meet financially. Some had to consolidate, while others collapsed.

Religious conversions, moreover, were few and far between. Although the churches that I attended continuously made efforts to expand their congregations, they rarely experienced success. Katherine, a 22 year-old missionary who had evangelized in Shale for two summers, told me that:

> It's just not a priority… the spiritual temperature of the region overall [is low]…I would say that [religion] informs the way that people view their afterlife a lot more than their current life.

Although poor Shale Countians subscribed to Christian ideas about the afterlife, Katherine and other missionaries told me that few regularly attended religious services, and that few organized their lives according to the prescriptions of the Christian faith. One of my key informants, Bruce, a 60 year-old recovering drug addict, described Shale as a "missionary zone" on several occasions, referring to its myriad social problems and low rate of organized worship.[18] This is all to say that Frank and other culture war theorists grossly overstate the piety and religiosity of poor people in places like Shale County.[19]

Apart from the culture war's misleading social geography, the contention that religion distracts people from—or simply replaces—their material interest does not hold up to empirical scrutiny. While religion, as Billings (1990) notes, can under certain circumstances function as a distraction or apology for an unjust status quo, it just as often functions as a means of protest,

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[18] Again, the commentary of both Katherine and Bruce represent emic understandings; they are not statements of fact. That written, my own observations suggested that they were roughly accurate, if somewhat exaggerated. If nothing else, they show that Shale Countians understood themselves to be inhabiting a somewhat godless community.

[19] Most of the exisiting research suggests that middle and upper class residents who live in poor areas exhibit the highest levels of religious devotion, not the economically distressed themselves. The poor are in fact often deterred from participation in—or at least alienated from—the political process (Salamon and Van Evera 1973; Gaventa 1982; Howell 1973; Pateman 1970; Chambers 1983).

change and liberation. Billings' work stresses how religion operates as an autonomous sphere, which carries a mediating—and variable—influence on political ideology. Imbuing Republican appeals to Christian values with a universalizing causal power, as such, carries little internal validity. The argument loses further credence when measured against empirical research regarding the impact of religion in the region.

Shaunna Scott's (1995) ethnographic work, for instance, suggests that the presence of religious practices does not always indicate strong religiosity. She discovered that small Pentecostal churches in Harlan County, KY engaged in snake handling practices not for the purpose of religious devotion, but in order to create a spectacle in order to attract greater quantities of people to their dwindling congregations. Other studies have shown that Protestantism has actually contributed significant moral, ideological and leadership resources to labor movements in the Appalachian coalfields, helping to transform southern miners into "one of the most class conscious occupational groups in the United States" (Billings 1990:16). Corbin (1981), for instance, found that religion "promoted collective thought and action, gave cohesion and strength to a social class, and permitted…miners to sever the servility and feelings of inferiority that class oppression often breeds in the oppressed" (p.181). Scott's (1995) work, similarly, showed that "religion provided a basis for social critique and class solidarity" (p.149).

Both Billings and Scott stress that religion translates neither automatically into radical political critiques nor conservative ideology. They instead construe religion as a variable that "articulates with political ideology" (Scott 1995: 151). It becomes oppositional or reproductive relative to social and material conditions on the ground. This conforms to the findings that scholars have derived in other contexts as well (e.g. Mainwaring and Wilde 1989's work on Liberation Theology in Brazil). Collectively, the literature casts doubt on Frank's essentialist

contentions, which developed from analyzing the pronouncements of prominent conservative pundits and assuming that they diffused unproblematically into the hearts of the masses.

Empirical studies of the relationship between religion and poor people's politics thus fail to sustain the culture war thesis. Moral piety—except in a minority of cases—cannot explain why disadvantaged populations vote Republican. Gelman et al.'s (2008) work, in fact, shows that religious affiliation predicts Republican voting more for rich families than for poor families. It also finds that rich voters who live in poor states are more likely to attend church than rich voters in liberal states. Their work concludes that "lower-income Americans don't, in general, vote Republican—and, when they do, richer voters go Republican even more so" (p.16). Research by Bartels (2006, 2008) has produced similar findings. In light of those results, Fiorina et. al.'s (2011) recent book proclaims that:

> The simple truth is that there is no culture war in the United States—no battle for the soul of America rages, at least none that most Americans are aware of…The myth of a culture war rests on misinterpretation of election returns, a lack of comprehensive examination of public opinion-data, systematic and self-serving misrepresentation by issue activists, and selective coverage by an uncritical media more concerned with news value than with getting the story right (p.8).

The authors argue that four factors have generated the culture war myth. First, analysts have falsely construed "closely divided" elections over the past 20 years as "deeply divided" contests representative of a polarized public. Second, they argue that political activists are not "normal people," and that their views do not represent popular sentiment. Third, they blame the media for "portray[ing] the unrepresentative as the representative" (p.22). And fourth, they argue that researchers have confused political positions with political choices. Gelman et. al (2008), on the same note, found that although the Democratic Party tends to win rich states, and although the Republican Party tends to win poor states, rich people still usually vote Republican, and poor people still usually vote Democratic.

Thus, in sum, poor voters have not massively defected from the Democratic Party. Most poor voters in fact still vote for Democratic candidates. Although religion does shape political preference and electoral behavior, it shapes the politics of the affluent much more so than the poor. Moreover, when the poor do "value vote," it does not indicate that they have forsaken their materials interests. As Greeley and Hout (2006) argue, "value voting is not a form of false consciousness; voters do not forget their material interests when they vote their values or vice versa" (p.66).[20]

2.3 The Liberal Elite: Outside Intervention in Appalachia

Although Frank's thesis regarding the relationship between religious devotion and Republican voting seems dubious, his writing concerning the threat of the liberal establishment might very well contain a kernel of truth—though not in the way that he might have anticipated. Frank's position argues that

> the idea of a liberal elite is not intellectually robust. It's never been enunciated with anything approaching scholarly rigor, it has been refuted countless times, and it falls apart under any sort of systematic scrutiny (p.115).

Upon closer inspection, however, a different story emerges. More than perhaps any other group in the United States, elites have "othered" poor rural whites, especially those living in Appalachia (Harkins 2004; Wray 2006; Newitz and Wray 1996; Hartigan 1997; Eastman 2012). Harkins' (2004) work shows that stigma against southern whites began to develop nearly 300 years ago. As early as 1728, a report on the state of the southern mountains lamented how: "There is no place in the World where the Inhabitants live within less Labour…they lye and

[20] That written, Conservative Christians are more likely to vote for Republican candidates relative to most other religions groups. The tendency does not represent a change though; they have long shown a preference for conservative politicians and policies (Greeley and Hout 2006). Moreover, the tendency represents a difference of degree rather than kind. For instance, relative to Mainline Protestants, Conservative Protestants show only a slight preference for Republican candidates. Greeley and Hout (2006) thus conclude that while we should not dismiss the influence of religion on voting, "the renewed emphasis on moral values is overblown" (p.55).

Snore, till the Sun has run one third of his course….they loiter their Lives, like Solomon's Sluggard" (p.15). The statement's author, William Byrd II, impugned mountaineers as "unhealthy, slovenly, and utterly averse to work" (p.15).

This discourse carried on into the 19th century, as manifest in the accounts of the innumerous traveling preachers who evangelized throughout Appalachia. One of them, Charles Woodmason, decried the "extreme Indolence" of the white farmers whom he encountered. He claimed that they "delight in their present low, lazy, sluttish, heathenish, hellish Life, and seem not desirous of changing it" (p.16). Planter D.R. Hundley, similarly, wrote that "poor whites" were "the laziest two-legged animals that walk erect on the face of the earth…[exhibiting] a natural stupidity or dullness of intellect that almost surpasses belief" (p.17). During this period, northerners and middle-class southerners viewed mountaineers as so morally, culturally and physically degraded that they called their whiteness into question (see also Wray 2006).[21]

Harkin found that constructions of the southern mountaineer became even more offensive after the Civil War, as the push toward modernization began to grip the country.[22] While early accounts of Appalachia as "other" conveyed the region as fundamentally different but safe, urbanites and local elites began to construe the region as a threat to civilization by the 1890s (Harkin 2004; Batteau 1990).[23] Newspaper reports decried the region's lawlessness and

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[21] Reporters and journalists made unfavorable comparisons between poor whites and various minority groups, arguing that due to the "destructive influences of the southern climate, rampant disease, and a woefully inadequate diet," they were "neither truly 'white' nor clearly 'nonwhite' but instead, a separate 'Cracker race' in all ways so debased that they had no capacity for social advancement" (p.17).

[22] See (Berman 1983) for a comprehensive review of the intellectual currents associated with modernity. A wealth of scholarship in post-colonial studies also speaks to the ways in which triumphalist notions of Western progress and superiority were employed to stigmatize non-modern societies.

[23] While these writers called the whiteness of mountaineers into question, they did not outright deny it as they did with Black Americans and other ethnic immigrants. As such, whereas elites enslaved and enacted physical violence along with institutional discrimination against these groups, they merely satirized and criticized the character of poor whites. Generally speaking, critical commentary against poor whites had the effect of heightening tensions between them and blacks. Black slaves resented the role that poor whites played as overseers and patrol riders in the South, and poor whites resented the status threat of poor Blacks. As Harkin (2004) writes: "The construction of a 'poor white' and 'white trash' social and cultural category thus allowed black slaves to carve out a space of social

moonshining, especially when mountaineers organized resistance against efforts to regulate stills. More than anything, journalists capitalized upon the "feuding" that was besieging the region in order to make unfavorable comparisons with modernist urban America.[24] Reporters from papers like the *New York Times* wrote columns suggesting that cultural and genetic deficiency precipitated the conflicts, and that mountain people posed a threat to national prosperity.[25] The only way that they could be reined in, such reporters claimed, was through "regional progress" (Harkin 2004: 35).

The social construction of Appalachians as a threat coincided with efforts to open new markets in rural locales, capitalize upon natural resources in rural areas and push toward a new vision of societal progress as industrialization, modernization and urbanization. As a 1912 editorial in the *Baltimore Sun* asserted:

> There are but two remedies for [mountain feuding], and they are education and extermination. With many of the individuals, the latter is the only remedy. *Men and races alike, when they defy civilization, must die*. The mountaineers of Virginia and Kentucky and North Carolina, like the red Indians and the South African Boers, must learn this lesson (p.35-6) [my emphasis].

Like other prominent colonial discourses (see, for example, Narayan 2013's work on Britain's capitalization upon isolated instance of *sati* in order to justify colonialism in India), Harkin notes how such reporters conflated the actions of single families with entire regional populations. By the turn of the century, as such, "the idea that the southern mountaineers were a race of violent

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superiority, as well as permitted the white planter elite to justify enormous economic and social inequality among whites in a supposedly democratic society" (p.17).

[24] Feuding by no means represented "backwardness." In fact, it typically occurred between elite mountains families as opposed to the poor (Billings and Blee 2000), and social changes related to modernization were often the cause of feud-related violence (Harkin 2004; Eller 2008). Harkin (2004), for instance, argues that "violent outbreaks in the 1890s most likely resulted from the climax of the region's post-Civil War economic and social transformation. The advent of extractive industries…and construction of railroad lines needed to bring these products to national markets, increases in land speculation and rising rates of absentee land ownership, and decreasing agricultural opportunities all led to a violent struggle between forces advocating modernization and those fighting to maintain local autonomy and a traditional agricultural system" (p.36).

[25] This is evident in the terminology; rather than writing of vendettas and families, they wrote of feuds and clans, capitalizing upon the low status of the Scotch-Irish at the time.

savages who threatened the progress of the rest of America had become firmly entrenched in the American psyche" (Harkin 2004:36).[26]

The protracted stigmatization that southern mountaineers faced generated a great deal of animosity and sensitivity, as Appalachians "sought to defend the reputation of the mountain people by presenting them…as no different than other American citizens" (p.41). This urge weighed heavily in Shale County, which journalists targeted for sensational newspaper content given its legacy of feud violence. In an 1899 *New York Times* article about Shale, the reporter reflected on how sources in nearby Rock City advised him to avoid the county. One stated:

> If I were you, I would not venture into Shale County. Nice people, oh yes! But there are two kinds of people they do not like—detectives and newspaper men. Detectives go at the risk of their lives, and they have run newspapermen out of town and will do it again. I wouldn't advise you to go.

When the journalist eventually visited the county against the advice of his sources, he interviewed a prominent doctor in the county who reflected on the negative reputation that Shale had inherited from the urban media:

> Valley Town [the county seat] has been very unfortunate in having been misrepresented by writers more enterprising and sensational than they were truthful…Writers of lurid dispatches have represented the whole people as affected by the passions that moved the few men who engaged in fatal quarrels.

Other interviewees told the reporter that they felt "resentment…against the press in consequence of the lurid accounts published concerning the feuds that have attracted the attention and criticism of the country."

Despite attempts rebuke the damning reports of opportunistic journalists, the pejorative commentary of outsiders took a toll on the county's collective consciousness. Accusations that Appalachians—and Shale Countians in particular—were "lazy, slovenly, degenerate people who

[26] Harkin concludes that, in all, mountaineers were constructed as a "white other, a group both within and outside of 'normative' American society" (p.44). This is of course the difference with nonwhites—that they supposedly were granted one foot into the door of normative citizenship.

endure[d] wrenching but always comic poverty" made a mark on the region's culture and collective identity, resulting in distrust toward outsiders and a sensitivity to stereotyping (Harkin 2004: 19).[27] Indeed another 1899 *New York Times* article about Shale began: "Shale County knows it has a bad name."[28] This understanding persists today and is reflected in the "double consciousness" that is present in many mountain residents (DuBois 1994).

Beyond afflicting the collective consciousness and psychic states of mountain residents, problematic assumptions about Appalachia's debased residents and culture—and the impoverished values of rural people more generally (Chambers 1983)— guided state development policy in the region. Policy makers have long attributed Appalachia's poverty and underdevelopment to an inferior culture composed of misguided value orientations (Eller 2008; Billings and Blee 2000; Fisher 1993; Gaventa 1982). Early researchers construed the Southern mountains, despite their vastness, as "a coherent region inhabited by a homogenous population possessing a uniform culture" (Shapiro 1978: ix). Typified by works such as Horace Kephart's (1913) *Our Southern Highlanders* and especially Jack Weller's (1965) *Yesterday's People*, these

[27] There are a few things to note about these accounts. First, as Harkin (2004) notes, they are exaggerated in a cartoonish sort of satire. They seem constructed so as to uplift the urbanite and elite's conception of himself rather than to accurately describe mountain life. As Eller (2008) has stated, mainstream conceptions of progress depend upon the "othering" of Appalachia and other groups—on orientalism. Second, contemporary journalism by well-intentioned reporters continues to make the mistake of depicting Appalachian social problems without contextualization. Bourgois (1998) argues that the danger of intimate ethnographies that provide rich depictions of social life rests in their tendency to perpetuate malicious stereotypes by eliding the structural context in which that social life plays out. Thus, Appalachian reporters miss the lack of jobs, infrastructure, etc. that lends itself to the behaviors depicted. And last, the depictions are fundamentally evaluative rather than explanatory in a way that is not only opportunistic on behalf of the writers, but which serves to impugn the dignity and self-worth of those depicted. As Malcolm X (1992) writes in his autobiography, "I have no mercy or compassion in me for a society that will crush people and then penalize them for not being able to stand up under the weight" (p.22).

[28] The region's historical subjection to stereotyping, interventionism and cultural engineering experiments helps to explain the ideologies of egalitarianism that hold sway there today. While such ideologies may not necessarily constitute reactions to the "liberal elite" that forms such an important part of Frank's narrative, they do elicit an intolerance toward behavior that is perceived as "snobby" (Scott 1995: 187; Brown 1988). Snobby behavior includes pretentions to possessing higher or superior knowledge and displays of wealth and power, such as stylish clothing, expensive jewelry, and expensive cars (Scott 1995). While Frank construes such beliefs as anti-intellectual (a claim refuted by the high value that Appalachians tend to impute to education), Scott (1995) and Eller (2008) show that they have origins in past egalitarian social relations, neighborly reciprocity and a history of paternalistic social administration initiated from without.

explanations attributed Appalachian poverty to the alleged traditionalism, sullenness, stubbornness, fatalism, and perverseness of its people.

During the War on Poverty, the region was transformed into a "domestic testing ground for strategies to promote economic growth" at the same time as "social scientists used it as a laboratory for experimentation in human behavior modification" (Eller 2008: 2). Rather than reorganizing land use patterns, redistributing wealth disparities or investing in basic human needs, programs associated with the EOA focused on assisting poor youth to break out Appalachia's ostensible "culture of poverty." As Eller (2008) notes:

> Educational programs such as Head Start, after-school enrichment, VISTA, and homemaker skills training were designed to change the behavior of families, raise the expectations of youth, and prepare adults for jobs in the new economy. Even the participation of the poor in [community action agencies] was deemed by many OEO administrators as just another tool to acculturate the poor into the value system and behaviors of the middle class (p.101).

State development, in short, attempted to modernize Appalachia's culture and integrate its people into the broader currents of U.S. society. Needless to say, it did not work. The projects ran up against the realities of entrenched local power structures and absentee mineral owners, who in many cases had created insuperable barriers to alternative development (Billings and Blee 2000; Gaventa 1982).

Thus, in conclusion, while scholars like Frank (2004) dismiss the notion of a "liberal elite," the region's history conveys a different story. The Northern and urban contingents of the United States have stereotyped Appalachia as backward and debased for 300 years, and newspapers like the *New York Times* and television shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* have spawned lurid accounts of the region for generations. Policymakers, moreover, have made numerous interventions into the region, attempting to lift residents out of their alleged "culture of

poverty" through offensive cultural engineering experiments. Frank's rejection of the "liberal elite" is thus as farcical as his narrative of rural piety and rural value voting.

2.4 Re-examing Class and Interest in Shale County

As the previous sections show, the culture war theorists set out to explain voting behavior without attempting to understand the social contexts which gave meaning to it. The region's history demonstrates that the processes of developing preferences, formulating s interests and making political commitments are not straight-forward tasks. For example, while the War on Poverty provided material aid to Appalachia, it came packaged in demeaning assumptions and entailed a loss of local autonomy. Opportunities to affiliate with a party, movement or political ideology that clearly benefitted one's needs and "interests," as such, rarely presented themselves. These contradictions have complicated political life in the mountains by rendering the notion of an interest into a slipknot.

Even what appears to be the most obvious choice for Appalachians—the decision to unionize—becomes fraught when subjected to historical scrutiny. Almost every social problem and disparity in Appalachia relates in some way to policies of internal colonialism.[29] Organizing miners in the coal economy often provided the only hope for improving living standards and gaining a measure of self-determination.[30] To reject the union, it was thus thought, was to reject one's own life chances. Although the benefits that the unionization produced for miners are undeniable, however, the UMWA's leadership was also responsible for some of the most damaging labor policies to befall the region.

[29] For a review of the internal colony model, see the theories of poverty discussed in section two.

[30] During the 20th century, by carrying out some of the most militant labor actions in United States history, miners who fought for collective bargaining rights through the UMWA won an eight-hour working day, compensation in the form of currency as opposed to scrip, health and retirement benefits, compensation that often exceeded a living wage, and critical improvements in working conditions through legislation such as the Federal Coal Mine and Safety Act.

While John L. Lewis originally used the UMWA's control over the national energy supply as a bargaining chip to win better wages and labor standards for disenfranchised workers, towards the end of his tenure he became increasingly cozy with the BCOA, having purchased and invested in coal mines, banks and railroads himself—using union funds in order to do so (Scott 1995). Moreover, Lewis' bargaining strategy with the BCOA ultimately worked to produce hundreds of thousands of losses in jobs. Viewing increased mechanization/production and decreased competition as the key to sustainability and stability in the industry, Lewis fought for and won the National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement (NBCA) in 1950. Although it increased wage rates for the average miner, the contract contained a no-strike clause that defanged the UMWA, while it simultaneously paved the road toward mechanization, which Lewis knew would result in the displacement of thousands of mine workers. The results of the act were dramatic: During the 1950s, more than 300,000 miners lost their jobs, which created a devastating and enduring problem of unemployment in the region (Seltzer 1985).

After retiring in 1960s, and after a short stay by Thomas Kennedy, the reigns of the UMWA were passed to Tony Boyle in 1962, who, throughout most of his tenure, acted as an aide to coal operators. In the winter of 1968-1969, for example, following the explosion of a mine owned by the Consolidation Coal Company in Farmington, West Virginia that killed 78 miners, Boyle sympathized with mine owners, attributing the explosion's cause to the "inherent danger of mining" rather than the unambiguous corners the company had cut in terms of safety standards (Eller 2008). Boyle would go on to consolidate the ill repute of rank-and-file miners for arranging the murder of Jock Yablonski, who challenged him for presidency of the UMWA, in 1969. While I could continue with illustrations that demonstrate how UMWA leadership often worked in collusion with coal operations, exercised autocratic control over the rank-and-

file, and embezzled union funds, the point is that the decision to endorse/join the union is not as easy or clear cut as it might seem—especially in Shale County.

In pressing for the 1950 BCOA agreement, Lewis believed that small, independently owned coals mines—such as those that operated in Shale—hindered rank-and-file organization and precipitated problems of over-competition. Shale's miners thus experienced much of NBCOA's fallout, as locals mines lost the capacity to compete with capital intensive operations organized under UMWA contracts. As such, the decision to support unionization by no means posed a "no-brainer" for Shale's working class.

A second, arguably more important aspect of the context in which Shale County's political behavior occurs relates to the implementation of War on Poverty and Appalachian Regional Commission programs. Such programs attempted to acculturate mountaineers for jobs that did not exit, disguised low-skill employment capacities as job-training initiatives and failed to address the structural roots of poverty. As Eller (2008) notes, locals became distrustful of outside "experts" who turned federal programs into a moral crusade and experiment in social rehabilitation, grew to resent the paternalism that these "experts" brought to bear on their lives, and developed suspicions regarding the purposes of political reform.

Corruption within local governments exacerbated the problem. School boards, civic organizations, and local officials abused federal grant money, using it to solidify the political machinery that dominated their communities. Investments from the OEO and ARC were often organized as part of a spoils systems, in which powerful community members exchanged opportunities and jobs created by federal investment for political loyalties. Eller (2008) argues

that "for some Appalachian elites, managing poverty was more acceptable than fighting it and sometimes more rewarding" (p.157).[31]

Nowhere do these observations hold truer than in Shale County. Shale's "elected" officials used federal and state funding in order to buttress an already rampant spoils system and personally enrich themselves.[32] This shaped residents' politics in significant ways. First, it produced skepticism toward government aid, which came packaged in offensive assumptions, exacerbated local corruption and rarely achieved its intended ends. And second, it engendered a disjuncture between political belief and political action. As Billings and Blee (2000) note, "in the context of clientelism…not only good reasons but loyalty, esteem, and expectations of future favors, to say nothing of fear and intimidation, influenced the positions people advocated" (p.135).

Thus, to claim that Shale's residents willfully cast their votes for Republicans, and that Republican ballots uniformly result in disadvantage, would be to ignore the social and historical context in which their political behaviors and understandings emerged. While scholars like Frank proclaim that the interests of the rural poor rest unambiguously in expanded government assistance, federal development initiatives and collective bargaining, I have shown that the benefits of such policies are, at best, ambiguous. Although ARC and the various assistance programs that grew out of LBJ's War on Poverty provided the poor with better infrastructure and a ramshackle safety net, state intervention also deepened clientelistic arrangements vis-à-vis local government and deprived many people of their economic independence. Assistance programs have also historically been implemented under the auspices of a demeaning set of

[31] At the federal level, congressmen tended to use ARC as little more than a tool for initiating pork barrel legislation, which ensured the loyalties of those same local political elites that benefitted from entitlement spending.
[32] A number of local governmental positions associated with considerable power derived from appointment, not election. In the case of positions that did mandate elections, electoral campaigns were notoriously corrupt, being characterized by bribery, extortion and tampering (Billings and Blee 2000).

assumptions, which has conveyed the Appalachian poor as perverse and ignorant "hillbillies" whose problems result from antiquated values and a backwards culture. Thus, while some dismiss the notion of a "liberal elite" as a ruse, the history of state, industry, media, and outsider interaction with the region conveys a starkly different story.[33]

2.6 Embracing the Coal Industry

While a wealth of research has speculated on the politics of the poor, especially poor Christians, few studies have explored support for and identification with harmful industries. Most of the literature, to the contrary, explores situations in which the poor have mobilized against polluting industries, especially in the case of coal (e.g. Fisher 1993; Bell and Braun 2010). Others have examined instances in which repression has prevented the aggrieved from airing their discontents (Gaventa 1982; Cabrejas 2012). The few studies of pro-coal sentiment that have been conducted suggest that individuals living in or near extractive communities express support for industry because they overvalue the economic benefits that it provides (Blaacker, Woods and Oliver 2012). Given the belief that individuals fashion their views toward industry according to rational calculations of economic advantage, most of the scholarly research has focused on debunking industry claims with regard to the economic benefits of coal extraction (e.g. Wishart 2012; Blaacker, Woods and Oliver 2012; Perdue and Pavela 2012; Bell and York 2010).

Nascent research, however, has begun to explore the cultural meanings of coal mining and environmentalism, which marks a much more promising direction. Much of the culturally-oriented work has focused on gender dynamics, illuminating how holding down a mining job

[33] These trends may even inspire the "embattled" sentiment that many Evangelical Christians exhibit (Smith and Emerson 1998). Perhaps efforts to preserve the Christian principles on which America was allegedly founded (Smith 2002), in other words, are part and parcel of a broader effort to preserve values and ways of life that have been systematically assaulted by modernization, yellow journalism and urban stereotyping. But this is mere speculation.

establishes hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Bell and Braun 2010). While these scholars have not necessarily tapped into how the gendering of mining as an occupation translates into active industry support, they have explored how it contains environmentalism.

In their study of environmental justice activism in the Appalachian coalfields, Bell and Braun (2010), for example, found that many men were reluctant to speak out against coal for fear of losing status in their community. They argue that because coal mining was central to their identities as men, protesting against coal was far more difficult than it was for women, even if they themselves did not work in the mines. Almost all of the men in their sample who had become environmental activists, as such, had lived outside of the region for anywhere from five to 30 years, which altered the way in which they defined masculinity, diminishing its connection to supporting coal mining. This line of research is promising in that, by exploring the non-economic dimensions of industry support, it moves beyond rational actor theory.

Another important study along these lines attempted to connect pro-coal sentiment to the concept of "community economic identity" (Bell and York 2010).[34] It reveals how the coal industry uses public relations in order to frame collective identity around the historical legacy of mining. While sociologists of work and industry have long noted how organizations muster commitment among incumbents by cultivating organizational identities (e.g. Kunda 1986; Edwards 1979; Besser 1996; Barker 1993), few studies have examined how economic identity diffuses outside of the organization's walls, coming to inflect whole communities. Thus, while most of the existing literature accounts for pro-coal sentiment by citing economic

[34] Their findings, however, remain inconclusive due the methodology employed. As opposed to exploring cultural reception, they simply coded industry propaganda in order to generate their findings.

misinformation, emerging scholarship has begun to examine coal's symbolic import to Appalachia.

2.7 Identifying with Local Elites

With regard to the final puzzle that this dissertation probes—why the people sometimes support and identifying with corrupt officeholders within the local state—the literature suggests that the premise of the puzzle is somewhat misleading. Looking upon local political choice as a manifestation of freewill is to embrace the pluralist model of political participation that Gaventa (1982) critiques, which infers that people are free to act as they wish, and that they do act when they have problems. In Central Appalachia this has not historically been the case.

Relations with elites must be understood within the context of severe and persistent rural poverty and entrenched clientelism. In most poor Appalachian localities, securing the possibility for employment, maintaining entitlement benefits and becoming eligible for social services (e.g. road work and access to municipal water) requires social capital and allegiance to local power brokers. As Coles (1971) writes:

> In some counties of Kentucky and West Virginia one or two families run everything; they control the judge's office and the sheriff's office and they have their man as the superintendent of schools. It is impossible for those who live scattered up the hollows and creeks to defy such "authorities" without paying one or several harsh penalties (p.297).

Because employment and income are so scarce, control over jobs functions as a source of power and wealth in a way that does not hold as true in urban areas (Duncan 1992). Jobs, Duncan (1992) asserts,

> are a kind of currency...private employers give jobs to family members, friends, and, frequently, political supporters. The valuable, steady public-sector jobs, and in some instances, the benefits and opportunities available through welfare programs are part of an entrenched patronage-driven political system. In many Appalachian communities a few powerful families have control over most of the desirable opportunities in the private and public sectors (p.111).

Finding work is contingent upon the reputation and social network of one's family and the ability to play the patronage system right: "Employers, workers, and those seeking work in Appalachian communities recognize that one does not get a given job based primarily on one's qualifications" (p.111) (see also Duncan 2000; Harvey 2011; Fitchen 1981). Outsiders, as Duncan (1992) notes, are often "struck by the lack of meritocracy in these depressed communities" (p.125). Because those who come from poor families are the least likely individuals to possess the reputation and political connections that are necessary for acquiring work, they are the most susceptible to participating in the unequal exchanges that clientelism entails.

The social and political structure of Appalachian community life, in other words, often compels the poor to "support" elites regardless of desire. As an interviewee in Coles' (1971) study notes:

> The poor here…won't take handouts. I mean, they will, of course, because they're desperate; but they don't like the idea…What we need here is factories, lots of them, to give jobs to our people…but there's nothing left for people but scratching what they can from the land—or turning to the county welfare system, which is full of rotten, dishonest politics. Welfare is a business here, not the right of a citizen who needs help and is entitled to it. No wonder a lot of people have contempt for welfare, even if they'll accept the money. They know that the county officials use welfare to stay in power, to buy votes and to punish enemies (p.273).

The poor do not support elites out of ignorance, misplaced priorities or because they are lazy and welfare dependent. The context in which they live, and the exigencies of daily survival, structure their relations with and "support" for community power brokers. As Duncan (1992) notes:

> Whether it is access to free government food, access to slots in youth training programs, jobs in state government offices, or referrals to openings at a new fast-food restaurant…having an opportunity depends on whom you know or whom you supported in the last election…The system and who runs it are clear to everyone in the community (p.125-126).

Many people who live off of civil jobs or government benefits must spend their time politicking—that is, delivering votes for local elites in return for money and jobs. Apart from feeling that the corruption of the local "system" is intractable, many believe the withdrawal of support will be met with retribution (Duncan 1992; Eller 1982; Gaventa 1982; Perry 1971; Arnett 1978).

Many Appalachians, as such, support local elites because they have no choice. The exigencies of daily survival demand not only surface-level allegiance but active participation in the social structure of clientelism. Participating in the physical and iterative rituals that such relations entail, moreover, shapes perception and belief (Althusser 1971; Wedeen 2009). Auyero et. al (2009) argue that clientelism involves not just objective network exchanges, but that it possesses a subjective life, inculcating dispositions into clients and patrons that reproduce paternalistic arrangements. Individuals oftentimes continue to participate in clientelist arrangements, they argue, not necessarily because of the material benefits that they glean, but because of the "habituation it generates" (p.5).

The symbolic actions that patrons perform, moreover—such as conveying themselves as concerned citizens and providing assistance and relief to those in need—introjects a human face into fundamentally unequal relationships. By emphasizing the "love" that they feel for residents and the "services" that they provide to the community, patrons and brokers sheath authority relations in a symbolic gloss (Auyero et. al 2009). While local elites abuse their authority and take advantage of the poor, they thus paradoxically serve as a lifeline to them as well. In fact, they express sincere concern for the well-being in many situations. As Arnett (1978) and Eller (1982) have observed, elites are often eager to assist the poor—so long as so doing does not compromise their power and leverage over them. At the end of the day, these personal relations

patrons ease tensions and defuse anger. The petty favors that are offered in return for political support—though unequal—are experienced as munificent. This contributes to the durability of the arrangement.

PART TWO: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL INTERESTS, SOCIAL CLASS AND IDEOLOGY

3.1 Class Theory

The incredulity that culture war theorists exhibit toward the political attitudes of white working class voters—and the questions raised in the introduction with respect to the voting patterns and cultural identifications of economically distressed mountaineers in Shale County—are anchored in a number of assumptions regarding the interrelations among social class, political interests and ideology. Class theory—the preeminent contribution of the sociological conflict perspective—suggests that structural forces sort individuals within society into a number of competing interest groups. The interest groups, or classes, to which people belong, are thought to determine which behaviors and choices, relative to others, maximize their life chances and serve their political objectives (Dahrendorf 1959). Class theory, as such, holds that social scientists can identify the social, economic and political forces at work within society, map the interest groups into which they sort its members, explain societal conflicts as a function of class struggle, and ultimately specify how individuals ought to behave in order to promote their class interests and, by extension, their personal well-being. When Thomas Frank argues that poor voters suffer from a "tragically inverted form of class consciousness," in theoretical terms, he suggests that social forces have circumscribed the poor into a unified class, and that their voting behavior diverges from—and in fact works against—the interests that accompany their class position.

The questions that this study takes up, as such, depend on the existence of a meaningful relationship between class position and political interest. If the notion of class lacks worth as an analytical concept, or if a group's political interest bears no relationship to its location within the class structure, the Republican leanings, pro-coal sentiment and support for local elites among Shale Countians ceases to pose a sociological puzzle. This section, accordingly, establishes the importance of class as a sociological category, reviews the way in which sociologists have conceptualized political interests, and outlines the ways in which previous scholarly work has modeled the relationship between class position and political interest.[35]

Almost all of the thinking within class theory that is germane to this project stakes its origins in the work of Marx and Weber. My discussion, as such, begins with Marxian class theory, sketching its development through Marx's own thinking (1907, 1940, 1964, 1990), to the work of Poulantzas (1975), to the scholarship of Wright (1978, 1985, 1997, 2002), and finally to the "Post-Marxism" of Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1987). I then discuss the Weberian response to Marxian class theory, which begins with Weber himself (1968), undergoes significant extension through Darhendorf (1959), and gains various undercurrents through the work of Parkin (1979). I begin the chapter with a brief explanation for the models of social class that my review excludes. At the end of my discussion of the relations between class and political interests, while not dispensing with the contributions of Marxist theory, I recommend a neo-Weberian approach to study of class and interests in Shale County.

3.2 Models of Class Theory

Erik Olin Wright (1979) argues that the various definitions of social class that sociologists have developed can be analyzed along the lines of three criteria: First, whether class

[35] Because the relevant literature is deep and conflicted, my review omits certain statements that are peripheral to the project at hand (though I discuss why exclude them).

is understood in gradational or relational terms; second, whether class relations are located in the market or in production; and third, whether productive relations are analyzed with respect to the technical division of labor, authority relations, or exploitation. Gradational theories of class are largely descriptive and suggest that class belonging depends on the extent to which certain groups possess or do not possess prized resources in society. Classes, in this view, always rest above or below one another. For example, Thompson and Hickey (2005) divide Americans into upper class, upper middle class, lower middle class, working class, and lower class categories relative to their levels of wealth, income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige.

Wright argues that the shape of the theorized class structure in such models tends to conform to the pattern of income distribution within the society in question, offering, beyond it, very little insight. This is because classes, in the gradational view, exist relative to one another, not necessarily in relation to one another, with lower classes simply possessing less of something relative to higher classer. Consequently, a wealth of work criticizes the gradational model for lacking theoretical and explanatory power in terms of analyzing patterns of class conflict (see, for example, Wright 1978, 1979, 1985, 2002; Poulantzas 1975; Dahrendorf 1959; Parkin 1979).[36]

Relational theories of class deposit class antagonisms within a social system, in which one's placement causally determines class belonging (Wright 1979). Classes, as such, are viewed in relation to one another, not simply relative to one another. While quantitative differences might distinguish classes, it is the qualitative differences that determine class position. Wright (1979) insists that this is not simply a semantic distinction. He argues that

[36] As Wright (1979) argues, gradational theories of class tend to reduce class structures to "static taxonomies" that cannot grasp the processes and dynamics of social conflict and change (p.7). Because this study questions how class belonging shapes patterns of political interest and conflict, my literature review emphasizes the relational theories of class that begin with Marx and Weber.

because, in this theoretical stance, classes are thought to be bound up in systemic and unequal relationships, the basic structures of inequality in society correspond to related structures of interest which lay the bases for collective social action. Moreover, he argues that only relational views are capable of identifying social forces that precipitate change dynamics within class structures.

Thus, whether Marxian or Weberian, relational theories of class view class structures as potential bases of collective action and attempt to link the analysis of class differences to a "dynamic theory of class struggle" (Wright 1979: 8). That is, the branch of class theory attempts to identify the potential bases for collective action that exist within society. One of its central problems involves why certain *latent* conflicts produce mobilization, while others, as Marx (1907) lamented in the *Eighteenth Brumaire,* produce "wasted opportunities."

3.3 Marxian Class Theory

The Marxian perspective on classes and interests developed from Marx's materialist conception of history. For Marx, history involved the organization, disorganization and reorganization of different class formations, in which human beings arranged themselves into changing social relationships in order to provide for their existential needs. Modes of production were never equal, as some groups controlled the "raw materials" of production, while others possessed only their "labor power," or ability to physically/mentally exert effort upon those raw materials. Due to a lack of ownership, Marx argued that unequal economic structures condemned most people to a life of exploitation, in which they could neither shape society in relation to their own aspirations nor utilize their time and effort—let alone earth's natural resources and humanity's accumulated progress—to benefit their individual/collective needs and desires (Marx 1964, 1990).

Given that a "material base" centered history for Marx, he argued that one's relationship to the means of production determined her class position. Following his lead, Erik Olin Wright (1979) conceptualized classes as "common positions within the social relations of production" (p.xix). While an individual might not always demonstrate awareness of her position within the class structure, so long as she maintained relationships with other people in the production and consumption of social materials, the concept of class described an objective material relationship in social reality.[37] Because economic production required exploitation (except when organized as communism), Marx conceptualized class position as something given and imposed, not as something negotiated or constructed. As such, while those divided by class might form alliances based upon "superstructural" factors like shared moral beliefs, doing so represented "false consciousness" in that such political alliances could never annul the root causes of human suffering.

The problem for Marx (1907) involved how social actors could become "class conscious," or, more specifically, how the proletariat could transition from a class "in itself" to a class "for itself." Wright (1989) suggests that "class-pertinent effects" lay the foundations for "class formation." Class formation refers to both the development and outcome of "cooperative social relations within class structures" (p.191). It is thought to occur when those disadvantaged by their structural locations within the economy begin to experience their individual problems as structural problems that can only achieve resolution through social means. The process generally involves the creation of formal organizations such as unions and political parties that link those

[37] Above all, Marx viewed class as a social relationship. Thus, to say that class is objective is not to say that it is immutable. One's class position changes in relation to the way in which one produces and consumes. If one works a wage-labor job during the day but owns a business that employs labor during the evenings, one's class position changes throughout the day.

within class structures together (Wright 1989). Marxists argue that one's fundamental interests ultimately rest with these class-based social movements.

However, contrary to popular perception, Marx never argued that class formation resulted from an automatic or guaranteed process (though much of his posterity did). His original framework engaged in two different levels of social analysis—the first theoretical, and the second historical. The theoretical analysis attempted to identify the potential bases of collective action engendered by capitalist productive relations—its class structures—while the historical analysis attempted to empirically understand the relationship between those structures and the empirical process of class formation—or lack thereof. As Harvey (1984) notes, Marx conceptualized the great proletarian and bourgeois classes as strictly theoretical categories within "the stark logic of capitalism stripped bare of all complicating features" (p. 25).

Marxian class analysis maintains that productive relations create the most important bases for collective action in society. This is because Marx's materialist conception of history posits that only struggles over productive relations can bring about transformative social change. The class structures that productive relations forge determine the potential actors in class struggle and define the range of their objectives. They also place limits on class struggle and class formation, determining its possibilities and the forms they will take. These class structures constitute objective positions within the social division of labor, existing independently of the will of the agents within them. As Parkin (1979) notes, that the incumbents who occupy class positions do not particularly matter; one group of people could be substituted for another without much consequence. And last, unlike Weberian theory, Marxism maintains no illusions of being "value free." The purpose of decoding "class structures" is to "specify the extent to which the task of building a viable socialist movement…hinges on…class relations…Developing a

rigorous concept of the working class is necessary if the contours of fundamental class interests engaged in struggles for socialism are to be understood" (Wright 1978: pp. 108, 110).

3.4 Political Interests in Marxian Theory

The Marxist attitude toward class relations and social change lends itself to a particular conceptualization of political interest—one that is firmly anchored in the class structures that productive relations produce. Marxist thought, as such, assigns an objective character to political interests that only scientific analysis can properly identify. Wright's (1978) definition of political interests is instructive:

> Class interests…are in a sense hypotheses about the objectives of struggles which would occur if the actors in the struggle had a scientifically correct understanding of their situations. To make the claim that socialism is in the interests of the working class is not simply to make an ahistorical, moralistic claim that workers ought to be in favor of socialism, nor to make a normative claim that they would be better off in a socialist society, but rather to claim that if workers had a scientific understanding of the contradictions of capitalism, they would in fact engage in struggles for socialism (p. 89).

Beginning from this standpoint, Wright's (1978) work distinguishes between what he terms "immediate interests" and what he calls "fundamental interests." Immediate interests involve the non-transcendental interests that one experiences within a given structure of social relations—that is, struggles *within* capitalism. Fundamental interests, on the other hand, refer to interests that "call into question the structure of social relations itself," meaning struggles against capitalism and hence for socialism (p. 89).

Wright argues that while immediate interests are not false, they are "incomplete." He contends that differences within the constitution of the working class, such as between white and black workers and male and female workers, involve struggles over only immediate interests. The durability of capitalism, he claims, depends on the extent to which fundamental interests are displaced into struggles over immediate interests. As such, he (1978) argues that "struggles over

immediate interests tend to undermine socialist struggles," and that gendered, racial, sexual, ethnic, and other conflicts are "incomplete," always being secondary to antagonisms within class struggle (p.91). In his view,

> Part of the impressive durability of capitalist systems can be attributed to the capacity of capitalism to displace conflicts from the fundamental to the immediate level, and one of the central tasks of any serious movement is to reorient those conflicts back toward fundamental interests (p. 109)

As Parkin (1979) observes, his terminology assigns a privileged, ontological status to class interests, and it trivializes other forms of struggle: "The possibility that some line of cleavage other than that between capital and labor could constitute the primary source of political and social antagonism…would fall into the old bourgeois error of confusing the appearance of reality for its essence" (p.5).

While not explicitly working from Marxian frameworks, the analysis of the American electorate propounded by culture war scholars seems to approach social class and political interests from the standpoint of Marxian theory. For Frank, for example, one's interests relate to her relative position within the economic structure, while her moral concerns and cultural values represent epiphenomena that lack the ability to generate meaningful happiness, freedom or political efficacy. Frank, in so many words, characterizes the so-called culture war as an ideological displacement—as something that distracts people from their authentic interests, while distorting and concealing what those real interests involve.

Although scholars have developed varying theoretical permutations of the ideology and false consciousness concepts, they have come under more or less universal criticism for falling into the twin problems of reductionism and essentialism. The first faults Marxian theory for reducing one's interests to her position within the economic base. Thus, Parkin (1979) argues that Marx's class theory reduces humans to embodiments of systemic properties rather than

conscious social actors. "The awkwardness of this theoretical stance," he writes, "becomes evident whenever social groups act in blatant non-conformity with their assigned place in the formal scheme of things" (p.4).

In such situations, scholars generally dismiss those who act in ways that depart from their standards and expectations as "cultural dopes," deluded into false consciousness through ideology. Frank, for instance, writes about social class in an evaluative way, privileging the economic and chastising Kansans for betraying their material interests in order to address cultural diversions that, in his view, are unworthy. Their moral and religious aspirations, rather than being taken seriously, are attributed to ignorance and/or stupidity. His writing, as such, belies a related criticism of the Marxian approach, which rejects the framework's pretensions to scientism—for implying that it has access to "reality" and can objectively assess the needs of others who lack a requisite cognitive framework for assessing their own best interests.

A second but related critique slights Marxist analysis for imbuing class with an ontological rather than subjective character (Slack 1996). As feminist, postmodernist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial writers have argued, reductionism and essentialism have encouraged Marxist scholars to imbue class-based divisions with a privileged meaning relative to other forms of stratification. Inequity rooted in gendered, raced, sexualized, and nationalized forms of difference is often ignored in Marxian analysis or, when acknowledged, construed as functions of class phenomena itself. However, as Parkin (1979) argues, "in many cases it actually seems to matter whether incumbents and embodiments are black or white, Catholic or Protestant" (p.5). He contends that class theory must treat religious, linguistic, and sexual divisions as having a reality sui generis, as opposed to conveying class-based movements as

eschatological panaceas—an inclination that can quickly degenerate into utopian and/or teleological thinking. Social differences, thus, are viewed as irreducible (Slack 1996).

These criticisms, revealing the inadequacies of Marxian class theory, laid the groundwork for contemporary "Post-Marxist" approaches to the study of classes and interests. The updated framework seeks to avoid the reductionism and essentialism of the orthodox Marxian approach, and to update class theory for the profound social changes that have occurred since Marx first drafted his work. Those changes include:

> Structural transformations of capitalism that have led to the decline of the classical working class in the post-industrial countries…forms of bureaucratization which…have generated new forms of social protest…the emergence of mass mobilizations in Third World countries which do not follow the classical pattern of class struggle…[and] the discrediting of the model of society put into effect in the countries of so-called 'actually existing socialism" (Laclau and Mouffe 1987: p.166).[38]

Rather than imbuing productive relations with a transcendental character, Post-Marxists attempt to theorize a partnership between the conventional working class and the heterogeneous social movements of the present age (Storey 2009).

The tenets of Post-Marxian thought were primarily developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 1987) in their influential book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and its follow-up essay "Post-Marxism without Apologies." Drawing from Freud (1999), they contended that the

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[38] Poulantzas (1975) also attempted to address how structural economic changes had affected societal class structures. However, he attempted to fit those empirical changes into Marx's theoretical system unlike Laclau and Mouffe, who attempt to reconstruct Marxist theory in order to accommodate the changes that had occurred. Nonetheless, Poulantzas ultimately rejected the wage-labor relationship as the primary axis of class struggle. In its place, he identified three central relations that, in his view, determined class belonging and patterns of class struggle. These included an economic level (whether one's labor was productive), a political level (whether one's labor was supervisory in nature), and an ideological level (whether one's labor was mental or manual). In order to be considered working class, Poulantzas argued that one had to meet all three criteria. Thus, he contended that only manual, non-supervisory workers who directly produced surplus-value should be included among the proletarian class. Other wage-laborers, in his view, belonged to the petty-bourgeoisies or the bourgeoisies itself. Subsequent work criticized Poulntzas' for developing overly restrictive criteria for class belonging (Parkin 1979), developing ambiguous and poorly defined guidelines for demarcating class relations (Wright 1978), undermining the importance of economic forces in relation to class struggle (Wright 1979), and, ultimately, falling into the unfruitful taxonomic description of gradational class models (Wright 2002).

articulation of class identity was inevitably and always over-determined—that is, run through with gendered, raced, religious, etc. statuses that could not be separated from one's class position. As a result, they rejected the idea of a single contradiction or structural fault line on which class interests fell. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, they:

- Dismiss Orthodox Marxism's political strategy of pinning the hope for progressive social change on the working class
- Bring attention to differences within the working class
- Reject the wage-labor relation as the basic antagonism producing conflict in society
- Criticize Marxian class theory for positing the worker as "homo-economicus"
- Replace Lenin's call for "class alliances" with Gramsci's call for the development of a "collective will"
- Stress the articulation between socialism and democracy not as an axiom, but as a political project/goal
- Argue that anti-capitalist revolution depends not on workers recognizing essential antagonisms, but on the continued development and extension of "democratic-egalitarian discourses."

Drawing from Althusser, Laclau and Mouffe's ultimately argue that the process of class formation occurs when

> a vast accumulation of "contradictions" comes into play *in the same court,* some of which are radically heterogeneous—of different origins, different sense, different levels and points of application—but which nevertheless "merge" into a ruptural unity" (Althusser 1990: 100-101).[39]

Classes, in this view, represent temporary alliances that form in response to historically contingent sets of social factors. Rather than being anchored in an obdurate structural relation, they contend that social actors construct class through a process of cultural articulation. Class, in other words, develops on a discursive rather than a material terrain. In similar vein, Laclau and Mouffe reject the idea of social actors possessing political interests of which they are unaware:

> Only to the extent that social agents participate in collective totalities are their identities constructed in a way that makes them capable of calculating and negotiating with other forces. "Interests," then, are a social product and do not exist independently of the

[39] I should note that Dahrendorf (1959), in his neo-Weberian model of class, had already proposed such a model in much simpler terminology almost 30 years earlier. He argued that that "conflict groups in modern society are likely to be rather loose aggregations combined for special purposes and within particular associations" (p. 202).

> consciousness of the agents who are their bearers. The idea of an "objective interest" presupposes…that social agents, far from being part of a process in which interests are constructed, merely recognize them—that is to say, that those interests are inscribed in their nature as a gift from heaven (Laclau and Mouffe 1987: 180).

Post-Marxism thus develops a significantly different approach to class theory relative to work of Marx and Wright. In many ways, it is, in fact, more Weberian than Marxist. The next subsection, as such, reviews the Weberian theory of class and interest. At the end of section, I return to the Post-Marxist material, synthesizing it into the work of Dahrendorf (1959) in order to develop a neo-Weberian approach to the study of class and interest in Shale County.

3.5 Weberian Class Theory

Weber's work, much like Marx's posited that class location and material interest shaped human behavior in important ways (Wright 2003). However, rather than focusing on exploitative relations, Weberian class theory construes classes as groups of people who experience common life chances. Unlike Marxian analysis, which defines productive relations as the harbinger on which class membership wrests, Weber construes classes as common positions within markets, which involve "relations of exchange between the sellers and buyers of various kinds of commodities" (Wright 1979: 8). These relations are important, because they are thought to determine one's well-being as measured by conventional indices of distribution (Parkin 1979). In Marxian class theory, on the other hand, class centers on exploitation, which productive relations determine. Wright (2003) argues that Weber's work, as such, is plagued by a "shadow of exploitation." He maintains that class theory must retain exploitation's centrality in order to infuse the relevant analysis with normative concern.

While Wright's criticism might ring true, Weber's adherence to "value free" sociology explains the omission, and the advantages of his class theory compensate for the omission. The focus on exploitation in Marxian theory is ultimately what necessitates the problematic

distinction between "fundamental" and "immediate" interests. The problem, as Parkin (1979) notes, is that a robust class theory cannot afford to trivialize inequalities that run at a tangent to productive relations, given that they "do not require any specific type of productive system in which to flourish" and "are able to adapt themselves remarkably well to all known variations in the division of labor and property rights" (p.9). While the distributive nature of the life chances criterion loses some of the systemic power of Marxian exploitation, it allows Weber to develop a threefold schema of social stratification, which avoids the reduction and trivialization of other modes of inequality.

Weber's model of inequality, summarized below, includes the categories of status and party in addition to class:

- Class, or the economic sphere of stratification, describes the possible bases for collective action that arise from unequal market relations. It shapes material inequalities.
- Status, or the communal sphere of stratification, describes actually existing groups with a high estimation in society. It shapes symbolic inequalities.
- Party, or the political sphere of stratification, describes the goal-oriented associations that are organized in society. It shapes political inequalities.

Though developing a more expansive view of stratification, Weber maintains that class position is important, and that it plays a role in shaping both material interests and behavior. As in Marxian theory, Weber's work posits that one's class position produces "objectively definable material interests," which "outside observers can…specify" in order to improve a people's "material conditions of life" (Wright 2003: 839-840). Thus, just as productive relations create a potential base for collective action in Marxian theory, the common positions that people occupy within market structures produce a potential base for collectivity in Weberian theory. Importantly, however, Weber posited a more complex and contingent relationship between what Wright called "class structure" and "class formation," rejecting the proposition that "class structures" could secure "class action." Weber insisted that class formation was a contingency,

occurring only in suitable structural conjunctures that possessed appropriate historical conditions.[40] This mirrors much of Marx's thinking in empirical historical work such as *The Eighteenth Brumaire* and *The Civil War in Paris.*

However, four important distinctions, relevant to the class theory I eventually advocate, set them apart. First, given his program of "value neutral" sociology, Weber took pains not to read his desires and politics into the situations that he studied. As such, he abandoned the Marxian effort to identify a "revolutionary agent" through sociology. Second, Weber's analysis laid the framework for a model of social conflict that acknowledged multiple sources of legitimate struggle—not a singular fault line that produced "fundamental interests." Third, although sociologists tend to ignore the historicism and contingency of Maxian class theory, Weber's theory is arguably more flexible and more historical. It rejects arguments such as the "absolute immiseration" thesis and the grand theorizing typically associated with historical materialism. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, relative to Marx's class theory, Weber's work was underdeveloped. While class served as a foundational concept for Marx, it occupied a much more peripheral role in Weber's thinking.[41]

3.6 Dahrendorf's Extension of Weberian Class Theory

Weber's cursory treatment of social class set the context for Ralf Dahrendorf's (1959) seminal work in *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society.* Although he retained many of the orienting features of Weberianism, Dahrendorf took class theory in a new direction, fleshing out Weber's fragments. While Weber rooted class structures in market relations, Dahrendorf

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[40] Weber's thinking on the relationship between structure and action was likely developed in response to the economic determinism of the Second International, which formed the dominant current of Marxism at the time that he was crafting *Economy and Society*. Taking fragmentary excerpts of *The Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*, and ignoring Marx's (1907, 1940) historical writing, such as *The Eighteen Brumaire* and *The Civil War in France*, writers like Rosa Luxemburg held that economic concentration and centralization would eventually guarantee the class-based overthrow of the capitalist system.

[41] Fragmentary concepts were characteristic of Weber's approach to sociology. He believed that researchers should create concepts only to the extent needed by the goals of their studies.

argued that social conflict groups formed on the basis of participation in or exclusion from the exercise of authority.[42] In his own words, Dahrendorf contended that:

> One of the central theses of this study consists in the assumption that this differential distribution of authority invariably becomes the determining factor of systematic social conflicts of a type that is germane to class conflicts in the traditional (Marxian) sense of this term…Identification of variously equipped authority roles is the first task of conflict analysis "conceptually" and empirically all further steps of analysis follow from the investigation of distributions of power and authority (pp. 165-66).

Dahrendorf, as such, argues that authority systems are ultimately what produce relations of domination and subordination in society. This theoretical model further pluralizes Weber's class theory, allowing for an unlimited number of class structures to form upon the social terrain. Moreover, it suggests that authority relations overlap with one another rather than producing privileged structural fault lines. Dahrendorf argues that

> there can be as many competing, conflicting, or coexisting dominating conflict groups in a society as there are associations. Whether and in what way certain associations—such as industry and society—are connected in given societies is a subject for empirical analysis…In this sense, the expression 'ruling class' is, in the singular, quite misleading" (198).

Dahrendorf criticized Marxist class theory for implying that domination flowed from a monolithic source, the negation of which could neutralize conflict. His own conflict model thus has the effect of ruling out conflict's eventual elimination. Positing that social organization will always produce authority relations of some sort or other, Dahrendorf's class theory casts conflict as intrinsic and permanent feature of social life.[43]

The conceptualization of political interests that derives from Dahrendorf's work marks his most important contribution to class theory. As in Marx and Weber's relational models of

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[42] Like Weber, Dahrendorf defined authority as the probability that a command with a specific content would be obeyed by a given group of persons.

[43] A considerable amount of research challenges Dahrendor's rejection of a ruling elite. Most notably, such research includes Mills' (1956) *The Power Elite,* Domhoff's (2002) *Who Rules America,* and Bartels' (2008) *Unequal Democracy.* This work, contrary to Dahrendorf's argument, suggest that while domination is not monolithic, and while subordination cannot be distilled to a transcendental relation such as labor/capital, that authority groups oftentimes form alliances with one another and coordinate their exercises of power. .

class, one's position within various relations of authority structures interests for Dahrendorf. However, unlike his predecessors, he addresses the "awkwardness" that results from assigning objective interests to social actors of which they might be unaware. He begins by acknowledging the problem:

> In everyday language, the word "interest" signifies intentions or directions of behavior associated with individuals rather than with their positions. It is not the position, but the individual who "is interested in something," "has an interest in something," and "finds something interesting." It might indeed appear that the notion of interest is not meaningfully conceivable other than in relation to human individuals. Interests would seem to be psychological in the strictest sense. Yet the proposition of certain antagonistic interests conditioned by, even inherent in, social positions contains precisely this apparently meaningless assertion that there can be interests which are, so to say, impressed on the individual from outside without his participation (p. 174).

However, he argues that sociologists can meaningfully speak of "non-psychological" interests by analyzing whether individuals and groups benefit from or are disadvantaged by the status quo. In this view, those who are deprived of authority within a given relation are believed to have an interest in modifying the social structure, while those whose domination is legitimated by an authority relation are believed to hold an interest in maintaining it. He stresses, though, that no social necessity or moral imperative requires people to become conscious of and act on their objective, non-psychological interests.

Through this thinking, Dahrendorf develops two new concepts, which he deems "latent interests" and "manifest interests." Latent interests correspond to one's social roles—specifically, to the undercurrents of them, of which one might not be conscious. Manifest interests, on the other hand, refer to one's "conscious psychological" interests. He compares the articulation of manifest interests to Marx's conception of class consciousness. However, he is careful not to equate the failure to act on latent interests to Marx's notion of "false consciousness," arguing that "in terms of a scientific theory which is supposed to explain

problems of reality, the statement that a large group of people thinks 'falsely' is plainly meaningless" (p.179).

Although not explicitly drawing from his work, Gaventa (1982) adapts this approach to the configuration of non-psychological interests. He argues that one can get around the problem of imposing interests on social actors by uncovering how they would behave outside the influence of power and authority relations. He refers to such behavior as the actor's "real interests." Thus, he argues that if the actor behaves in a way that is contrary to how she would behave outside of the power/authority relation, we can reasonably conclude that the person has acted against her real interests. Like Dahrendorf, he criticizes the notion of false consciousness, arguing that

> to discount it as "false: may be to discount too simply the complexities or realities of the situation. What is far more accurate (and useful) is to describe the content, source, or nature of the consciousness—whether it reflects awareness of certain interests and not of others, whether it is critical or assuming, whether it has been developed through undue influence of[authority], and so on (p.29).

Dahrendorf and Gaventa's theorization of interests are thus considerably different from false consciousness arguments such as Feldman's (1982, 1984). Feldman (1982, 1984) attributes the weak relationship between economic self-interest and voting patterns to the ideology of economic individualism, arguing that misled voters attribute their financial and social well-being not to structural factors but to hard work and personal responsibility. He concludes that "these beliefs play a major role in preventing the translation of personal experience with unemployment into political attitudes and behavior" (1982: 448). Similarly, Gomez and Wilson (2001), attribute the failure of individuals to act on their material interests to a lack of "political sophistication," which essentially translates into a lack of knowledge. Dahrendorf and Gaventa, however, locate non-psychological interests in situations and behaviors that authority structures prevent social

actors from realizing (though possibly through misinformation), not in behaviors and situations that they are too ignorant to understand.

Based upon this model of interest, Dahrendorf develops a new model for classifying individuals who occupy common positions in relation to authority structures. On the one hand, such individuals find themselves in a "common situation," but on the other they "do not in any sociologically tenable sense constitute a group" (pp.179-180). Because individuals who occupy positions with identical latent interests do not necessarily feel connected with one another, Dahrendorf argues that they constitute a "potential group." He calls these potential groups "quasi-groups." "Interest groups," on the other hand, refer to actually existing groups who articulate a sense of belonging among members and who make common demands against another group: "they are the real agents of group conflict. They have a structure, a form of organization, a program or goal, and a personnel of members" (p.180). Interest groups, then, are organized around a system of common ideas.

Dahrendorf argues that class theory, if it is to retain any analytical utility, must investigate the relationship between latent interests and manifests interests, explaining the conditions under which quasi-groups, which hold latent interests, produce concrete interests groups that propound manifest interests. Class theory, thus, should be able to explain why workers formed class-based movements in the Appalachian coal mines but not in the textile industries of the Southern Piedmont (Billings 1990), why farmers in Northern Argentina mobilized against agrochemical contamination in 2003 but not in 2010 (Lapegna 2013), and why mountaineers took action against the coal slurry spill in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia in 1974 but not against the spill in Martin County, Kentucky in 2000 (Erikson 1976).

Dahrendorf posits that a number of "intervening variables" form "general structural conditions of organization," which explain why latent interests begin to transform into manifest interests, which produce interest groups. These variables include:

- Technical conditions of organization, which refer to the availability of appropriate leaders and ideologies for mobilizing quasi-groups. For example, Gramsci (1991) argued that the lack of a subaltern language undermined mobilization in 20th century Italy.
- Political conditions of organization, which refer to the juridical and legal constraints that impede mobilization. For example, Piven and Cloward (1979) argue that a lack of collective bargaining rights undermined progress in the U.S. labor movement.
- Social conditions of organization, which refer to the ability of individuals within a quasi-group to communicate and interact with one another in meaningful ways. For example, Marx (1907), in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, argued that the atomized nature of feudal production inhibited the French peasantry from developing social bonds.
- Psychological conditions of organization, which refer to the ability of individual personalities within a quasi-group to subjectively identify with a nascent interest group. For example, Feldman (1982, 1984) argues that attitudes of "economic individualism" in the American working class undermine class-based political mobilization.

3.7 Conclusion: A Neo-Weberian Approach to Class Analysis

Dahrendorf's variant of class theory, anchored in the thinking of Weber, provides the most useful starting point for examining social class dynamics in Shale County. Marxist class theory defines class in an evaluative way, positing that objective social and moral imperatives exist for certain behaviors. Dahrendorf's framework, on the other hand, is eminently sociological, approaching class as an etic sociological concept that describes how authority relations at the micro-, meso-, and macro-level affect collective well-being. Further, it explains how behavior influences life chances within a matrix of overlapping relations of authority and stratification. By avoiding the circumcision of interests to the material realm, it serves as a useful tool for investigating political behavior in Shale County, which is often characterized by ostensibly contradictory economic behavior. Dahrendorf's "general structural conditions of organization," moreover, provides a theoretical framework for investigating and explaining why

Shale Countians have been mostly quiescent in the face glaring inequality, which derives from a multiplicity of authority relations.

Moreover, unlike orthodox Marxist analysis, this approach focuses on the cultural conditions under which social actors *construct* their class and political interests rather than harking on why they fail to *realize* their ontologically assigned ones. As such, the emerging work in post-Marxist class theory, which approaches classes and interests as historical phenomena, will help to flesh out Dahrendorf's schema. Inspired in many ways by E.P. Thompson, the perspective approaches classes and interests as constructs that are achieved and formed, that "in fact happen," rather than as predetermined structures and categories (Thompson 1963: 8). It focuses on the "making" of class, investigating it as "an active process, which owes as much to agency as conditioning," rather than as passive realization guaranteed by teleological laws (p.8). Overall, my theoretical framework marks a radical change relative to the research discussed in chapters one and two. Because that work fails to meaningful engage with contemporary class theory, it reduces complex patterns of human behavior to ignorance and stupidity, faulting social actors for not behaving in the ways that scholars like Thomas Frank posit that they ought to.

Having codified my approach to study and analysis of "political interests," in the next chapter I discuss my approach to study of political understanding and political socialization—that is to say, how individuals develop understandings that transform "latent interests" into "manifest interests" and "quasi-groups" into "interests groups." Unlike the existing research that has examined conservative partisanship among the poor, identification with exploitative industry and support for corrupt political actors, I emphasize cultural and symbolic dimensions of political understanding.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY, DOXA AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

4.1 The Misinformation and Stupidity Models

Dominant accounts of working class conservatism attribute the political behavior of the rural poor to one of two sources: Misinformation and/or stupidity (or a combination of the two in the case of the culture war thesis). The nightly admonishments that left-leaning pundits level against media personalities like Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh exemplify the former position. This account reflects not just the offhand commentary of leftist pundits but the conclusions of several scholarly studies of working class conservatism. A number of recent publications, for example, attribute the "problem" of working class conservatism—in one fell analytic swoop—to Fox News, the ostensible epicenter of the Political Right's misinformation campaign. Examples include Bock and Rabin-Havdt's (2012) *The Fox Effect: How Roger Ailes Turned a Network into a Propaganda Machine*, Amann and Breuer's (2007) *Fair and Balanced, My Ass!: An Unbridled Look at the Bizarre Reality of Fox News*, and Hart's (2003) *The Oh Really? Factor: Unspinning Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly*. Decrying Fox's lack of objectivity, conservative bias and misrepresentation of facts, each asserts that the news organization has poisoned the minds of the rural electorate with "right wing propaganda," engendering a "false consciousness" that has resulted in political choices that contradict their interests. If only these voters had access to accurate and impartial information, so the account goes, they would make better choices.

If the "false information" narrative described above depicts poor voters in a somewhat pathetic light—as passive, if not utterly helpless in the face of media programming—the competing explanation of working class conservatism is even less flattering to its subjects. Analyses like Frank's (2003) *What's the Matter with Kansas* and Pierce's (2010) *Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free* attribute working class conservatism to sheer stupidity—an inability to evaluate political information, correctly identity one's political interests and participate in the political process as a competent and informed citizen. If only we could raise the poor's educational attainment, cultural sensibility and political knowledge to an appropriate level, so the account goes, they would make better choices.

In the remainder of this section, I will show that neither the "misinformation" nor "stupidity" model adequately explains Republican partisanship among the poor. Beyond being offensive permutations of the culture of poverty thesis, I will argue that both accounts are based on the outmoded assumptions of mass culture theory, which convey political knowledge as an isolated, independent object, exaggerate the role that the media plays in political socialization and presume a rational political decision-making process among social actors. As opposed to being an isolated independent object, I will show that the political understandings held by Shale Countians are embedded in personal experiences and local social relations, which shape the meaning that national political events and media messages take.

4.2 Deconstructing the Misinformation and Stupidity Models

Whatever Fox's shortcomings, and whatever the lack of political sophistication that might characterize some voters, the "misinformation" and "stupidity" accounts of political behavior described above run against the grain of nearly 60 years of social science research. Both explanations of working class conservatism are rooted in the discredited mass culture

theory that dominated communication studies during the 1940s and 1950s. Emerging on the heels of the Second World War, after Hitler had used media programming in order to shore up support for Nazism, and as the broadcast, marketing, advertising, and public relations industries began to rapidly expand, mass culture scholars theorized a stimulus/response relationship between media content and social action. Media organizations were believed to deposit political messages into the otherwise empty minds of audience members, who passively responded to them.

Scholars who critique news organizations like Fox and media personalities like Bill O'Reilly implicitly operate according to this "hypodermic needle theory" of communication, which posits a powerful and direct relationship between media programming and audience behavior. In the misinformation model, activist media organizations are thought to directly account for foolish political decisions. In the stupidity model, a slightly more complex relationship is posited between media programming and audience behavior. Rather than directly attributing foolish political decisions to media programming, adherents view irrational political behavior as a symptom of the prolonged effects of consuming "kitsch." The "tepid, flaccid middlebrow culture" dispensed by the media, in other words, is thought to have "engulf[ed] everything in its spreading ooze," resulting in the retrogression of the body politic—a withering away of the nation's collective intelligence and democratic resolve (MacDonald 1953: 5).

Hypodermic needle accounts of media influence, however, are rooted in an outmoded Lockeian conception of communication, which "places individuals in the center of the universe and marginalizes commitment, language and culture as the shaper and substance of human knowledge" (Peters 1989: 390). Locke's epistemology treats the social as a source of corruption rather than as a source of meaning while positing the individual as a meaning making sovereign

who independently formulates viewpoints by imposing reason upon perception.[44] The individual, in this model, does not carry society within her, shaping how information and events are understood at every turn, but instead engenders meaning through a process of pure reflection.

The Lockeian epistemology, which Peters (1989) argues has ossified into a type of common sense within communication studies, treats language and other forms of culture as if they encapsulate private meanings, conveying culture as social only in the sense that it links people together in modes of exchange. This common sense orientation to communication, as Glaeser (2011) notes, has encouraged scholars to view political knowledge as an "isolated independent object." Glaeser asserts that the prevailing account of political epistemology: 1) treats persons and understandings as independent from one another, assuming that understandings are "deposited" into neutral persons, unaffected by their background/experiences and vice versa; 2) assumes that understandings are neatly inventoried into a person, becoming a totality of knowledge (i.e. assumes that understandings remain separate and do not interact with each another); 3) assumes that the understandings have no context and are thus unaffected by the context in which they arise; and 4) views understandings as static rather than generative. While never explicitly articulated, the misinformation and stupidity explanations of working class conservatism rest on the assumptions of this implicit political epistemology. They thus have "no sense of the dynamics of understanding, its role in lived life, [or its role] in the generation, maintenance and transformation of social arrangements" (Glaeser 2011).

4.3 The Political Epistemics of Experience

In *Political Epistemics*, Glaeser (2011) defines political epistemology as "the academic field studying the historically specific politics-oriented knowledge-making practices of people and their consequences" (loc 222). Political epistemology thus "investigates how, in an effort to

[44] Locke believed that language distorted the ability of individuals to accurately discern reality.

orient themselves to the world, historically, socially and culturally situated people actually form and interrogate what to them appears as valid understanding" (loc. 196). Studies of political epistemology trace the processes through which people develop particular political understanding and how they come to feel justified in holding those understandings.

Our political understandings, Glaeser argues, develop through processes of validation. He defines three different kinds of engagement with the world, which produces three distinct forms of events, which in turn produce different types of understanding. First, there are interactions with other human beings, in which we check our understandings against their understandings (though not everyone matters to us). He call this form of validation "recognition." Second, there are pragmatic modes of validation, in which understandings are validated because they achieve useful actions/results. He calls this form of validation "direct corroboration." The third form of validation occurs when understandings hold up against the other things that we know—when they are consistent with existing knowledge and compatible with our values. He calls this "resonance." In sum, he asserts that

> we come to inhabit our understandings through the encounter with others whose authoritative judgment recognizes ours; through the interactions with people and the material world in which success gives us confidence in our ways of ordering the world; and finally by checking understandings against our established knowledge, our values, feelings, desires, and skills (loc 2496).

This is precisely why we cannot "treat knowledge as if it were an isolated independent object that sits somewhere on a shelf in our brains" (loc 2496). Our political understandings do not arise in a vacuum. We pit them against our experiences, measure them against preexisting beliefs and confirm them by appealing to others.

In this study, I draw from Glaeser's work in political epistemology by situating the Republican partisanship of my subjects within the clientelistic moral economy that defines life in

Central Appalachia. I focus on three dimensions of their political understandings: How they are embedded in interactions with other people; how they relate to the other cultural understandings that people hold; and how they relate to subjects' location in the larger world (Glaeser 2010). In doing so, I show how Shale Countians' Republican partisanship derived not from media indoctrination, stupidity or the presence of a culture war, but from their experiences with the patronage relations and economic survival strategies that operated in their communities; their integration into a moral and religious order that emphasized the value of hard work; and their subordinate relationship to the dominant culture as post-colonial subjects of "internal-colonialism."

4.4 The Embodied and Emotional Dimensions of Political Ideology

While the previous section spoke to the *spatial* inaccuracies that afflict dominant accounts of working class conservatism, that is to say, their focus on mass media and national interest group activity in lieu of local institutions, organizations and experiences, this section highlights their *temporal* inaccuracies. The focus on mass media and interest group activity in dominant accounts of working class conservatism belies a static view of political belief formation, in which political opinions are thought to develop instantaneously and without context. But as Glaeser has shown, political understandings are generative rather than static.

Young people are not raised tabula rasa, nor do they come of age in a situation in which disparate political beliefs and identities are pitted against one another in equal competition—wherein one simply chooses, in conscious fashion, the political identity and partisan ideology that best represents his or her interests. Rather, one is unconsciously and involuntarily interpellated into a dominant ideology before every reaching maturity. By dominant ideology, I do not mean a ubiquitous set of beliefs propagated across society by the bourgeoisie in order to

legitimate capitalism, as in the vulgar Marxist sense (Marx 1990). Rather, I mean the institutional cultural beliefs that prevail in one's locality, which in most cases are mediated and transmitted through both parents and educators. Although the young do not *necessarily* internalize these beliefs as common sense (Gramsci 1991), they live within their material and cultural confines (Althusser 1971; Smilde 2007).

As Bourdieu (1977) writes in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*:

> The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition)…produce systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (p.72).

Bourdieu's practice theory suggests that political understandings not only begin to take shape during childhood socialization, but that they are anchored in unconscious tastes, preferences and dispositions that evolve from one's embodied and emotional experiences within a particular cultural and material context—that is to say, a habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 2000).

Habitus refers to

> our deepest likes, dislikes, and personal dispositions, including those of our preconscious bodies. It is grounded historically in the collective frameworks of culture and society, misrecognized as "instinct," "common sense," or "character," which becomes the basis for how we feel things and why we act (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009).

Moving beyond conscious intentions, meanings and calculations, the habitus concept illuminates the dispositional nature of self-identity—those "visceral experience[s] [which] transcend linguistic expression"—the knowledge of self that is "unutterable, ephemeral, known only *deep down*" (Desmond 2006: 389). Unlike scholars oriented toward cognition and discourse, who associate identity with the narratives that we "keep going" (Giddens 1990), Bourdieu's work

illuminates how identity and understanding derive from lived, bodily experiences that linger below the surface of conscious awareness. In this view, the self is ingrained into one's mind and flesh in a deeper way—as a form of corporal knowledge. Bourdieu (1977) emphasizes how the body does not merely accumulate experience: What the body learns, he argues, is ultimately what the social actor becomes.

The practice theory that emerges from Bourdieu's habitus concept suggests that people think about the world in dispositional terms—not in conscious, rational or discursive terms. People, that is to say, do not formulate cognitive opinions on political events and information based on the "facts." Rather, their embodied and emotional dispositions, which develop during youth and congeal in their fat and muscle as forgotten socialization, filter the political events and information that they encounter, functioning as a source of "practical sense" (Desmond 2008: 15). This is why "Baysian Updating" often fails to occur when people encounter new information that contradicts our beliefs: People know by body and by history, not simply by mind. When analyzing the political rhetoric of research participants, whether that rhetoric involved support for the Second Amendment or opposition to social welfare policy, I thus approached them as extensions and articulations of habitus, not as mere "opinions."

I also attempted to attune myself to how elites—whether in relations to local politics or industry—capitalized upon the ingrained dispositions of Shale Countians. Like the "backcountry boys" in Desmond's (2008) study of wildland firefighters, most of participants in my study grew up in rugged and rural settings, viewing themselves as "small town" folks as opposed to "city slickers." Most also grew up hunting, fishing and exploring the outdoors. Their diet was replete with mountain staples, such as cornbread, sausage gravy and wild game. Given the area's history of tobacco cultivation, many smoked cigarettes. Hardly peripheral to the politics, this

"forgotten socialization" shaped Shale Countians dispositions toward political events, information and actors in unconscious (though sometimes quite conscious) ways. Elites knew and often took advantage of this.

In *Pascalian Mediations*, Bourdieu argues that one can distinguish between a "general" and a "specific" habitus—an observation that Desmond (2006, 2008) has employed in order to study the attitudes, identities and allegiances of young working class men who were reared in rural settings. The general habitus is a "system of dispositions and ways of thinking about and acting in the world that is constituted early in life, whereas a specific habitus is acquired later through education, training, and discipline within particular organizations" (p.15). Desmond's work examined how the U.S. Forestry Service organized the general habitus of "backcountry boys" into a more specific one that fit with its organization and institutional goals.

Noting the important and often unforeseen ways in which inculcated dispositions shape political understanding, Desmond makes a call for an "ethnography of the habitus" at the end of his 2006 *Ethnography* piece, asserting that:

> What makes a habitus-driven approach distinct is its insistence on ferreting out specific linkages connecting personal histories with present-day social contexts…[it] requires rigorously examining the origins of acquired dispositions and skills as well as the precise ways in which they handicap or advantage individuals in various organizational, educational, cultural, social, or political settings. Rather than view individuals as suspended in a single context within a single timeframe, balancing themselves upon the knife-edge present, ethnography of the habitus forces researches to view individuals ontogenetically: as developing agents and inheritors of a specific history (p.412).

Desmond emphasizes how political understandings derive from lived experience, often existing only on the level of half-consciousness. They rarely derive from coherent value orientations that country boys—or whatever other demographic—consciously subscribe to.[45]

[45] This is precisely why attempts to "reason with people" often fail. People do not enact behaviors due to values, beliefs or ideas that rest with their brains that then trigger the behaviors. They act out of habit, out of knowledge that is below the surface and second nature. I would argue, for example, that anti-smoking campaigns have achieved

Answering his call to carry out further "ethnographies of the habitus," my analysis probes how elites associated with the coal industry and local politics capitalize upon—and organize—the inculcated dispositions, i.e. general habitus, of the rural poor into support for their leadership and policies. Just as Desmond showed how the process of becoming a wildland fire fighter began long before one joined a fire crew by tracing the development of a general habitus into a specific one, I attempt to show that the acquisition of political dispositions begins long before one enters the field of politics, beginning with "thousands of experiences specific to working-class rural backgrounds. Through these experiences, [individuals] acquire…naturalized ways of apprehending the world" (Desmond 2006: 411). My analysis thus explores how Shale Countians attempt to seek out a political universe in which they can recognize themselves and thrive.

4.5 Cultural Hegemony, Doxa and Local Elites

Although I reject the notions of false consciousness—and have shown explanations of working class conservatism that rely on the notions of misinformation, irrationality and stupidity to be empirically bankrupt and offensive—my analysis does consider how *local elites* (as opposed to national elites) take measures to shape the perceptions of the poor. This chapter has thus far illuminated the way in which political understandings are anchored in social relations, collective identities and accumulated experiences. Because Shale Countians live within the context of unequal social relations, the capacity to shape perceptions of "reality" is also unequal.

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little success in Eastern Kentucky because they operate at the wrong phenomenological and hermeneutical level—the do not speak to the actors' ways of being the word. They assume that people smoke out of ignorance and that they do not understand the health risks associated with smoking. But smoking is an ingrained habit—a carnal disposition that has been inscribed in the bodies of smokers as the result of two hundred years tobacco cultivation. As Pascal argues, consciousness changes with practice, not the other way around. The entire rural way of life would have to be overhauled, and the centuries of accumulated, intergenerationally transmitted habits, dispositions and practices erased for the campaigns to operate at the level of "reason." Likewise, an aversion to "liberal values" results not from a calculated resistance to a set of values, nor from ignorance of how the political world works, and especially not from false consciousness. Among other reasons, one reason that they such values failed to gain traction is that they simply do not map onto the embodied habits, dispositions and tastes of rural individuals.

By virtue of their control over local media, government and community organizations, elite actors hold the capacity to mobilize bias in their favor and set the agenda in relation to public discourse (Gaventa 1982). Put differently, they are well positioned to exercise what Gramsci (1991) calls "moral and philosophical leadership" over subordinates. Not only do the elite take measures to exclude information from public discourse that would undermine their claims to authority, they actively attempt to filter and shape the information that circulates through civil society. This involves mobilizing their superior resources to propagate definitions of the situation that represent social life from the standpoint of their own interests (Marx 1990).

Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony is a robust concept for illuminating how they do so. Unlike similar concepts, such as "false consciousness," the idea of hegemony acknowledges that dominant groups do not have the capacity to construct a static, closed ideological system that is impervious to threats from below. Because hegemony requires the *consent* of subordinates, it is a moving equilibrium. Dominant groups must continue to win, reproduce and sustain their leadership (Hebdige 1979; Jay 1984). Given the ability of subordinates to deconstruct and demystify elite claims, dominant groups cannot permanently normalize hegemonic beliefs and values. Contrary to the arguments of Marx, Gramsci did not view culture as an idealized representation of dominant social relations. While emphasizing the power of elites to define both micro and macro situations, he viewed culture as something that was perpetually contested and negotiated—as an amalgamation of domination and concession.

Gramsci's work thus suggests that elites must *achieve* hegemony by providing a cultural framework—or definition of the situation, whatever that situation may be—which recognizes and resonates with subordinates' identities, goals, values, dispositions, and experiences. Hegemonic discourses, in short, it must gel with the general habitus of subordinates and must

reflect what Bourdieu (1975) calls “doxa,” i.e. what people take for granted as a result of their structured dispositions. As he asserts in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*:

> In class societies, in which the definition of the social world is at stake in overt or latent class struggle, the drawing of the line between the field of opinion, of that which is explicitly questioned, and the field of doxa, of that which is beyond question and which each agent tacitly accords by the mere fact of acting in accord with social convention, is itself a fundamental objective at stake in that form of class struggle which is the struggle for the imposition of the dominant systems of classification. The dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of doxa and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa or, short of this, of establishing in its place the necessarily imperfect substitute, orthodoxy (p.169).

Doxa, put more succicintly, refers to "the universe of things that can be stated and hence thought" based on a group’s ingrained socialization, embodied experiences and unconscious dispositions (p.169).

Just as Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence captures how subordinates often “misrecognize” inequality as natural, blaming themselves for poverty, lack of “taste,” so on, the concept of doxa captures the way in which arbitrary experiences are misrecognized as necessary, universal ones. For example, in Shale the notions that outsiders are intent upon demeaning mountain residents, that enacting masculinity requires manual labor, and that coal mining offers the most realistic path toward upward mobility have all become “doxic.” Elites, as Bourdieu notes, have an interest in preserving the taken-for-granted nature of these notions and using them to their advantage. As the work cited about by Desmond (2006, 2008) illuminates, this is typically done by creating a pathway between the general habitus that subordinates inhabit and a specific habitus that will consolidate the position of elites with the local political field.

The concept of hegemony thus indicates that the philosophical and moral leadership of the dominant class penetrates deep into the fabric of social life. A number of sociological concepts inform how norms, values and beliefs operate in social space. Culture, for instance,

describes the expression of a particular way of life, while moral order describes a system for making evaluations and judgments regarding good and bad, right and wrong, and so on. The concept of hegemony suggests that "doxic relations" constitute a "nomos"—a socially constructed ordering of experience that enables human beings to make sense of and navigate reality (Berger 1967).

Hegemony, as such, comprises something more profound than an idealized expression of dominant-subordinate relations or a prevailing system of moral judgments favoring the position of the powerful. Elite hegemony defines the range of human possibility, describing the way that things are but not how they could or should be, and ossifying historically peculiar relations as timeless and universal instantiations of "common sense." This is considerably more powerful than the control of culture implied in the "misinformation" model. As Hebdige (1979) notes, individuals cannot objectively learn about the world through common sense, they can learn only how events and people fit into the existing scheme of things.

In sum, while most accounts of working class conservatism have relied on permutations of the "false consciousness" concept (e.g. misinformation and irrationality), my approach construes hegemony neither as false nor necessarily harmful. I view hegemony as an achievement that, while legitimating the position of dominant actors, provides cultural leadership that offers meaning, purpose and an honored identity to those who embrace it. Rather than negatively evaluating the understandings adopted by research participants, I attempt to understand what hegemonic discourses do for them and what meanings they provide. Beyond moving beyond the flawed presuppositions of the culture war theorists, my approach improves upon empirical work that has examined Appalachians' relations with the coal industry and local elites (e.g. Gaventa 1982; Caudill 1962; Eller 1982; Perry 1971; Cabrejas 2012). While the

existing work emphasizes the role that *repression* has played in maintaining unequal arrangements in Appalachian localities, my work illuminates the role that *consent* plays, emphasizing the idea of *leadership* in lieu of *domination.*

4.6 Conclusions

As a whole, the theoretical approach that I have developed calls for an analysis that acknowledges the overlapping and often contradictory nature of interests; takes subjects' political understandings and preferences seriously; avoids reading one's own desires into them (i.e. that is value-free [Weber 1968]); and acknowledges the import of history and the necessity of empiricism in terms of illuminating the ontogeny of political understanding and political behavior. My approach thus demands that the complexities and subtleties of the research setting be parsed out. Rather than attempting to understand the political behavior of Shale Countians from the "birds-eye-view" utilized in culture war-style studies, the chapters that follow situate their lives within the empirical specificities of the county's historical context. Doing so reveals how local forces of class, status and party shape political choice, participation and contention in ways that distant, macro-level analyses fail to capture. The "worms-eye view" of the setting at hand that results allows me to contextualize, historically locate and explain the political understandings that I documented.

By providing context to Shale County's voting trends and political behavior, I make a case for carrying out research that seeks not the static reasons for why residents vote against their interests, but the sociological conditions that produce particular patterns of political activity. I also argue that the research must probe what residents mean by voting Republican—that is, what exactly it is that they are saying and communicating with their votes. I argue that only in using this form of thick and historical description to illuminate the structural and symbolic contexts in

which residents behave will their class affiliations, political interests and behavioral motivations become clear.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTIC TECHNIQUES

5.1 The Rationale for Qualitative Methods

Having outlined the study's empirical context and theoretical framework, in this chapter I relay the research methodology and analytical strategy that I employed in order to examine my research questions. I used qualitative methods in the execution of this study. I chose a qualitative strategy for a number of theoretical reasons. First, research on political participation and political understanding has been dominated by political science, which tends to favor quantitative approaches (Schatz 2009). While the studies therein have yielded important findings, they have produced little insight into the organic evolution of political understandings and the subjective experience of political participation. My research questions require that I collect such data on Shale residents. Auyero et. al (2009) show that clientelist arrangements carry a subjective life that often results in a "clientelist habitus" (p.5). They argue that understanding how clientelist arrangements shape political behavior requires engaging the experiences and life histories of those embedded within them. Thus, while Billings and Blee's (2000) historical work reveals that clientelism has diminished political participation in Shale and resulted in a "stunted public sphere," it does not explain how residents have interacted with and experienced local elites. Accessing the hermeneutic dimensions of the county's political life required me to speak with and residents and probe their experiences through in-depth interviews. More so, It demanded that I develop an intimate familiarity with the milieu in which they operated, made meaning, forged political understandings, and levied political decisions.

Second, political interests and understandings, as the previous chapter denotes, do not form within a vacuum—they form within a context. Polsky (1967), as such, argues that "sociology isn't worth much if it is not ultimately about real live people in their ordinary life-situations" (p.138). Past research has tended to define the axes of poor people's interests from without, failing to situate them within the complex realities of their day-to-day lives. This study, on the other hand, seeks to examine how Shale residents personally and collectively defined their own interests, notions of progress and conceptions of the good life. It also seeks to investigate how those constructions formed in response to the ways in which their biographies intersected with the broader cultural and historical lineage of Appalachia. Ethnographic observations were thus needed in order to illuminate the environment in which Shale Countians formed their understandings and enacted their civic participation.

Third, Geertz's (1973) work shows that culture constitutes a set of publically available symbols that conveys meaning. Understanding a people's politics requires "thick description" of the cultural situation surrounding them, not a mere indexing of their values and beliefs. Rather than simply probing the values that belie political behavior in Shale, I examined what that behavior—such as voting—signified. By viewing culture as a public code, my research moves away from antiquated conceptualizations of culture that reduce its existence to deeply held value orientations. I wanted to explain how the convergence of biography and history influences one's identity, one's sense of her best interests and progress, and one's political commitments and behaviors. Being physically present in Shale during the 2012 election provided a unique opportunity to do this, as it permitted me to observe how residents talked about politics, responded to political platforms, and made use of political symbols and discourse.

Fourth, several of my research questions related to ostensible instances of quiescence and consent, which are not static conditions but rather continuously changing social processes Thorough sociological understanding requires an ongoing investigation of the phenomena as they occur in the face of everyday events within the community. Politics is not a reality in which people occasionally participate; it is a reality that they inexorably construct, and one that thus requires continuous engagement (as well as disengagement). For example, when I began my preliminary field work in March 2011, eight former public officials had just been convicted of federal RICO charges. Exploring why many expressed support for the convicted required me to be physically present in the community in order to examine how they interpreted and responded to situations such as these.

Fifth, rather than simply recording what people have to say about politics, an ethnographic approach allowed me to observe how people actually behaved and enacted their politics. Because so much past research has attempted to explain Appalachian voting patterns and quiescence without actually talking to or interacting with Appalachians, achieving an insider's view of the situation is paramount. People do not experience class, injustice, inequality, industry, politics, and so on in vacuums that produce universal experiences and responses. Rather, their lived, biographical experiences of those conditions, grounded in a complex and particularized local context, color the responses to them. It is the task of the ethnographer to parse them out.

Sixth, qualitative methods are necessary in order to carry out Burawoy's (2003) "focused revisit" methodology, which I will elaborate in the following subsection. Because two previous studies of Shale County have utilized ethnographic methods, I must also use them in order to create a logical base of comparison. As Bahr et. al. (1983) note, the best revisit studies utilize—

to the greatest extent possible—similar methods relative to those that preceded them. This allows the researcher to check the reliability of earlier findings and to determine whether they hold under alternate conditions. Using a radically different methodology would preclude me from measuring my findings up against the work of Brown (1950) and Schwarzweller et. al. (1971).

Seventh, and last, prolonged qualitative research is necessary for collecting accurate data on and establishing trust with participants. Due to the cultural stereotypes that have long been leveled against Appalachia, local people often maintain leeriness and distrust toward outsiders (Fitchin 1981; Duncan 1999). Distrust stems more from the region's long and enduring history of external intervention in relation to everything from colonial pursuits, to cultural engineering initiatives, to FBI investigations of local corruption, to the National Guard's use of helicopter gunships to fight the county's marijuana production. In a recent article about Shale County. Haygood (2010) noted the "fear" and "distrust" that "locals harbor about outsiders who come around with pencils and questionnaires wanting to probe personal living habits."

Local sensitivity to representation and distrust toward outsiders required me to spend a significant amount of time in the community in order temper the wall of skepticism that at first lingered around me (and that, I am sure, continued to exist around me for many). Moroever, as Auyero and Switsum (2009) write, "familiarity and social proximity [help] to reduce the symbolic violence exerted through the interview relationship" (p.13). They also argue that the researcher must take care to not come across as "an occasional visitor who routinely comes to the [research setting] and then all to soon disappears without a trace" in order to avoid disrespecting participants (p.14).

Given these issues, quantitative methods and interviews in isolation from ethnography were out of the question. Spending time with participants on a daily basis allowed me to build trust with residents, which, I believe, resulted in the collection of reliable data. I also attempted to use the overall social situation as a means to motivate participation among research subjects. In his study of disenfranchised African Americans, Dollard (1937) encouraged participation by stating his goal to counteract common stereotypes of African Americans. Many individuals agreed to participate in my study for the same reason.

5.2 Research Design

My research took the form of a historical, interpretive, comparative case analysis.[46] By analyzing political behavior in Shale County during three different historical moments, my dissertation provides broader insight into how local values, state-driven modernization efforts, clientelism, industry hegemony, outside stigmatization, powerlessness, and restricted political choice shape political understanding, interest and participation. I constructed a case out of present day Shale County by carrying out a comprehensive ethnographic study, which included nonparticipant and participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, content analysis, and historical analysis.[47] My analysis was comparative, in that in that I juxtaposed my findings with two additional cases: Premodern, agrarian Shale County and industrial, modern Shale County. I constructed these two cases by drawing from the previous studies of the county: Billings and Blee's *The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Poverty in Appalachia;*

[46] According to Patton (2002), a case analysis "involves organizing…data by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison. Well-constructed case studies are *holistic* and *context sensitive*…The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest" (p. 447). With regard to goals, Ragin (1987) notes that "historically oriented interpretive work [should] account for specific historical outcomes…or processes chosen for study because of their significance for…social life in general" (p.3).

[47] Because I used both interviews and different types ethnographic tactics, my research took on what Auyero and Swistun (2009) call a "cubist" strategy. They argue that "the essence of an object is captured only by showing it simultaneously from multiple points of view" (p.16). This is especially important for a comparative study such as this one. As Bahr et. al. (1983) note, "a characteristic of most successful longitudinal studies is that they triangulate—apply multiple methods—rather than simply repeating similar measurements time after time" (p.256).

Brown's (1988) *Beech Creek: A Study of a Kentucky Mountain Neighborhood*; Schwarzweller et. al's (1971) *Mountain Families in Transition: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration;* and Arnett's (1978) *Eastern Kentucky: The Politics of Dependency and Underdevelopment.*

Although I used slightly different data collection techniques relative to Brown and Schwarzwell et. al, and although my study carries different theoretical goals relative to theirs, using their respective works as bases of comparison was possible. As Burawoy (1998) notes, "history is not a laboratory experiment that can be replicated again and again under the same conditions. There is something ineffably unique about the ethnographic encounter" (p11).[48] Bahr et. al. (1983), reflecting on the Middletown III study, similarly argued that identical replication in longitudinal studies is exceedingly difficult if not impossible.

A number of other comparative historical studies have utilized what Burawoy (2003) calls the "archaeological revisit" in order to make comparisons among similar but distinctive cases. Haney's (2002) ethnographic study of the post-socialist state in Hungary, for example, used oral histories and archival data in order to reconstruct a past case, which she used in order to make sense of the contemporary effects of welfare cutbacks. Lopez's (2003) study of labor campaigns in Pittsburgh, similarly, reconstructed past cases using archives, newspaper material and legal reports in order to understand why some organizing drives were successful while others were not. Given the thoroughness and quality of the two past ethnographic studies of Shale County—and the way in which they are complimented by Billings, Blee's and Arnett's historical work—my comparisons are considerably more robust relative to those examples.[49]

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[48] Burawoy, thus, argues that subsequent studies should not seek replication but extension, attempting to deepen exisiting understanding of the theoretical questions under examination. In other words, through the use of his "extended case method," which I further elaborate below, he argues that the researcher can connect cases to one another rather than reducing them to instances of a general law.

[49] I should also note that my methodology possessed considerably more reliability than the wealth of comparative work that uses Weberian ideal types in order to construct cases for comparison (Ragin 1987).

My work sought two goals. First, I attempted to understand how different sets of historical and contextual conditions produced comparable outcomes of conservative partisanship, industry identification and quiescence in the face of elite malfeasance. Second, I attempted to identify the more general mechanisms that yielded those conditions in similar structural contexts. In this sense, my research utilized Burawoy's (1998) extended case method, which

> applies reflexive science to ethnography in order to extract the general from the unique, to move from the 'micro' to the 'macro,' and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory" (p.5).

Through the use of this method, Burawoy argues that researcher can explore broad historical patterns and macrostructures without relinquishing the artfulness and understanding that accompany ethnography or the analytical rigor that accompanies science.[50] There is a strong lineage of this method of research within Appalachian studies. Through particularized ethnographic analyses, several scholars have linked general phenomena like poverty, inequality, and contention to broader forces of capitalist accumulation and state building (Gaventa 1982; Scott 1995; Erikson 1976; Arnett 1978; Eller 1982). Burawoy contends that the researcher can accomplish this by extending out from particularities and by following their links to broader forces and social trends.

In the case at hand, rather than attempting to explain different outcomes at different moments during Shale's history, I attempted to account for the similar patterns of political behavior that have held consistent across them. Burawoy (1979) utilized this method/strategy in his well-regarded dissertational research at a Chicago industrial plant, which yielded the book *Manufacturing Consent.* Using Donald Roy's study of the same plant from several decades earlier, Burawoy analyzed how the use of distinctive work incentive systems in two different

[50] Past ethnographies in this tradition have connected micro to macro, for example, by linking community studies to broader forces such as labor markets and institutionalized racism.

time periods produced a common outcome of compliance in lieu of class-based resistance. As Ragin (1987) notes, Burawoy explained a constant (worker consent) with a variable (different ways of producing on the shop floor).

In my research, I strived to do the same. Specifically, I analyzed how three different forms of socio-economic organization (a preagrian subsistence farming economy; a wage-labor economy dominated by industrial extraction; and a post-industrial economy characterized by high unemployment, informal economic activity, state retrenchment, and the drug trade) produced similar outcomes of Republican partisanship, identification with/quiescence in the face of abusive economic and political actors, and civic disengagement. My historical-interpretive goal, as such, involved deciphering why characteristics that appeared to be different generated very similar consequences. My causal-analytic goal involved identifying the general social mechanisms that precipitated Republican voting patterns, identification with the coal industry, support for the local state, and class-based quiescence in lieu of contention among the poor.

In order to build a base for comparison with the previous work carried out on Shale County, I utilized Burawoy's (2003) "focused revisit" method. An "ethnographic revisit," generally speaking, "occurs when an ethnographer undertakes participant observation, that is, studying others in their space and time, with a view to comparing his or her site with the same one studied at an earlier point in time, whether by him or herself or by someone else" (p. 646). A focused revisit, which Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent* exemplifies, involves "an intensive comparison of one's own field work with a prior ethnography [or ethnographies] of the same site, usually conducted by someone else" (p.650).

While I paid a great deal of attention to the internal dynamics of change across the two different cases in Shale history when making my comparisons, I maintained an eye toward how

larger economic and political forces had shaped life in the community. Because all of the previous studies of Shale were situated within processes of modernization and national social change, this task was rendered rather straightforward.

5.3 Ethnographic Component

My ethnographic data collection explored inequality, hierarchical relations, and political behavior in Shale County.[51] Stylistically, it mirrored Dollard's (1937) classic study of class and caste relations in the rural South, which illuminated the patterns of emotional life in a community marred by injustice, inequality and abuse.[52] My field methods, however, borrowed from the larger tradition of community studies. As Arensberg (1954) notes,

> community study is that method in which a problem…in the…dynamics of behavior and attitudes…is explored against or within the surround of other behavior and attitudes of the individuals making up the life of a particular community…Its purpose…is to use the community as a setting for the exploration, discovery, or verification of interconnections among social and psychological facts and processes (p. 110).

As Arensberg writes, the community study is a tool of sociology, not a subject. Its purpose is not to understand the narrow behavioral dynamics of a particular community, but to study a broader sociological problem within the context of one in order to observe and analyze human behavior within a complex empirical setting.

In order to accomplish this, he states that the researcher must choose a variety of data collection techniques: "To explore the natural, living setting of a problem necessarily involves concurrent attacks upon all the relevant factors at a single time" (p. 111). A well-done study,

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[51] Wacquant (2003) defines ethnographic fieldwork as "social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do" (p.5). Beyond the unique data that this approach yields, Auyero and Swistun (2009) argue that ethnography is important for its evidentiary value, in that the researcher should assign higher value to what she sees relative to what subjects report in interviews. Thus, ethnography as a strategy of triangulation helps to ensure reliable data, as it enables the researcher to gauge the veracity of what subjects report in other forms of data collection.

[52] In carrying out his work, Dollard operated according to the logic that living under similar states of affairs and social structures creates a common emotional mood and set of dispositions.

then, must deal with all relevant facets of community life and explore the interrelations among their various features.[53]

Unlike Brown (1988) and Schwarzweller et. al's (1971) studies, which focused on a poor and remote neighborhood within Shale County, Beech Creek, like Billings and Blee (2000) and Arnett (1978), I focused my efforts on the county seat, Valley Town. I chose Valley Town because it was the center of political life within the county, because it was the most prominent site of communal activity therein, and because it was most accessible. My selection, as such, reflects both a convenience and theoretic sampling strategy. Although it did not mark my focus, I did visit and interact with many people who lived outside of the county seat.

My data collection consisted of both participant and nonparticipant observation and examined how residents interacted with the patronage system (i.e. local power brokers), how they participated (or neglected to participate) in community life, how they made ends meet within the context of economic deprivation, and how they experienced the patterns and rhythms of everyday life. Given that I probed many different facets of community life, my fieldwork was diverse.

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[53] The famous community studies of Middletown (Lynd and Lynd1929, 1937; Caplow et. al. 1982), for example, divided community life into six chief domains: Getting a living, organizing leisure, religious activities, community activities, making a home, and training the young. The analytic strategy that I outline below will tapped all of them, thought it emphasized the first four domains.

De-emphasizing the "training the young" domain perhaps limited the analysis, given that previous sociological research has examined how the school functions as ideological apparatus bound up with the processes of class reproduction, significantly impacting life chances (Willis 1977; Althusser 1990). However, the relationship between life chances and educational attainment is weaker in Appalachia due to the overall lack of relevant jobs in its economy (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990). Moreover, within the patronage system, one's academic achievement and educational attainment matters far less than one's familial ties (Eller 2008).

The inability to directly analyze familial processes also limited the study, given that the nuclear family—especially in the South—has long served as a site for the reproduction of patriarchal structures, with Scott (1995) observing these processes in Harlan county. Moreover, rural poverty tends to disproportionately affect women—particularly single mothers (Tickamyer et. al 2007). However, as a wealth of Appalachian studies have shown, women have played a tremendous role in contentious politics—oftentimes exhibiting greater militancy than men in times of labor agitation (Scott 1995; Eller 2008; Fisher 1993). Thus, though not specifically attuning myself to familial processes, my ethnographic work can still capture how gender dynamics relate to participation and agitation. And last, as with education, the previous community studies of Shale County have not specifically focused on education or gender issues, which would makes historical comparison difficult.

I made my first visit to the county in March 2011, at which point I spent a week attempting to make contacts (I did not know anyone there prior to my arrival) and acquaint myself with the area. I stayed in a large house that had been divided into three different apartment units. One of the units featured a single room that was designated for short-term visitors. At the time, a 71 year-old woman named Dawn, who had moved to Shale County from Pennsylvania 30 years earlier in order to work as a missionary, was living in the largest unit, which contained the aforementioned "hotel room." Her son-in-law owned the house and allowed her to live there free of rent in exchange for managing the property. I stayed in the "hotel room," with Dawn living in the bedroom beside me.

Dawn became an early "gatekeeper" to the larger community. Although she expressed skepticism when I introduced myself as a sociologist with an interest in studying community empowerment and local politics, she soon took a liking to me and showed me around the town. Dawn answered my many questions about the town, introduced me to a few people who lived about the hollow, took me to church with her, and gave me a tour of the town. Her son-in-law, whom I also met, gave me contact information for Shale's Historical Society and lent me two local history books and recent documentary about the county that chronicled its struggle with drug addiction. In all, this early visit provided contacts and gave me a sense of what was happening in the town as far as current events (e.g. the county's struggle with drug addiction, the trials of various local politicians who had been indicted for corruption, and a march that had occurred several years earlier in order to raise consciousness around the county's social problems). It also gave me the opportunity to conduct a few preliminary interviews, which I drew upon in order to refine the analytical focus of my study.

I returned to the county for a second visit in May 2011 and stay until the beginning of August. I stayed in the same room that I had stayed in during the first visit, again sharing an apartment with Dawn. Although I spent time attending public meetings, attending church with Dawn, seeking out interviews with key individuals (e.g. anti-poverty workers, government officials and leaders in the community), and attending community events (e.g. a county festival, a Fourth of July celebration, etc.), I spent most of this period documenting the daily lives and survival strategies of a poor couple who lived in the apartment above me. I met the couple, a 34 year-old woman named Lauren and a 28 year-old woman named Amy, on the day that I arrived, when they knocked on the door to borrow Dawn's phone. While Amy was very shy at first, Lauren was very outgoing and interested in talking with me. She often expressed an eagerness to introduce me to various characters in the county, whom she always referred to as "hillbillies," for the purpose of facilitating my research.

Because they frequently came down to our unit in order to request favors from Dawn—usually rides (they did not have a car, and we lived in a very remote area) and to make phone calls (neither had a telephone)—I saw them very often during the first few days of my stay. They soon began requesting favors from me (usually rides). At this point we began to become friends. For the remainder of the summer, I spent the majority of my time driving Amy and Lauren around town and hanging out in their upstairs apartment. While I knew little about them at first, I quickly learned that they were poor and had run into legal problems in the past due to drug use. Both had children from previous relationships that were living away from them. While Amy had temporarily ceased using drugs because she was pregnant (about five months into term), Lauren regularly abused prescription medications (mostly Xanex), smoked marijuana and drank alcohol.

Lauren and Amy made ends meet through a combination of government assistance programs—Lauren collected a monthly Supplemental Security Income check for approximately $650, and Amy received WIC and SNAP benefits—and "hustling." "Hustling" consisted of performing informal work when it was available (for example babysitting, pawning possessions and carrying out housework), bartering (e.g. exchanging cigarettes and prescription pills for rides), manipulating government assistance benefits (e.g. selling their food stamps for cash), soliciting petty loans, diverting prescription pills, which Lauren received for free from her Medicaid coverage, and occasionally stealing.

Because Amy and Lauren did not earn enough money to cover their living expenses, and because they were entangled in a complex web of small debts that continuously demanded payment, most of the time that we spent together involved driving about the county in order to make various social and economic transactions. These transactions included paying back friends, taking loans from other friends, going to the pharmacy, going from house to house in order to sell pills, and so on. At first, I did not know that I was facilitating their drug transactions, as the pair developed cover stories for the errands that we ran (such as "I need to visit my sick friend," and "so and so owes me babysitting money"). Although I requested that they not bring drugs into my car when I discovered what was happening, they usually did so anyway, often conning me into making stops at various locations under the pretext of ruses.[54] The ethical dilemmas that these situations presented are discussed in the appendix.

I also provided rides for "legitimate" purposes. I drove them to the grocery store on several occasions, to the post office, to a DUI course in which Lauren was enrolled, to Amy's

[54] Beyond being party to "hustles," I developed a sense of how they and their friends understood their social status, how they viewed the local political players, the challenges associated with obtaining work and making ends meet, and so on.

doctor's appointments, and so on. Occasionally we drove to a nearby lake in order to go swimming. When we were not about the town, I spent a great deal of time hanging out with Amy and Lauren in their upstairs apartment.

Apart from observing their daily survival strategies and interactions with various people and institutions in the community, I spent much of my time asking Amy and Lauren about their lives, the county, their social and political views, and so on. In spending so time with them, I also met many of their friends and acquaintances, especially those who were involved in the drug subculture, which was sizeable. As a whole, this phase of my fieldwork was critical because it provided a window into the daily lives of Shale County's "lumpen class" (elaborated in Chapter Seven). As Chambers (1983) notes, most qualitative studies of rural poverty, which are mediated through local power brokers, service providers and county officials, fail to access the poor in a meaningful way.

After leaving in August 2011, I did not return to Shale until June 2012. I stayed until January 2013 and conducted the majority of my fieldwork during this visit. Although I moved into the same house as before, I stayed in one of the independent apartments and thus no shared living space with Dawn . Amy and Lauren, unfortunately, had been evicted soon after I had departed during the previous summer. Because they did not have a phone or consistent access to email, I was unable to contact them upon arriving. Soon, however, I discovered that they had been arrested on drug-related offenses and were in jail. Amy's young child had been taken away from her as a result.

Unlike the previous summer, I spent most of my time during this final visit engaging with community institutions, community leaders, recipients of social programs, and public life. My fieldwork took a multitude of forms. First, I attended public meetings and public events,

including meetings of the city council and fiscal court, holiday celebrations, and special events, such as campaign events associated with the 2012 election and community symposiums. Occasionally, I also participated in meetings held by a local drug prevention organization.

Because community meetings and public events occurred only sporadically, I spent much my time engaging with local churches and their outreach missions. I regularly attended three churches—a large "county seat" Baptist church, a large and affluent Pentacostal church, and a small Holiness church with a relatively poor congregation. I most thoroughly involved myself with the former church, which also oversaw a religiously oriented addiction counseling program, monitored several drug offenders whose cases had been diverted into "drug court," engaged in anti-poverty missions throughout the county, and housed several individuals who were struggling to make ends meet. On most days of the week, I spent several hours volunteering and hanging out at "The Lord's Table," the center out of which the church's missions were run and where those enrolled in drug court worked.

In a rural community with few opportunities for entertainment and socialization, The Lord's Table was a vivacious place. Those in need of assistance—whether in the form of counseling, material goods (it contained a large "clothing warehouse," which provided clothes, mattresses, books, toys, etc. to the poor), legal favors (i.e. for the pastor to speak to the county attorney or a judge on one's behalf), and occasionally money—visited nearly every day. Several people (many of whom were recovering addicts) spent much of their day there, as it functioned as community gathering place. And, of course, those in drug court and receiving addiction counseling through the church's "lifeline" program were present to attend meetings and volunteer most days of the week. Between volunteering, which involved sorting and distributing items that people donated to the church, I had occasion to listen to and get to know a variety of

people within the community. These included drug offenders (both younger and older), recovering drug addicts, volunteers who attended the church (who were typically middle-class but occasionally of limited means), and the "lumpen" individuals who came for favors and services.

I became very good friends the two primary volunteers: Max, a 60 year-old pastor who was unemployed (he had ministered at a small Baptist church in a rural part of the county for 20 years but had recently been asked to step down), and Bruce, a 56 year-old recovering drug addict and born-again-Christian, who had completed a local rehab program about a year before I arrived. Beyond spending time with them at The Lord's Table, I spent time with them at their homes, engaged in various volunteer projects around the county with them, and attended various social functions and community events with them. Max had grown up in Louisville and was a relatively erudite individual who viewed himself as a scholar of the bible. Although well-liked by the drug court workers, he was strict and maintained a more distant, paternalistic relationship with them. Bruce, on the other hand, had spent most of his life partying and doing drugs. He had a much more charismatic and exuberant personality. Given their divergent personalities, Max and Bruce often quarreled.

Although I became very close with Steve and Bruce, the closest friend that I made in Shale County was Valley Town Baptist Church's pastor, David, who served as "gatekeeper" to other individuals and organizations in the area. David was a humble, soft-spoken, intelligent, moral, and caring person who had grown up in nearby Harlan County. Widely respected throughout the county, he sat on the boards of several community organizations and was heavily involved in public life—mostly in relation to preventing and treating drug abuse. David had also helped to organize several concerned citizens groups to confront the county's problems with

drug abuse and political corruption several years earlier. His efforts cultivated in a march through the Valley Town in 2004 comprised of approximately 3,500 people. Thereafter, David helped to organize a local "court watch," "citizens for a fair election group," and successfully petitioned the district congressman for a federal grant to construct a rehab center in the county.

Although David sometimes expressed skepticism and confusion about the nature of my project, he eventually settled into his own interpretation: That I was present to "write about the good things in the mountains." During the seven month period that comprised my final visit to Shale, I spent much of my time with him. I saw him at The Lord's Table almost every day, shared meals with him, accompanied him on errands and missions throughout town, went to movies and community events with him, went on a number of hikes with him, and even drove to Virginia with him for a church mission. As with Bruce and Max, we spent this time discussing politics, community development, religion, and so on. David also introduced me to several people in the community. On a few occasions, individuals whom I had approached for interviews contacted him in order to verify that I could be trusted.

Apart from the people whom I met through church and volunteering, I spent time with my neighbors and other people whom I met simply via living in community. As Dollard (1937) argues, these informal methods are paramount, given that

> the researcher learns by living and observing in the actual situation…by fleeting empathy which is followed by distance and reflection…People may not tell him directly what he wants to know, perhaps may not know how to, and they will certainly not be able to give him a theory of their culture. What they will do is illustrate it for him, act it out, and in the best case be their true selves before his eyes (pp. 19-20).

Like Dollard, I observed what people said and attempted to understand what they thought and felt. At every opportunity, I had conversations with them about their everyday problems and took note of tacit things, such as what they became excited or distressed about, how they

responded to particular situations and questions, and so on. In short, I made every effort to embed myself in the community and to live there as typical Shale Countian.

After each period of observation, whether it involved attending church, a city council meeting, a high school football game, or simply having dinner with friends, I recorded detailed field notes. While I did not overtly take notes while in the actual field, I carried a small notebook with me at all times, so that I could jot down important occurrences for later elaboration. After returning home, I expanded my condensed notes in order to create a comprehensive record of what I saw and participated in during the day Altogether, this resulted in hundred pages of fieldnotes that provide insight into the structure of feeling enveloping the county, the social and political problems that weighed on residents' minds, the values many embraced, and their understandings of the political arena.

5.4 Interviewing

In addition to my field observation, I carried out interviews with 40 people, which were tape-recorded and fully transcribed (these were in addition to the innumerous "informal interviews," which I conducted during my ethnographic fieldwork).[55] While I interviewed a large cross-section of residents, seeking out diversity in age, gender, occupation, and geographical location, I focused on key members of the community, i.e. those involved with addressing and/or administrating community problems. For example, I spoke with several pastors who were spearheading anti-corruption and drug awareness efforts, aggrieved citizens who were protesting mountaintop removal mining, the mayor and judge executive, police and

[55] This interval range is an approximation of how many interviews data collection will require before I reach a point of saturation regarding emerging themes and topics. Its high number is predicated upon the lengthy period of time that I anticipate spending in Shale County. As with my ethnographic work, the number/range can be modified relative to the state of my data collection.

antinarcotics officers, newspaper reporters, social workers, leaders of activist organizations, and many ordinary citizens—everyone from missionaries to recovering addicts to educators.

Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to four hours in length. The longer interviews were typically partitioned into multiple sessions in order to mitigate against participant exhaustion. The interviews were semi-structured; while I asked prefabricated questions, I allowed the interviews to veer into unanticipated directions and asked follow-up questions when appropriate. Because I interviewed a wide array of people, I tailored each protocol to the participant's background. The questions that I asked the board-certified addiction specialist and rehab counselor in my sample, as such, were different from the questions that I asked anti-coal activists. I asked almost all participants, however, about how the county had changed over the past 20 years, the most pressing problems it faced and best ways to confront those problems.[56]

While I interviewed participants in a variety of settings, I typically conducted them in the places where they worked or volunteered (e.g. their churches, offices, schools, meeting places, etc.). Those involved who were critical of the local government and coal industry, however, expressly noted their disinclination to meet in public settings. As such, I interviewed these individuals in my apartment and, in one case, a sparsely attended local park. Beyond offering small favors to some interviewees, I did not offer them financial compensation as an inducement for participation.

I recorded all interviews on a digital recording device. I personally transcribed approximately half of the interviews and used a transcription service for the remaining

[56] The protocols that I devised typically utilized a topical interviewing method. According to Glesne (1999), topical interviewing attempts to understand the opinions, perceptions, and attitudes of social actors about various phenomena and/or topics. My topical protocols explored residents' experiences with clientelism, inequality, corruption, and voting; asked questions regarding values, beliefs, interests, and politics; queried attitudes about elites and their control of community resources; investigated ongoing, everyday occurrences in county politics; inquired about significant events and problems during the county's recent history; and, when applicable, discussed participation in community organizations.

recordings. I also wrote reflection notes after most interviews. They also detailed my relationship with the interviewee, described their self-presentation, noted relevant events that might have influenced their responses, listed my thoughts on the quality of data, and commented on the interview's themes and motifs. I made an effort to continuously reflect on the information as a whole in order to modify and hone my interview protocols and observational techniques as my time and Shale carried on. Similarly, I used codes from my ethnographic work in order to update and improve my protocols. Altogether, my efforts netted more than 1000 pages of participant commentary.

5.5 Archival Research

As a final prong of my data collection, I carried out extensive archival research. Beyond meticulously reading and compiling notes on the four previous studies that were carried out on Shale County, I analyzed the better part of the last ten years of the local newspaper. The newspaper, which is published weekly, documents significant events and occurences that transpire in the community. They also feature periodic columns from local politicians, which report on their efforts and achievements in government, as well as non-politicians, which comment on social problems in the community. The newspaper also regularly publishes religious oriented op-eds and columns on local history by local writers. Finally, innumerous political ads are published in the newspaper, which are robust sources for examining how politicians present and legitimate themselves. While I read physical copies of the paper during my fieldwork, I carried out most of this analysis in the local library, which preserved old copies of the newspaper on microfiche. This work yielded almost 150 pages of notes and observations and played a pivotal role in fleshing out my understanding of the county's local history and structure of feeling.

In addition to analyzing the local paper, I analyzed legal documents and transcripts from the federal corruption cases that were filed against local officials during the 2000s. I obtained these files on the US PACER system, which electronically collates and stores federal legal cases. While I purchased key files for download, I analyzed some in the United States District Court building located in Rock City, where they can be viewed on a terminal free of charge. These files provided insight into the nature of local clientelism and corruption that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

Lastly, I monitored local Facebook groups/events and a local web-forum for discussions of local political events and social occurrences. Although I established trust with many of my research participants, this strategy allowed me to capture the political discourses of Shale Countians on their own terms—outside of my gaze. It also provided a window into the more private thoughts of county residents, in the sense that under the guise of anonymity, they were able to openly discuss what they often could not discuss in public.

5.6 Data Analysis

As a method of collecting and analyzing data, my design relied on a grounded theory method (Charmaz 2000).[57] As I drafted field notes and attendant reflections, and as I conducted and transcribed interviews, I continuously analyzed the data in order to identify the common experiences and emotions that informed and influenced residents' cultural and political understandings. As codes, patterns and findings began to develop, I modified my observations and interviews in order to cohere with them. I thus attempted to synthesize the data collection and data analysis components of my research.

[57] According to Eaves (2003), grounded theory "uses a systematic set of data collection and analysis procedures to develop an inductively derived theory from the data" (p.655). Charmaz (2000) writes that a grounded theory approach should remain close to the world of social actors, and should develop "analytic interpretations of participants' worlds and of the processes constituting how these worlds are constructed" (p.508).

When I completed my fieldwork, I collated the sum of my fieldnotes, interview reflections, interview transcripts, and archival notes into Atlas.ti, which I used to code the data. I employed an inductive, analytic strategy as my primary technique for data analysis. This meant actively searching for patterns and themes that cut across all of the data garnered from my field work. I then used continued and repeated abstraction in an attempt to truly understand "what was going on" within in. In order to minimize problems of reliability, every effort was made to further investigate misunderstandings and embed field notes and interview responses in the richest contextual detail possible.

While analyzing the data and generating codes, I gave particular attention to the following issues:

- Why people do or do not participate in the county's political life
- How people talk about local government and other levels of government
- How relations of power and patterns of inequality (specifically with regard to clientelism, corruption and factionalism) enable and/or constrain political choice and political participation
- The relationship between people's positions within the county's authority structures and their interests, beliefs, values, etc.
- What ideas, feelings, and experiences people associate with political messages, signs and symbols
- The extent to which people feel efficacious/empowered vs. repressed in their daily lives
- What issues and problems people assign primacy to in the county
- What qualities legitimate political actors and political understandings

In all, I developed 503 independent codes on Atlas.ti, although most of those codes were sub-codes belonging to a larger "family." Almost all of the codes were given explicit definitions, and analytic notes were affixed to a large proportion of the quotations. I continuously refined the codes in order to minimize repetition and enhance analytic rigor.

PART THREE: THE RESEARCH SETTING -- SHALE COUNTY, KY

CHAPTER 6

HISTORICAL ORIGINS: SHALE COUNTY'S ROAD TO POVERTY, 1800 - 1970

6.1 Introduction

Shale County is located in the Southeastern portion of Kentucky and in the heart of Central Appalachia.[58] The county is relatively large in area, spanning nearly 500 square miles, but rural and sparse in population, housing fewer than 25,000 residents. Valley Town, a small community of less than 2,000 people, serves as the county seat. The nearest major cities are each about two hours away. While evidence suggests that frontiersmen such as Daniel Boone had begun to clear trails through modern day Shale in the middle to late 1700s, the locality first began to attract population around its "salt bowl" region in the early 1800s.

Shale's early history is complex. In remote parts of the county, social life was organized around a system of small subsistence farms. In these areas, transportation, formal organization and political life remained limited, and economic independence prevailed. In other parts of the county, namely Valley Town, political and economic inequality reigned, and social life was marked by unequal economic accumulation, clientelism, corruption, and feuding.[59] Whether in

[58] The Appalachian Regional Commission demarcates three distinctive regions within Appalachia. Northern Appalachia comprises portions of Eastern Ohio, most of Pennsylvania and Southwestern and South-central New York; Central Appalachia consists of all of West Virginia, the Western counties of Virginia, Eastern Kentucky, and Eastern Tennessee; and Southern Appalachia includes portions of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. While all three regions have experienced disproportionate shares of poverty and social disorganization relative to the rest of the nation, Central Appalachia's poverty and disadvantage has historically been the most severe and the most stubborn (Eller 2008). As Billings and Blee (2000) note," no region of the United States remains more deeply mired in poverty and economic distress than Appalachia. Central Appalachia in particular…is virtually synonymous both with rural poverty and with difficulty of implementing effective policies of social betterment" (p.3).

[59] Given the differences between life in the county seat and life in remote parts of the county, as Halperin (1990) argues, the term "rural" does the not do justice to the dynamism and differentiation that characterizes the county. Life in and around Valley Town should be thought of as "shallow rural," i.e. a middle ground between "city" and

the county seat or in the "country," most families were poor and lacked the comforts associated with urban life.

Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee (2000, 2004) set out to investigate the economic, cultural and political roots of Shale's persistent poverty in 1990s. In studying the county, they hoped to illuminate the origins of Appalachia poverty more generally. One of the reasons they selected Shale as their case was because much was already known about the county. In a dissertation that became a classic, James Brown (1988) studied a set of rural neighborhoods in rural Shale County in 1942. Schwarzweller et. al (1971) carried out a follow-up study 20 years later.[60] Two additional studies were undertaken as well. Douglas Arnett (1978) studied how the War on Poverty unfolded in the area during the 1960s, and Clyde McCoy and Virginia McCoy Watkins (1980) collected data on how migrants from the county had adjusted to life in the Midwest during the mid-1970s.

Given the wealth of existing research, this chapter reviews the aforementioned studies in order to provide an economic, cultural and historical backdrop to the current study. Each of the existing works captures the community at different phases in its historical development. Billings and Blee's (2000, 2004) work illuminates the period from approximately 1800-1942. Drawing from a massive historical dataset, they document several phases within the county's pre-modern history, underscoring how slavery, unequal patterns of land ownership and a "patriarchal moral economy" shaped enduring economic and political inequalities. Brown's (1988) 1942 study depicts the county's social organization on the eve of modernization. The ethnographic detail

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country," while life in hollows within remote parts of the county should be thought of as "deep rural" (Halperin 1990). While both areas share the same cultural and economic patterns and historical trajectory, they are distinctive. Modernization came to "deep rural" areas of the county later, and agriculture in those areas declined over a longer period of time. As a result, the "deep rural" remained more aloof from political dynamics within the county, not fully experiencing clientelism and corruption until modernization.

contained within his work not only provides a ground-level view of social life at the time, but illuminates how unequal class relations, familism, "puritanism," and a commitment to "democracy" underpinned community life.

Schwarzeller's et. al's (1971) work, which was carried out in 1962, provides a snapshot of the county during a transitional moment, in which the last vestiges of agriculture were eroding and many county residents were migrating out of the region. Although much of their research focused on the dynamics of migration and assimilation, the final chapter of their book gives a glimpse of what had become of the neighborhoods that Brown studied 20 years earlier.

Arnett's (1978) work, based on his experiences working with the county's development association and community action agency during the 1960s, gives an in-depth analysis of how the War on Poverty unfolded in the county. His analysis focuses on how Shale's political elite thwarted economic empowerment among the poor and how "infrastructures of dependency" perpetuate underdevelopment in internal colonial situations. Because Brown and Schwarzeller et. al gave limited attention to the county's political structure, Arnett's work brings Billings and Blee's historical analysis full circle, laying the groundwork for a contemporary investigation of the relationship between poverty and political domination in Shale.

6.2 Settlement and Foundations of Poverty

Shale's early settlers formed a combination of subsistence farmers seeking land and "wealthy, southern back-country elite that exercised political leadership and possessed economic power throughout Virginia and Frontier Kentucky" (Billings and Blee 2004:24). The latter group settled along Shale's "salt bowl" region. These settlers found that the bowl area "contained the largest source of sub-surface salt water to be found in the United Sates as far as was known at the time" (House 2008: 13). House (2008) argues that "for ambitious types who owned enough slaves to take advantage of it, it was like picking money off trees" (p.13). The

latter contingent of settlers quickly began to capitalize upon Shale's natural bounty. While Billings and Blee note that Shale's persistent poverty is irreducible to a single factor, salt production played the decisive role.

As nascent salt operations gained momentum in the early 1800s, Shale attracted more residents and investment, eventually incorporating as a county in 1807. During this time, the county's salt works produced more salt than any locality east of the Mississippi River.[61] Few residents enjoyed the fruits of the industry though. Because the families who owned the salt works employed slaves in order to operate their firms, they accumulated significant wealth relative to the subsistence farmers who had settled alongside them. Producing for themselves in lieu of the market, farmers accumulated only minimal capital. The situation eventually created the "socioeconomic foundations for an emergent political elite," which gave rise to inequalities in wealth and land ownership, shut the poor out of political life and undermined economic diversification (p.24).

Despite the presence of early inequality, Shale's subsistence farmers remained economically independent from "elite" influence—doing well for themselves—through most of the 19th Century. They did not, however, enjoy corollary political independence. As Billings and Blee (2004) note:

> During the antebellum era, slaveholders dominated Shale County's political and judicial institutions, as did their wealthy descendants for many decades thereafter. The economic elite secured…its class position by controlling tax assessment, collection, and expenditures and using…law enforcement and…judicial institutions to defend its rights to property…discipline slaves, enforce contracts and debts, adjudicate disputes, secure additional sources of labor (sometimes oppressively)… and enlist local citizens in the maintenance of roads and waterways. Additionally, some members of the economic elite found governmental offices…to be financially lucrative in their own right (p.31).

[61] During the 20 year period from 1830 to 1850, for instance, the county's emerging elite built 15 manufacturing firms, which produced nearly a quarter of a million bushels of salt per annum.

Not only did elites gain control over the local political apparatus in order to ensure that their economic accumulation continued unabated, but powerful families in the area, most with links to the salt industry, engaged in fierce competition with one another. Their competition resulted in severe political factionalism, which manifested in a series of violent feuds that raged from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. These feuds, which attracted national attention, had a ruinous effect on the local state and civil society. Billings and Blee (2004) argue that they "had lasting effects on Shale County's political development," resulting in a stunted public sphere (p.31).

Elite competition and a dearth of nonagricultural economic opportunities also made Shale's local government vulnerable to clientelism and corruption. Billings and Blee (2004) argue that:

> Personal ties and connections became the foundation on which public politics was transacted, allowing antagonisms from economic life to spill easily over into public life and governance. Such corruption crippled local capacity to establish the modern infrastructure necessary for sustained local economic development (p.32).

Clientelism and corruption worsened as Shale's economy transitioned away from subsistence agriculture. By 1880, farm productivity had begun to decline.[62] Billings and Blee (2004) attribute the loss of economic stability to population growth, which was driven by the emergence of a "patriarchal moral economy:"

> Patriarchy provided strong incentives to high fertility in the non-capitalist economy by positioning fathers to use and benefit from the labor of all family members, including children. The virtual absence of wage laborers, combined with the financial inability to invest in slaves during the antebellum period, kept fertility high in Shale County's subsistence farming areas long after it had declined in other, more market-oriented regions of the country. But over time, the effect of rapid population growth on limited

[62] The majority of local farmers exhibited an aversion to the profitable and commercial deployment of agricultural land and were geared toward "self-sufficient survival with no special emphasis on the acquisition of material possessions as status symbols and even as laborsaving devices" (Billings and Blee 2000:161). Yet, while the primary economic fault line that emerged in Shale's early history involved elite salt producers, who took measures to construct and control local political institutions, and subsistence farmers, Billings and Blee note another important mode of inequality that ensued from subsistence farming: a "patriarchal moral economy." By this term, they mean to underscore how male patriarchs benefited and controlled the value generated through farm labor largely carried out by women and children.

> land resources led to diminishing economic prospects as mountain farms were divided and re-divided to accommodate new generations of farm families. (p.30).

The patriarchal-feudal relations that governed the area, in which male property owners benefitted from the uncompensated labor of their family members, led to high fertility rates (men had an incentive to bear children for the purpose of enhancing agricultural yields). As farms were subdivided among posterity, subsistence became more difficult and less food could be brought to market.

The diminishing viability of subsistence farming was formative not only for the economic path that Shale County took, but for how its cultural patterns developed. In order to survive population growth and diminishing farm yields, a moral economy emphasizing mutual aid, hard work and reciprocity developed:

> Family survival strategies, rooted in a nonmarket system of social production and reproduction, helped rural Appalachians to cope both with the hardships they encountered when their farm system declined, and the hardships they faced during the capitalist-industrialist transformation of the mountain region (p.30).

Kinship norms of mutual aid, interdependence and reciprocity became key survival strategies for subsistence farmers. As Brown's (1988) work shows, these strategies came to play a profound role in shaping patterns of social interaction and social understanding for years to come.

6.3 Coal-driven Modernization and its Consequences

Organized around a factionalized local state and a network of overpopulated subsistence farms, Shale County could not generate enough resources to internally fund its own economic development. This set the stage for outside interests to control processes of industrialization that began in the early 20th century. While slavery and salt manufacturing had led to some integration within the national marketplace during the antebellum, Shale's mountain location and lack of transportation infrastructure had resulted in relative isolation after its salt works were

destroyed by union armies in the Civil War. They county began to experience reintegration into broader regional networks in the 1890s, however, as word began to spread of a nascent plan to connect the county to the nearby Rock City via railway.[63]

As speculation continued, the inchoate railroad project reached fruition. Laborers began to construct a line in 1907 and had linked Shale County to the Rock City grid by 1916. Outside investors, positing that the rail project would render coal mining economically profitable, initiated an aggressive land grab. The resulting speculation raised property values immensely, which encouraged families to sell the mineral rights to their land—oftentimes through the broad-form deed.[64] Though locals gleaned certain short-term financial benefits from the sale of their properties, in the long run, real estate speculation intensified Shale's long-standing problem of unequal land ownership (Billings and Blee 2000).

Shale's railroad allowed for the first significant development of its coal resources. By the early 1920s, the same elite families who had controlled Shale's salt industry had formed small scale mining operations in order to send the county's mineral deposits to market. Outside speculators and investors, however, quickly gained the upper hand. While the advent of widespread mining brought short-term benefits to the county in the form of infrastructural development and greater opportunity for waged employment, scholars agree that coal-driven modernization resulted in a host of social, political, economic, and ecological problems for the region (Arnett 1978; Eller 1982, 2008; Caudill 1963; Lewis et. al 1978; Perdue and Pavela 2012).

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[63] Rock City is located approximately 20 miles West of Valley Town, the seat of the county.

[64] Coal operators often obtained the mineral rights to residents lands through an agreement known as the "broad form deed." The broad form deed allowed operators to purchase millions of dollars of latent wealth from land owners at rates that reflected a fraction of its value. Sellers retained the surface rights to their land until miners wished to develop it, at which point operators became fee to extract coal through any means necessary. This often involved the complete destruction of the surface owner's land and home and, by default, their displacement without compensation.

Eller (1982) summarizes the scholarly consensus regarding modernization's outcome for the region well in his classic book *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers*:

> The brief prosperity brought on by the bonanza of modernization broadened the mountaineer's economic horizon. It aroused aspirations, envies, and hopes. But the industrial wonders of the age promised more than they in fact delivered, for the profits taken from the rich natural resources of the region flowed out of the mountains, with little benefit to the mountain people themselves…it brought struggle, hardship, and despair (p.xxiv).[65]

As Eller indicates, the "development" associated with Central Appalachia's mining "bonanza" transformed many formerly self-governing localities into economically dependent "internal colonies" (Lewis 1978; Arnett 1978). Industrialization resulted in precipitous agricultural decline; widespread patterns of absentee land ownership;[66] and the advent of the "company town" (Caudill 1963; Lewis 1978; Arnett 1978; Gaventa 1982). It is appropriate to quote Eller (1982) at length with regard to how the development of such towns affected socio-political life in the region:

> The power of the mine operator was pervasive, extending over almost every facet of village affairs…He regulated access to the town and restricted movement within it, and

[65] While the externalities noted by scholars like Caudill, Eller and Lewis are well-taken, it should be noted that their accounts of modernization romanticize the past by interpreting coal mining as a catchall explanation of Appalachian social problems. The following quote by Eller (1982) is an example: "The transformation of the region had come quickly. Less than thirty years earlier, the mountains had stood in solitude. Great forests of oak, ash, and poplar covered the hillsides with a rich blanket of deep hues, and clear, sparkling streams rushed along the valley floors. No railroad had yet penetrated the hollows. The mountain people lived in small settlements scattered here and there in the valleys and covers. Life on the whole was simple, quiet, and devoted chiefly to agricultural pursuits" (p.161). Eller goes on the juxtapose this bucolic and wholesome imagery with the chaos of modernization that railroads and coal camps brought: "The once majestic earth was scarred and ugly, and the streams ran brown with garbage and acid runoff from the mines. A black dust covered everything. Huge mounds of coal and 'gob' piles of discarded mine waste lay about. The peaceful quiet of three decades before had been replaced by a cacophony of voices and industrial sounds" (p.162). While true in many ways, Eller fails to mention the many ugly problems that existed alongside the region's natural beauty and the toll that early timbering and over-farming practices took on the environment prior to mining. Moreover, as Billings and Blee (2000) note, accounts of Appalachian poverty that stress "internal colonialism" do not well explain the persistent poverty and "underdevelopment" of communities that lacked a historical coal presence.

[66] By 1900, outside capitalists owned 90 percent of the mineral deposits in Mingo County, West Virginia, for example (Eller 1982). Other counties in the region were—and still are—characterized by similar inequalities vis-à-vis land ownership. Lacking control over the mineral rights to the region's natural wealth, the economic value that mining generated flowed outward into urban metropolises rather than being reinvested in mining communities.

> he "squelched with a heavy hand" any conduct or activity that hindered the production of coal. His relationship to the miners…was not of landlord to tenant but of master to servant…Employer, merchant, and master, he sought to apply the principles of business efficiency to the social demands of the mining town. Convinced that the miners' interests were identical to those of the company, he ruled the town as he ruled the mine, without opposition or debate. Under these conditions, the company town was a closed community, and most coal operators were determined that it should remain that way (pp.193-4).

Like similar accounts by Caudill (1963) and Lewis et. al (1978), Eller's (1982) passage describes how the emergence of company towns constricted political relations, destroyed social capital and introduced hitherto unknown social strife into Central Appalachia. More than 600 such towns were established in the region between 1870 and 1930, outnumbering independent incorporated towns in the coalfields by more than five to one (Eller 1982).

Miners were forced to endure terrible social conditions in these new coal camps. In 1925, the U.S. Coal Commission found that living conditions in Central Appalachian mining camps were among the worst in the nation (Eller 1982). Beyond being blanketed with coal dust from nearby tipples and awash in black runoff waste, houses were clumsily assembled with the shoddiest of materials.[67] "The absence of sanitary facilities in the coal camps and the refuse from mining operations," moreover, "polluted land and water resources in the coal districts, causing serious health problems" (Eller 1982:185).

Beyond blocking mountaineers from having a say in the development and administration of their communities and subjecting them to terrible living conditions, mining was dangerous, exploitative work. Due to fierce competition, which was often paired with greed and callous disregard for human life, coal mining became one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States. During the first few decades of the 20th century, approximately 1,600 miners died

[67] Describing these terrible conditions in colorful language, Caudill (1963) stated that camp residents were terrorized by a "monstrous coaldust genie" (p.145). He notes how the omnipresence of the tipple gave rise to the common saying: "I was born with coaldust in my blood" (p.145).

per year from work-related accidents. From 1906 to 1935, 48,000 miners died as a result of coal mining. Roof falls alone killed an average of three miners per day during this period. Major disasters in which dozens if not hundreds of miners died at a time increased sharply as the pace of production and mechanization accelerated (Eller 1982).[68] During the course of my own research in Shale County, it seemed that nearly everyone with whom I spoke had a story about a relative who had sustained an injury—if not perished—in the mines.

What made the danger even worse was that despite almost always resulting from safety violations, juries rarely ruled against companies in cases of disaster, often attributing explosions to "Acts of God." State and federal government officials, moreover, "did little more than the coroner's juries to hold the coal companies responsible for mine safety" (Eller 1982: 181). Although safety ordinances were passed in mining states, "the political influence of the coal operators…assured that the codes remained weak and ineffective" (p.181). Laws placed the sole responsibility for workplace safety on miners, doing little more than warning miners to "be careful" while at work. Enforcement of safety violations was thus essentially nonexistent (Gaventa 1982).

In addition to causing sadness, sickness and death, environmentally irresponsible mining practices devastated the region's natural beauty and robust ecosystems. The animal and aquatic life that at one time abounded in the area disappeared in many areas due to the ecological destruction that mine operators waged in the name of profit. In *The Hills Beyond*, Wolfe and Aswell (1941) described the ecological effects of coal mining as follows:

[68] In 1902, for example, 184 miners were killed in an accident in Coal Creek, Tennessee. In 1907, 358 men were killed during an accident in Monagah, West Virginia in 1907. Such accidents continued to occur nearly every year in Central Appalachia. In 2010 25 workers died in a mine explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia. Massey Energy, who operated the mine, had been cited for more than 1,300 safety violations in the years leading up to the disaster.

> The great mountain slopes and forests of the section had been ruinously detimbered; the farm-soil on the hillsides had eroded and washed down; high up, upon the hills, one saw the raw scars of old mica pits, the dump heaps of deserted mines…It was evident that a huge compulsive greed had been at work: The whole region had been sucked and gutted, milked dry, denuded of its rich primeval treasures; something blind and ruthless had been here, rasped, and gone. The blind scars on the hills, the denuded slopes, the empty mica pits were what was left…Something had come into the wilderness, and left the barren land (p.236-7).

The socio-economic changes that widespread mining produced in Central Appalachia, in short, resulted in short-term economic *growth* without *development* while ushering in long-terms consequences of dependency, inadequate social services, absentee land ownership, colonial economy, and environmental destruction (Eller 1982). The case of Appalachia is thus similar to those of the many developing nations that failed to develop according to the postulates modernization theory (Perdue and Pavela 2012; Arnett 1978).[69]

In Shale County, beyond altering the local power structure, coal production contributed to the overhaul of the county's pre-agrarian system of kin relations, which deepened emergent patterns of poverty and inequality. By the 1960s, integration into the national marketplace via coal had helped to stamp out many of Shale's preindustrial residues. While the industry provided some opportunities for waged employment until mid-century, the ability to depend on the industry for a job—if it was ever possible—had begun to expire by the late 1940s. While over-production and fluctuating demand had generated wild boom-bust cycles of employment during Appalachia period of coal-driven modernization[70] (Caudill 1963; Cleves and Estep 2013), internal changes within the industry precipitated a spiral of permanent job loss after World War II.

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[69] As I discuss in other chapters, the "triple alliance" (Evans 1979) of political leaders, multinational corporations and local elites is largely responsible for modernization's failure to translate into the positive changes that the theory predicts.

[70] Because Shale County was the last county in Kentucky to receive rail access, it proceeded through the process of modernization later than most localities in Central Appalachia (Billings and Blee 2000). Eller (1982) states that most areas on Central Appalachia modernized between 1880 and 1930.

One of the most important factors driving this job loss was the 1950 National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement (NBCWA) discussed in Chapter Two (Scott 1995). Much of this job loss occurred in counties like Shale, which, although profoundly shaped by the presence of coal operators in the region, featured only small, non-capital intensive mines itself. Shale's coal production remained comparatively minor due to the relatively thin nature of its seams and its late access to rail. Combined, these factors ensured that the county never received the massive capital and infrastructural investment that occurred in places like Middlesboro and Harlan.[71]

Although coal production has experienced occasional rebounds since the 1950s, for example during the Energy Crisis of the 1970s and the artificial economic prosperity of the early 2000s (fueled by staggering growth in China and the US' domestic housing bubble), the industry appears to be in a state of more or less permanent decline (Cleves and Estep 2013; Purdue and Pavela 2012). Beyond the problems that mechanization holds for generating stable employment (including both automation and the advent of strip and MTR extraction), the industry faces numerous external challenges. For one, in communities like Shale, operators have already mined the best and most profitable coal seams and thus cannot compete with cheap Western coal. Given the development of hydrofracking, they also face fierce competition from cheap natural gas. Lastly, it is now more difficult for the industry as a whole to forge a competitive place in the energy market due to tightening EPA regulations.

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[71] Thus, because Shale's mines were owned or at least mediated by the county's elite, because its seems could not attract a sufficient density of labor for achieving unionization, and because the 1950 NBCWA agreements undermined its mining operations in many ways, organized labor made few if any inroads into Shale County.

A man in his 70s who I interviewed at Shale County's Historical Society, as an illustration, told me that one of his earliest memories involved hanging out at an ice cream shop in Valley City during the late 1940s. On the day that he described, John Lewis and several UMWA organizers were slated to visit the area. The owner of the ice cream shop placed a shotgun on his counter, and several other people had come into town in order to ward off Lewis and his crew. The man, Charles, told me that when Lewis and the others arrived in a town, in an entourage of black Ford cars, they drove straight through the town without stopping due to the intimidating crowd that had gathered

Shale County's mining activity reflects these regional dynamics. According to data from the US Energy Information Administration, there are four active mines (all capital-intensive surface operations) and one processing plant in the county. Collectively, these permit areas account for only 66 jobs. Outside of the county, few individuals work in coal operations. According to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey, only 411 individuals within the county were employed in the "agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining" sector (8.3% of the county's workforce). As the classification includes non-mining jobs, mining's share of that employment is doubtless smaller. Educational services, social/healthcare services, manufacturing, retail trade, and public administration all employ more Shale Countians than do the mines.

Although Shale County did not receive permanent jobs or economic development from coal, the descendants of its salt barons made do as lawyers, land agents and political representatives for emerging coal companies. They also benefited from the increasing property values that coal investment brought. Thus, while modernization injured most residents, it amplified the power of the county's elite class. Not only did they come to function as "infrastructure of dependency" for the coal industry, but they capitalized upon the emerging dependence of dispossessed farmers. Because extractive jobs were scarce and subject to boom/bust cycles, civil positions and transfer payments became the primary means of making ends meet for those who once sewed their oats through farming (Schwarzweller et. al 1971). Given that officeholders controlled both, their influence grew.

Billings and Blee (2000, 2004), in conclusions, thus argue that three factors converged in order to pave Shale's "road to poverty" from 1800-1942: The unequal patterns of economic accumulation that resulted from slave-based salt manufacturing; the cultural strategies associated

with subsistence farming, which encouraged unsustainable population growth and agricultural decline over the longue durée; and corruption within the local state, which stunted the public sphere, transformed local government into an agent of accumulation, clientelism and control, and rendered the county fodder for absentee ownership during the period of coal-driven modernization. These forces, which began over 200 years ago, continue to perpetuate poverty and political domination into the present day.

6.4 The Class Structure of Shale County

Brown's (1988) work picks up where Billings and Blee's analysis ends: The on-the-ground situation of subsistence farmers who were nearing the end of their historical mode of producing a livelihood in the early 1940s. Unlike Billings and Blee's work, Brown studied Shale County ethnographically, examining the social organization of a set of neighborhoods located within a "deep rural" region of the county. His work illuminates the socio-cultural patterns associated with the "patriarchal moral economy" that Billings and Blee depicted from afar.

Brown (1988) argued that the social organization of Shale County was not only a matter of the family structure but also of a class structure. Drawing from the work of Parsons, under whom he had studied, he conceptualized class as "the group of persons who are members of effective kinship units which, as units, are approximately equally valued" (p.123).[72] Brown (1951) classified area residents into three classes: High, intermediate and low. One's class, he argued, largely determined who one associated with, who one was willing to associate with, who one courted, and how one evaluated others.

[72] Unlike the permutations of Marx and Weber's work that now prevail in the study of social class, Brown's conceptualization was intended to analyze class as a local rather than macroscopic phenomenon (i.e. within a closed social system). Avoiding relations of exploitation in the area and only indirectly probing market position, Brown's account of Shale County's class structure, I would argue, describes what we now think of as status relations—that is to say, how honor and prestige were distributed among the area's residents.

One's class was evident by how those in the area spoke about one's family. "They're a lazy bunch," might signify low class standing, while "they've raised fine children" or "they're a hard working bunch" might indicate high class standing. While intermingling occurred among the classes, it did not occur often and was usually not condoned. High class families, for example, almost always discouraged their children from courting individuals who were beneath their class, sometimes intervening in order to put an end to such relations.

Brown (1951) observed that a general pattern of attributes characterized the behavior of families in each class. High class families were described as

> being long-resident families of good background, "moral athletes," hard workers and good livers, less isolated and more modern than other families in the area and as people who emphasized self-improvement and who participated more widely in neighborhood affairs (p.233).

While greater wealth and higher income were usually associated with high class standing, neither determined it. Thus, some intermediate families lived in larger homes than did some high class families. A reputation for adhering to values within the local moral order was the decisive factor in determining the class of one's family. Lower class families were more often newcomers to the area who had "shady pasts" and were "morally lax, economically insecure, not ambitious, old-fashioned and 'backward,' and people who participated relatively little in many neighborhood activities" (p.233). Thus, sexual indiscretions, gambling, drinking, a failure to maintain one's property, and a reputation for loafing in lieu of working would identify a family as low class. Rather than representing distinctive characteristics, Brown stated that intermediate families possessed a combination of the divergent attributes separating high and low class kin units.

Brown argued that although there was some limited possibility for class mobility, the possibility was very constricted.[73] This was not only because high class families usually controlled the best plots of land in the neighborhood that he studied, but because one inherited—and thus rarely escaped—the reputation of his or her family. The homophilous patterns of interaction and marriage that this generated, according to Brown, had produced a de fact system of caste in addition to the area's class-based stratification(see also Dollard 1938; Warner 1936).

6.5 The Moral Order of the Mountains

As a "deep rural" pocket within the county, when Brown (1988) began exploring Shale's system of social organization in the early 1940s, he encountered a community that was still predominantly organized around small subsistence farms and that was, in the case of many isolated hollows, several years away from electrification and other forms of modern development (Billings and Blee 2000). Thus, although modernization had come to Valley Town and others neighborhoods within the community, others, like Beech Creek, remained aloof from it. Within this context, he (1988) identified a well-defined "value system" that undergirded community life.

This value system, he argued, served as the principle basis on which honor and status were delegated to individuals and kin units. Shale's values, he found,

> tended to be traditionalistic, not only in the sense that a very high proportion of its beliefs and practices were handed down relatively intact from one generation to another but also in the sense that because they were beliefs and practices of one's father and forefathers, (that is, were traditional beliefs and practices) they were right and should be followed (p.186).

He found evidence of the local culture's "traditional" air in religious activity, which emphasized the bible as ultimate authority; political norms, which encouraged residents to adopt the political preferences of one's forebears; in addition to personalism, particularism and individualism. The

[73] While high class families emphasize the "achieved" nature of their social standing, low class families more often understood their standing as ascribed.

three values that most shaped social behavior, however, were familism, puritanism and democracy.

Brown found that the family, as a social institution, dominated social life in the area. Kinship was the decisive factor governing patterns of interaction within the community, for example who one befriended and who one married. Brown also found that kinship conditioned one's life chances in the sense that the reputation of one's family of origin determined one's social status and access to opportunity.[74] Family ties also shaped political behavior. Children were expected to embrace the politics of their parents. Family ties often determined the results of local elections as well. As Brown (1988) notes: "The candidate with the widest kinship relations [usually] won" (p.188).

Beyond shaping patterns of interaction, electoral behavior and political attitudes, Brown found that social structure of the family had come to define the social structure of nearly all institutions and organizations in the area. This was especially true of the institution of politics: "Relationships between elected officials and the people were expected to be personalistic and friendly, like relationships within the family, rather than impersonal and objective" (Brown 1988:188). Even commercial relations took on characteristics of the family relationship. Going to the neighborhood store was a social occasion at which news and gossip were exchanged, and where the social ties between merchant and patron were reinforced through moral behavior embedded within economic activity.

Although the familism that had diffused into area insitutions often cultivated social solidarity and helped to ensure survival amid the precariousness of subsistence farming, it produced nepotism, malfeasance and ineffective governance within the realm of politics. It also

[74] More contemporary rural community studies have replicated this finding as well. See, for example, (Duncan 200) and (Fitchen 1981).

distorted the labor market and encouraging unprofessionalism in the realm of the economy. Of course, when Shale's civil sector and labor market—due to isolation and the dominance of subsistence farming, respectively—remained small, the particularism associated with familism remained largely inconsequential. As the area developed, with both markets and politics accruing new import, however, familism would come to clash with modernity.[75] Brown perhaps predicted this trend upon leaving the field. He observed that institutions in Shale County

> so emphasized informal, intimate relationships of the familial type that the pattern of secondary, formal organization which increasingly characterizes the more urbanized parts of America has had difficulty in taking root…formal organizations centering on special interests do not fit into the social organization of the mountain. The pattern of formal organization has remained foreign (p.190).

Apart from familism, Brown also found that "puritanism" played an important social role within the county. By this he meant that the cultural ideals of Protestantism had profoundly shaped local norms, values and understandings. This manifested in several ways. First, Brown observed a tendency to interpret events in stark moral terms. Not only did Shale Countians ascribe supernatural significance to the events that transpired in everyday life, but they understood behavior as firmly "right" or "wrong." There was limited gray area within the collective moral compass.

Second, Brown found that Shale Countians distanced themselves from the "physical appetites" and "things of the flesh." Drunkenness, licentiousness, dancing, gambling, and

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[75] I must emphasize that my intention is not to repeat the very flawed discourses associated with the culture of poverty thesis and modernization theory. Both of these perspectives suggest, in some way or other, that antiquated—if not flawed—cultural values coupled with isolation from markets and development produce poverty. As this dissertation emphasizes throughout, the introduction of markets and modernization in Shale County has, on the whole, undermined social organization, economic independence and democratic governance. My purpose is thus to exhibit the socio-cultural disorganization that has resulted from the unique way in which Shale County has undergone development—how its rapid transition from an agrarian, to proto-industrial, to post-industrial society has produced competing if not contradictory forms of culture and thus a degree of anomie. Raymond Williams'(1978) work on the cultural process provides a useful heuristic schema for grasping this phenomenon. Williams argues that culture operates in a complex and dynamic way, as social actors work to stabilize reality. He identifies three moments/types of culture: dominant, residual and emergent. In Shale's case, a dominant culture had yet to form in the present condition. Instead, a mash up of residual and emergent forms of culture reigned.

similar activities were strongly discouraged. Very high value, on the other hand, was placed on the "economic virtues." His subjects thus extolled the moral value of industry, reliability, austerity, self-control, thrift, foresight, and self-reliance:

> The feeling that in the economic sphere one got what he deserved resulted from the high valuation on the economic virtues, and so were the deprecating attitudes of…people toward the poor and their admiration for the "self-made man" (p.192).

Given the emphasis on self-reliance, thrift and industry, the participants in his study—especially those hailing from the "high" and "intermediate" classes—tended to oppose government relief programs associated with the New Deal (the WPA, for example). While this was in part due to self-interest (waged jobs reduced the supply of farm labor and thus increased its price), Brown argued that it predominantly stemmed from puritanism and the associated belief that

> every man should be economically independent and that poverty owed to individual failings…The tenacity of Beech Creek people's conservatism in politics and economics related to the strength of this basic orientation (p.192).

Finally, in addition to emphasizing physical chastity and a strong work ethic, Brown found that the influence of puritanism had generated an emphasis on the importance of the individual: "Every individual was regard as the child of God. Every individual as a child of God had the right and responsibility to reach his own conclusions" (p.192).[76] The emphasis on one's right to personally interpret the bible and come to one's own conclusions "furnished the basis for innumerable quarrels, bickerings, and divisions resulting from different interpretations of the bible" (p.193). As I discuss further into the dissertation, this exacerbated the crippled civil society that Billings and Blee (2000, 2004) analyzed by intensifying factionalism.

Third, and last, Brown found that Shale Countians subscribed to a set of ideals that he termed "democracy." First and foremost, this involved a commitment to equality—a belief that

[76] Numerous other studies of religious life in Appalachia have noted an emphasis on the personal interpretation of the bible. See (House 2007; Scott 1995; Billings 1990; Billings and Blee 2000).

no individual was better or more entitled than the next. Open assertions of superiority were strongly condemned, and residents thus criticized those who came across as "uppity" and "overbearing."

Interestingly, Brown found that this produced a "hesitation (almost a refusal) of…people to say flatly and openly that there was a class system…It did not seem 'right' or 'moral' to admit such inequality" (p.193). The belief in equality was so ingrained, Brown argued, that his research participants felt guilty in admitting deviation from the ideal. Thus, a system of rationalizations rose up around the local class system. As in Dollard's (1938) study of Southern Town, participants attempted to render actions that were out of synch with local values expedient and in line with their ideals. Rather than acknowledging class privilege, structural inequality or lack of opportunity, participants asserted that all individuals started on an equal playing field, and that personal failings accounted for those who failed to succeed. While this produced a drive to succeed among many, it amplified the feelings of frustration that those who had failed to achieve economic success experienced.

6.6 Modernization: The Changing Face of Shale County

The moral order, class structure and patterns of interaction that Brown observed had developed within the context of a relatively isolated, pre-modern agricultural community, in which subsistence farming had formed the predominant form of economic production and social organization. Shale's culture, I would argue, represents a dialectic that should be understood as both "weak" and "strong."[77] On the one hand, the puritan influence that permeated the area had encouraged a vigorous work ethic and a style of living that emphasized austerity and chastity. Coupled with Scotch-Irish cultural ideals extolling independence, which were also imported into

[77] See (Alexander and Smith 2001) regarding the distinctions between the "weak" and "strong" programs in the sociology of culture.

the mountains (Caudill 1963), the county's "residual culture" (Williams 1978) laid the foundations for a robust and highly productive tradition of subsistence farming and self-reliance.

Yet, because these beliefs ultimately reinforced the exigencies of subsistence farming, familism, puritanism and democracy also became reflections of the local economic structure. Brown (1988) came to this conclusions when analyzing the area's emphasis on self-reliance and its opposition to government assistance: "Such an interpretation was justified in many cases…[given that local families were] not so affected by factors outside of an individual's control as the industrial economy of the greater society" (p.192). A homology thus developed between Shale's mode of socioeconomic organization and its cultural patterns.

But what was to happen to these cultural patterns when Shale modernized? Shale's agricultural economy was in the beginning stages of its decline when Brown began his study in 1942 (Billings and Blee 2000). Although the regional moral order encouraged farm work, and although the moral order cohered in a sensible way with subsistence farming, structural economic forces—both local and national—had begun to undermine the viability of agriculture. Not only had railroad access, extractive industry and a federal development policy favoring urbanization begun to impinge upon traditional modes of living, but many mountain neighborhoods, which by that point were in their fourth generation of settlement, had reached if not exceeded their carrying capacities. Farms, as the Billings and Blee's (2000, 2004) work noted, had declined in size and become overcrowded. This problem, inevitable as it was, approached a breaking point when former inhabitants flooded back to the area when Midwestern industrial jobs dried up during the Great Depression (Billings and Blee 2000).

Thus, when Brown returned to his field site for a follow-up study in the early 1960s (accompanied by Shwarzweller and Mangalam), he found that hundreds of residents had

migrated back to the Midwest, no longer able to eke out a living on the subsistence farm (Schwarzweller et. al 1971). Shale County, at this point, began to experience significant social, economic and cultural change, transitioning—in "deep rural" areas—from a fledgling agricultural community to an even more unstable industrial one. The primary economic opportunity for residents came to rest in mining jobs.

Because mining wealth flowed outward (Lewis 1978; Eller 2008; Arnett 1978; Gaventa 1982), because mining was a boom and bust industry, and because the NBCWA resulted in permanent job loss, however, Shale's socio-economic development was stunted. Unlike most localities in the United States, which proceeded through distinct phases of pre-industry, industry and post-industry, Shale transitioned almost directly from a pre-modern, agricultural community to a post-industrial one devoid of the benefits that accrue—in (mainstream economic) theory—from modernization (see Moreton 2009 for an analysis of this phenomenon in the Ozarks).

The follow up to Brown's (1988) *Beech Creek: A Study of a Kentucky Mountain Neighborhood* was thus aptly titled *Mountain Families in Transition: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration*. Indeed, Schwarzweller et. al (1971) found that most Shale Countians coped with agricultural demise by migrating to the Midwest in pursuit of industrial opportunities.[78] Those who stayed behind found themselves inhabiting a world that had changed dramatically since the time of Brown's first study. For one, mass exodus had left the area a "lonesome country:"

> Walking up along one of the creeks one soon becomes aware of the large number of seemingly empty stretches between occupied homes; occasionally an abandoned house with sagging rooftop and vines growing across the windows breaks the monotony. The general scarcity of people is obvious, especially to a visitor from town or city. Indeed, fewer than half as many people reside in the Beech Creek neighborhoods now as in

[78] Interestingly, family and class continued to play a pivotal role in shaping this process, determining patterns of migration, modes of adjustment and access to opportunity in the urban areas into which residents migrated.

> 1942…While the roads into this mountain locality are much better than they were in the days when muleback was the practical form of transportation, many of the people who might have used these roads have long since moved out. Paradoxically, the families still living in the area are now in some ways more isolated from meaningful social contacts with other people than they ever were, in spite of the fact that it is easier for them to get out and visit families who live some distance away (Schwarzweller et. al 1971: 226-7).

The researchers asserted that this was a "damning thing" for the "personalitistically-oriented mountaineer" who lived in the area (p.227).

Specifically, they found that "neighborhood institutions and facilities [had] weakened, church support and attendance [had] declined, and the local one-room schools [had] been forced to close (p.227).[79] Because automobiles had become more prevalent, more families were traveling to the county seat in order to do their shopping (given the decline of subsistence farming, more were relying on shopping and markets to obtain their necessities in general). The "numerous small neighborhood stores…where…people did most of their shopping and where they often gathered to talk, visit and quarrel" had "virtually disappeared" (p.228). The one small store that remained in the community on which the research trio focused had become a "clearing-house for local gossip" more so than an important retail outlet (p.228). The range of services that small communities within the county once featured had also diminished, and as a result, economic transactions had become "less personalized, less a group-centered affair, as the territorial boundaries" of social life expanded while immediate neighborhoods declined (p.228). In short, the county seat had supplanted and consolidated the role that local communities once played, thereby undermining the role and place that familism, puritanism and democracy had occupied.

[79] The theme of "school consolidation" remained prominent when I visited Shale County more than 40 years later. Beyond gripes with the protracted length of time that young children spent on buses, which sometimes approached two hours per day, many felt that consolidation had weakened local communities and undermined academic achievement.

Perhaps more than anything, Schwarzweller et. al observed a precipitous decline in agricultural production. Although commercial agriculture had never played an important role in the local economy, even small-scale agriculture had ceased to make economic sense. While small scale tobacco cultivation remained an important income supplement for many families, very few families carried on the old ways. The researchers thus claimed that "the attitudinal basis for substance agriculture [was] being eroded by the forces of modernization" (p.229).

"Transfer payments of one kind or another" filled the economic void that the decline of farming left (p.229). The researchers found that over half of the families in the Beech Creek neighborhood received welfare payments, with an additional third participating in the now defunct "surplus commodities" program (p.229). Residents also collected retirement pensions, veterans' pensions, survivors' benefits, aid to dependent children, and various other government subsidy programs. The scope of what one newspaper later deemed the "mailbox economy" had become staggering: "Indeed, almost all families in the Beech Creek locality derive much or most of their income from such sources" (p.229). Few individuals generated income from wage labor or salaried jobs. Those who did faced meager compensation.

Thus, while Brown initially encountered a locality that was lacking in some material comforts but self-sufficient and economically stable, he encountered what was "clearly…a rural poverty area" when he returned (p.229). Modernization, coupled with the endemic causes of agricultural decline noted by Billings and Blee, had eliminate economic independence and reduced quality of life in the area: "Although none of the Beech Creekers is starving, there is evidence of a great deal of malnutrition. Their folk diet, modified by modern consumptions habits (symbolized by the 'pop' bottle, the hog dog, white bread, and the candy bar), is certainly not adequate for good health" (p.229). While cash income among almost all families had

increased, the researchers claimed that it had "stimulated all kinds of new wants and new ways, which, paradoxically, may have contributed to the present state of affairs, namely, that Beech Creekers are far less independent than they once were" (p.230).

While participants in the study insisted that conditions in the neighborhood had improved, in the sense that more modern amenities had become available and the toil of farm labor had become mostly unnecessary, the researchers offered a bleaker assessment of the county's future: "One thing is clear…the process of the final disintegration of the Beech Creek neighborhoods as a viable social entity is irreversible" (p.231).

6.7 The 1960s and 1970s: Accelerated Modernization and the War on Poverty

If modernization driven by the limits of agricultural production, transportation improvements and coal production defined the post-war period in Shale County, state-sponsored modernization efforts shaped social change during the 1960s and 1970s. These modernization efforts were ushered in by the War on Poverty, which was envisioned by the Kennedy administration and implemented through Johnson's presidency. As part of LBJ's Great Society initiative, the War on Poverty began when congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) in 1964.[80] Part a response to the "discovery of Appalachia,"[81] part an effort to combat urban poverty, the EOA sought to eliminate poverty, expand educational opportunity, increase the poor's safety net, and provide better healthcare for the elderly.

[80] Sundquist (1968), in *Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years*, asserts that "The bill was…a composite of one central new idea—community action—and long-discussed ideas, like the Youth Conservation Corps. It had something for children, something for youth, something for the adult poor. It offered something to the urban poor and something to the rural poor. It appealed to altruism with its bold objective of wiping out poverty and to conservatism by emphasizing that this would be accomplished not through 'handouts' but through opening opportunities for people to escape poverty through their own efforts" (p.144).

[81] See Batteau's 1990 book, *The Invention of Appalachia.* Throughout the vicissitudes, Appalachian poverty has cycled through phases of discovery and oblivion. These phases have less to do with developments in the region and more to do with the needs and concerns of the broader society.

The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) became the body responsible for overseeing these efforts. In addition to overseeing programs such as VISTA, Job Corps and Head Start, the OEO monitored and dispersed funds to local Community Action Agencies (CAAs). CAAs administered Community Action Programs (CAPs), which were intended to

> provide services, assistance, and other activities of sufficient scope and size to give promise of progress toward elimination of poverty or a cause or causes of poverty through developing employment opportunities, improving human performance, motivation, and productivity, or bettering the conditions under which people live, learn, and work.

According to Section 202(a) of the Economic Opportunity Act, a "Community Action Program:"

1. Mobilizes and utilizes resources in order to redress poverty
2. Provides services, assistance and other activities in order to redress poverty by creating employment opportunities, improving human performance and bettering the conditions in which people live, learn and work.
3. These activities should be developed, conducted and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups served.
4. The activities were to be carried out by a nonprofit agency.

As opposed to top-down programming, CAAs were intended to feature "maximum feasible participation" among the poor, who were expected to be the architects—not just the beneficiaries—of anti-poverty programming. This maximum feasible participation clause arose from the influence of strain theory, which inferred that delinquency resulted from a lack of opportunity within the encompassing social system.[82]

In Central Appalachia, anti-poverty programming took shape through a network of CAAs in conjunction with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), which monitored and dispersed funding related to another piece of legislation: The Appalachian Regional

[82] The Community Action Program not only fell far short of this ideal but generated tremendous with regard to the purpose and logistics of creating and administering anti-poverty programs that included the poor's input. Huey Perry's (1971) *They'll Cut Off Your Project* discusses how local power brokers thwarted participation among the poor in Central Appalachia, as does Arnett's (1978) dissertation on community improvement in Shale County, which I discuss at length in this project. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's (1969) *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding* speaks to the confusion that the "maximum feasible participation" clause of the EOA generated among policymakers and technocrats in Washington.

Development Act (ARDA). Also associated with LBJ's War on Poverty, the ARDA targeted Appalachia for permanent development (as opposed to temporary relief initiatives) by way of highways, factories, schools, water systems, etc. (Eller 2008). Although the War on Poverty resulted in some improvements for the region, mostly in terms of infrastructure, it failed to achieve its intended results. Two key factors account for its limited success.

First, because EOA and ARC programs were guided by the tenets of modernization theory, they failed to address the structural and historical roots of regional poverty.[83] Believing that Appalachians lived in a "culture of poverty," technocrats operated under the assumptions that "poverty [could] be seriously addressed without structural change, that growth [was] good for everyone, [and] that urban lifestyles and institutions [were to be] emulated" (Eller 2008:7). Most programs, as such, attempted to lift Appalachians out of their "backwardness" and alleviate poverty by integrating the region into markets and spurring economic, that is to say commercial, growth. Because "modernization" had in fact caused many of the region's problems, and because regional culture had largely developed outside of markets, and because those managing anti-poverty programs were often the same people who stigmatized and stereotyped mountaineers, the War on Poverty not only failed but generated controversy and resentment on the ground (Eller 2008).

Keynesian-style social programs attempted to acculturate mountaineers for jobs that did not exit, disguised low-skill employment capacities (such as clearing brush from the road) as job-training initiatives, and attempted to educate mountain people about the necessity of such things as dental hygiene. None of these addressed the structural causes of poverty illuminated by

[83] As the introductory chapter discusses, the "structural roots" of Appalachian poverty rest in colonial relations with the urban metropolis, the infiltration of absentee industries, namely coal, the development of unequal patterns of land ownership due to local forms of exploitation, and federal policies that have long promoted urbanization and "modernization" to the detriment of rural community.

scholars like Billings and Blee. As Eller (2008) notes, locals quickly became distrustful of the outside "experts" who had turned federal programs into a moral crusade and experiment in social behavioral modification. They also resented the fact that development doctrine failed to incorporate their own visions for social change along with the paternalism that case workers brought to bear on their lives. Perhaps most of all, the ARDA contained language that prioritized "urban growth areas" for development, programming and funding. This not only ensured that those most in need of assistance—i.e. those living in remote mountains hollows—did not receive it but hastened the atomization and decline of neighborhoods like Beech Creek.

Second, because EOA and ARDA funds were channeled through local institutions that in many cases consisted of corrupt patronage machines—such as Shale—they often failed to reach their intended beneficiaries. School boards, civic organizations, and local officials abused federal grant money, using it to solidify the political machinery that dominated their communities. Investments from the OEO and from ARC were thus organized, in many cases, as part of a spoils systems, in which powerful community members exchanged opportunities and jobs created by federal investment for political loyalties. These funds and resources were co-opted by local elites, and as a result, "maximum feasible participation" among the poor was rarely achieved by local CAAs. As I discuss below, rather than empowering the poor, in Shale County, the War on Poverty more often served to heighten the power of elites.

Eller (2008) thus found that "powerful families and special interests controlled the social service agencies, the schools, and most other means of employment" in a place in which employment and resources were extremely scarce (p.143). This ensured that almost all participation in War on Poverty programming was shot through with ulterior motives. For example, many residents were expected to vote for "the right" candidates in local elections in

order to ensure that they received such things as their food stamp benefits (Billings and Blee 2000).[84]

Even national programs, like Medicare, Medicaid and Food Stamps, proved to be a boon for members of the local power elite like physicians and grocers. Eller (2008) argues that "those who controlled access to the burgeoning transfer payments for the poor…could influence the location and character of lucrative government 'investments' in their communities." He goes on to conclude that "for some Appalachian elites, managing poverty was more acceptable than fighting it and sometimes more rewarding" (p.157). At the federal level, congressmen tended to use ARC as little more than a tool for initiating pork barrel legislation, which ensured the loyalties of those same local political elites that benefitted from entitlement spending.

Nowhere do these observations hold truer than in Shale County. Rather than operating under conditions as imagined, federal antipoverty programs were implemented into a local government that had developed as an agent of elite accumulation rather than an institution for serving the public good. As Billing and Blee's work (2000, 2004) noted, by the county's advent, elite families had already appropriated the local governing and political apparatus as an instrument of communal domination, using it to facilitate private gain and consolidate political control over residents. Across generations, elite families had manipulated local government, creating a corrupt clientelist system characterized by political violence and civic degradation.[85]

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[84] This fits with Auyero et. al's (2009) work, which shows that clientelist relationships tend to be unequal, with most all benefits accruing to patrons and brokers at the expense of clients.

[85] As Billings and Blee (2000) have noted, "personal ties and connections became the foundation on which public politics was transacted…antagonisms from economic life easily spilled over into public politics and governance" (p.304). They describe Shale's clientelistic apparatus as a system of "instrumental friendships in which higher-status persons use resources and influence on behalf of lower-status persons in exchange for the latter's expressions of esteem, personal assistance, or political support" (p.131). They argue that it has had a ruinous effect on the county's civil society, undermining participation and entrenching inequality. Clientelism also catalyzed monumental problems of corruption, as elites learned about the "revenue-generating potential of county government and the advantage of being on the right side of its controlling faction" (Billings and Blee 2000: 134).

Across the vicissitudes of intergenerational familial control, Shale officials used local government to facilitate private gain rather than serving the public good, with "elected" officials using local and state money to benefit their own economic accumulation.[86] Federal welfare provisions enabled, encouraged and facilitated an already rampant spoils system. County officials used fraud to become eligible for available provisions, and used the programs for personal enrichment rather than social improvement thereafter.[87]

This suggests that the patronage system in Shale, with its entrenched structure of power, political corruption, and attendant factionalism, constrained poor people from participating in community empowerment initiatives, and, in many situations, from acting or mobilizing at all. This certainly held true across other Appalachian communities during the War on Poverty, when groups like the VISTAS and Appalachians Volunteers met resistance from the old-boy network of small towns and their local governments, which experienced their advocacy as a challenge to elite authority. The agendas of those groups, which often called for structural reform, alternative development and social justice, were quickly put down due to the inequity and inequality of the political context (Eller 2008).

6.8 Shale County's Middle Class Modernization Movement

Although it was never published, Douglas Arnett (1978) conducted his dissertation research on Shale County in the 1970s while completing his PhD in political science at Duke University. Arnett's study sought to document the role that local polite elites, which he termed

[86] A number of local governmental positions associated with considerable power derived from appointment, not election. In the case of positions that did mandate elections, electoral campaigns were notoriously corrupt, being characterized by bribery, extortion and tampering (Billings and Blee 2000).

[87] Such practices have historical roots. Dating back to the 19th century, in incredible feats of tact during the county's problems of feuding during the 1850s to the 1920s, elites even made money off of the attendant violence. For example, the state government offered funds to build militias for the purpose of feuds down, which officials embezzled.

the "infrastructure of dependency,"[88] played in perpetuating Appalachian poverty. As a native of the area who participated in the community's development association and community action agency during the 1960s and 1970s, his work not only catalogues how Shale County continued to develop after Schwarzweller et. al's study, but provides direct insight into how the War on Poverty's programming played out there. As with many Appalachian localities, a misguided effort to attract heavy industry and a record of elite co-optation became the defining features of the period (Eller 2008; Perry 1971).

As subsistence agriculture continued to decline throughout the early 1960s, members of Shale County's middle class—especially merchants and professionals—became increasingly concerned with the area's high rate of poverty and unemployment. They soon mobilized to confront the problems, forming a movement that sought to modernize the area. The movement focused on improving local infrastructure in order to attract industry and bring jobs. Similar efforts were occurring in many Eastern Kentucky counties at the time.[89] In Shale County, a progressive Republican mayor who was active in various community affairs spearheaded the efforts.[90] Most middle class people in the area supported his endeavors to improve communal life. Many also hoped that Bert Combs, who had recently been elected governor and was a Shale County native, would take interest in the mayor's initiatives and provide aid for them.

Thus, in 1961, almost a hundred cars drove from Valley Town to Frankfort in order to seek information regarding how industry could be drawn to Shale. The delegation included

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[88] This term was developed to capture the way in which local power brokers mediated and facilitated the colonial conquests of external industry within the region, especially coal.

[89] The efforts were spurred not just by the emergence of increasing unemployment and poverty but by the political opportunity structure of the time. Middle-class activism arose during a progressive moment in both local and national history—John F. Kennedy had just been elected president, and Bert Combs, a progress-oriented politician who was born and raised in Shale County, had just been elected governor.

[90] Regarding the political importance of this position, Arnett wrote: "Although the position of mayor was unsalaried, controlled few patronage jobs, and therefore had little clout, the person who held that office could at least prevent 'undesirable' changes" (p.112).

businessmen, professionals, city and county officials, members of the press, members of civic organizations, and a local coal operator. Because the governor was away when they arrived, they met with other state officials. These officials, according to Arnett, had "little of substance to offer the delegation" (p.115). The special assistant to the director of the Department of Economic Development advised the delegation:

> You must clean up your town and beautify it. You must do this yourself before you can ask industry to come into Shale County…I can't guarantee that Shale County will have a factory. Even if you don't get a new industry, you can make your town better by making it more attractive (Local Newspaper, 2/9/61).

Community delegations continue to receive similar advice today, which, in essence, amounts to the ineffectual dictum: "If you build it, they [factories] will come." What the newspaper column neglected to report, moreover, was that the special assistant had privately stated: "The best thing they could do would be close the damn county and ship everybody out of it" (p.116). Evidencing the prevailing "growth pole" approach to development, he had asserted that "there ain't a damned thing up there worth fooling with."[91]

After being told to solve the county's economic problems themselves, the delegation returned to Shale and formed the Shale County Development Association (SCDA). Most of the membership was middle class—clergy, professionals and public officials. They quickly organized a "clean up day" in Valley Town. At first few people participated, but interest grew with time. In the organization's second year, the local paper urged "every member and citizen of Shale County to attend the meetings and discuss the existing problems of our county and the probable solutions for them" (p.119).

[91] Despite receiving advice that was of limited use, they did succeed in persuading the State Highway Commissioner to permanently move the district office of the Highway Department to Valley City, which would provide some civil service jobs to county residents. It would later become an important source of patronage within the community.

During this second year the SCDA began channeling its efforts into obtaining grants for water and sewer systems, improving roads/bridges, and building industrial sites, health facilities, and recreational areas. Most of the relevant grants, however, required matching funds. Without the ability to issue bonds or levy taxes, the group's hands were tied. It received a break in 1961, however, when the federal government passed the Area Redevelopment Act (ARA), which provided distressed communities access to low-interest, long-term loans and grants for the development of industry, commerce, public facilities, and infrastructure.[92]

After funding from the ARA was secured, two major projects emerged from the SCDA's middle class modernization movement. One involved the construction of a lake near Valley Town. While Arnett considered this a success in that it provided a water source for the city, the group had to procure most of the required land through condemnation hearings, which angered and alienated the poor. The other major project—the construction of a modern water/sewer system—was financed with a $239,000 federal grant that required the city to raise the other $302,500 needed for the project. This amounted to a gigantic sum for such a small and impoverished city. The city issued bonds and financed the project through water fees and tap-on charges. This ensured that the system only benefited the middle and upper class neighborhoods that could afford the charges—low-income areas on the outskirts of town did not receive water.[93]

This, Arnett argues, represents the movement's chief failure. Although all county residents were superficially encouraged to participate, it was the middle class that dominated and benefitted from the group's modernization efforts. Few representatives from the local elite participated either. Arnett writes that the SCDA "was…on the fringes of the county political

[92] Little money, beyond the building of a housing project, went directly to empower the poor. Almost all funding was geared toward facilitating industry.
[93] That written, it did create the base needed to attract industry (factories require water/sewer service) and a few local jobs.

structure and could not always be sure of the backing of the county's most influential citizens" (p.121). Businessmen involved in extractive industry and local elites avoided the movement because it

> offered little or no opportunity for them to increase their control over patronage… Further, nothing that the association was doing seriously threatened the existing political or economic structure…the local elite was willing to tolerate the work of the development association as long as the innovations involved were merely "functioning innovations" and not "re-structuring innovations" which would threaten the social structure (p.137-8).

With an absence of poor and elite participation, the middle class shaped the course that the SCDA took, which involved relying on the capacity of industrialization to redress poverty and unemployment. They shied away from radical change, which might have involved increasing property taxes, shuffling up local government and regulating coal, because in most instances they benefitted from the status quo. The professionals and small businesses owners thus believed that their interests laid in the same direction as those of the local elite.

Arnett believed that the movement was ultimately doomed to failure for this reason. Because the county's dispossessed and unemployed—e.g. the proleterianized farmers living in areas like Beech Creek—had little if any say in the SCDA's planning process:

> in practice, few of the dispossessed participated…more than two-thirds of the county's population of slightly more than 20,000 in 1960 was not directly involved or represented in the planning and work of the development association (pp.119-120).

While participation remained open to all, the organization took no efforts to corral the poor:

> I and, apparently, others in the association assumed that they were apathetic and that, in any case, they were no yet capable of planning and making policy. This paternalistic attitude was a common one, and it provide a (perhaps subconscious) justification for leaving the basically closed political system closed: "We must do for the poor what they are incapable of doing for themselves (p.140).

He writes that the notion of the poor's role in public planning and policy was alien to all of those involved in local government and local civic organizations, which ensured that they lacked voice

in the direction that county planning took. This situation would not only come to define how the War on Poverty unfolded in Shale County, but how subsequent community improvements initiatives 40-50 years later would transpire as well.

6.9 Shale County's War on Poverty

When the Economic Opportunity Act was passed in 1964, it included employment programs, job training, and low-cost loans to farmers and small businesses. Although the act called for maximum feasible participation among the poor, "it could hardly be expected…that those who currently held political power would sit idly by or welcome the poor into the ranks of the policy-makers" (p.146). The local power brokers in Shale County—and in Appalachia more generally—opposed the interventions of community organizers and anti-poverty workers.

The maximum participation language of the EOA became the subject of much confusion in Shale County. Did it mean that the poor should share in the benefits of programs, or did it mean that they should become policy makers? Did it mean that they should shake up the local political establishment, or did it means that they should form alliances with the elite? Much of the regional OEO's staff believed that maximum participation involved placing the poor into positions of influence and allowing them to partake in the political life from which they had long been alienated. They attempted, as such, to implement CAPs in a manner that would break up the local power bloc. This clashed with the plans and desires of Shale's elite.

When the EOA was passed, Arnett was president of the SCDA, and he sought to have it designated as Shale's community action agency. After several months of attempting to accomplish this, he realized that the regional office of the OEO was "following an unwritten policy of not recognizing existing county and area development associations as community action agencies" (p.160). Arnett thus approached the Superintendent of the Shale County School System—one the county's chief power brokers—in order to propose organizing a different

nonprofit group with which to secure CAA designation. When he did so, however, he realized he was already too late:

> To my great shock, [she] reached into her top desk drawer and handed me a copy of the incorporation papers of the Shale County Economic Opportunity Council, Incorporated. Without very many people in the county knowing about it, [she] had already filed the necessary incorporation papers with the state, had hand-picked a "broadly based" board of directors, had held an organizational meeting, and had had herself appointed as chairman of the board of directors (p.162).

He goes on to write that:

> I knew that if the Shale County Economic Opportunity Council became the community action agency, this would severely limit any meaningful participation by the poor, or, for that matter, by anyone outside the power structure. [The superintendent] would not be just one member of a democratically elected board of directors…rather she…would have complete control of the agency, reigning over a hand-picked board (p.162).

Arnett went to the OEO in order to block the process and convince the regional director that the SCDA should become Shale's CAA. Because he had married into an elite family, however, many within the regional office assumed that he was part of the local establishment. After much haggling, the regional CAP coordinator agreed to fund the superintendent's organization if Arnett could convince her to make him the CAP director. This meant that Arnett would have to strike a difficult balance between the regional OEO's desire for maximum participation among the poor and the local board of directors' desire for maintaining elite control.

The superintendent eventually agreed to support Arnett's bid for the CAP directorship, but only after he approached her husband, another powerful patron within the county, for approval. Arnett had to use his familial connections in order to convince him that he would not "rock the boat." The ordeal speaks to how CAPs were designated, organized and directed in most Central Appalachian localities (see also Perry 1971). Rather than becoming sites in which the poor could economically empower themselves, owners and officeholders quickly wrested control of them.

As Arnett expounds, he immediately confronted difficulties in terms of achieving "maximum feasible participation" among the poor. The notion of the poor participating in governance and policymaking was unprecedented in Shale County. Local power brokers:

> Had no objections to giving more money or more services to poor people, so long as the federal government was paying for it. Their position, however, was that all federal resources should be channeled through existing institutions and organizations controlled by local power structures. This would allow them to maintain control of patronage coming into the counties and to strengthen their already secure positions…if the poor gained some measure of control over how the money was spent, the established leaders' control would be weakened…it was almost impossible for a political dissident, or a member of his family, to obtain a job in the local public sector and nearly as difficult in the private sector (p.172).

The stakes for the elite were high. The War on Poverty brought vast sums of federal money into Eastern Kentucky (Shale received $1,596,501 during the first 18 months). The money and resources established antipoverty programming as a rival to the school systems in terms of economic impact and potential for patronage.[94] Local elites thus wanted to ensure that they benefitted.

They did so by winning control over the board of the local CAA. CAP guidelines specified that CAA boards should include 1/3 representation from public agencies, 1/3 representation from private groups, and 1/3 representation from the target population (i.e. the poor). The school superintendent ensured that elite patrons quickly secured the "public agency" seats. Small business owners and clergy occupied the "private group" seats. Because the elite board members controlled business permitting, property tax valuation and made the best customers and highest church donations, however, these board members became behold to elite

[94] For example, local CAA's provided numerous civil jobs; the Neighborhood Youth Corps provided part time jobs to young people; Head Start provided jobs for child-care workers, janitors, etc; and more generally, the influx of money boosted consumption and spurred secondary industries (e.g. programs spent money on gas, vehicle repair, etc.).

interests.[95] While poor occupied the remainder of the seats, all of them held county jobs that would be eliminated if they "rocked the boat" (the school superintendent carefully screened these individuals). The situation effectively nullified the maximum feasible participation ideal by enabling the elite to use Shale's CAA in order to consolidate their influence.

By 1965, widespread discontent had developed vis-à-vis Shale's antipoverty programs. Progressive CAA directors like Arnett and the regional OEO staff were displeased because participation had not deepened and democratic control had not expanded. Even though the OEO required CAA boards to continually reorganize in order to preempt elite cooptation, the requirements did little to actually change the composition of the board. All of the handpicked members went through formality of being "officially" reappointed. While some poor were elected to the 27 member board, Arnett asserts that:

> You couldn't just elect a poor person and set him or her down among a twenty-seven member board which was dominated by an exceedingly powerful political machine and expect a miracle to happen. The poor on the board had to be concerned about their day-to-day struggles just to survive; they had even more at stake than the small businessman had. Many of the VISTA volunteers and Appalachian Volunteers were convinced that the entire CAP part of the program could not help being coopted by the local power structure (p.186).

Given the tensions and contradictions that Shale's CAA faced, the processes of promoting poor people's participation and achieving material progress were slow.

The OEO eventually decided to consolidate CAAs over multi-county areas in order to increase efficiency, attract more qualified personnel and countermand pressures from local political machines. Shale's CAA was consolidated into a gigantic eight-county area organization. While membership was hypothetically open to anyone, Arnett asserts local powers still dominated the organization.

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[95] The clergy, Arnett moreover claims, "have historically been notorious for their 'hands off' attitude toward the politics of the region" (p.183). This claim is subject to debate however. Billings (1990) and Fisher (1993), in particular, discuss the role that religion has played in spurring protest in the mountains.

The individual who became director of the multi-county CAA in Shale's district –James Kendrick—was committed to the idea of maximum feasible participation. He and the deputy director relied on county-level developers, VISTAS and AVs in order to organize poor people to elect representatives to the CAA's board. Local politicians opposed these efforts, however, and often blocked the work of VISTAS and AVs. Shale County officials, for example, denied VISTA volunteers the use of school buildings for their work with poor children in June 1966. They also frequently voiced distrust of "outsiders." The county's state representative, for instance, stated: "Peaceful citizens all at once are spouting hate…the organizers are teaching class hatred. The business people are 'big shots.' The county officials are 'power structure bosses.' Let a man find a job making $800 a month and he becomes an 'enemy'" (p.204).

The superintendent of schools from an adjacent county, who was viewed as a "political boss," wrote a letter to the governor, stating that the AVs and VISTA operated under the assumption

> that the only way to make progress in any community is to discredit completely those in positions of authority in local communities…Many of those young people come from distant states, with no knowledge at all of customs, habits, or tradition in Appalachia. From the appearance and conduct of an overwhelming number of these young people, I feel I can truthfully state that they do not belong in positions of leadership in any area…These young people, in the time they are located in our communities, foment unrest and encourage a lack of faith in all constituted authority. (p.204).

In short, local power brokers conveyed participants in the War on Poverty as rabble rousers and communists who sought to undermine the region.[96]

Arnett was eventually fired as part-time consultant to the area council—the official pretext being that he was overpaid. Yet, he believes that he was fired because he had favored Kendrick for the area director as opposed the school superintendent's pick, and because he was

[96] Numerous other studies have observed this as well, including (Gaventa 1980 and Eller 1982, 2008). Many of the poor who became involved in the projects conducted by the AVs and VISTAs, however, defended outside organizers against charges of immorality and supported their work, claiming that they were doing a wonderful job.

in the process of getting divorced, which alienated him from his connections in the local power structure. The political machine, he feels, viewed him as favoring the poor to the detriment of their political control. Not long after he was fired, the CAA for which he had work was decertified by the OEO for failing to meaningfully include the poor in decision-making, and for co-opting funds for patronage purposes.[97]

Arnett's work, as such, speaks to how the political power base in Shale County thwarted the maximum participation tenet of the EOA, fearing that it would unsettle its monopoly of influence. In order to do so, elites fired and/or threatened organizers and activists who depended on county patronage for their jobs. They also discredited activists—especially ones from the outside—by dismissing them as communists, harbingers of class hatred and troublemakers. The CAA boards also dragged their feet in terms of implementing the special conditions of OEO grants that were designed to enfranchise the poor and refused to publically address grievances and exhibit public accountability. Accustomed to a lack of public scrutiny, they dealt with problems in closed-doors sessions, experiencing public questions as a moral affront to their authority.

6.10 Shale's Elite as an "Infrastructure of Dependency"

Arnett concluded his study by arguing that an "infrastructure of dependency," i.e. the local elite, had allied itself with absentee owners and state/national politicians in order to resist structural change during Shale's War on Poverty. In the middle-class modernization movement of the early 1960s, the local elite remained aloof from city improvement efforts, because they did not stand to lose or benefit from better infrastructure or efforts to attract industry. The middle-

[97] Importantly, Arnett notes that several other CAAs remained certified despite violating the maximum feasible participation clause of the EOA. In these cases, national politicians intervened when the OEO attempted to discipline them in order to preserve their political support. As he wrote: "The War on Poverty was, after all a political program, and politics had to be taken into account. The OEO was willing to enforce the implementation of maximum feasible participation until there was a serious conflict between such implementation and the political interests of [congressional representatives] (p.250).

class merchants and small business owners, however, stood to increase their profits by bringing more population and money into the area. Arnett, however, did not view middle-class efforts to attract industry as a viable strategy for development. Most of the industry that such efforts attract are marginal—usually foreign-owned factories that seek cheap, unskilled labor, which develop products for export rather than local consumption. He argued that such industries would perpetuate rather than redress poverty. Moreover, middle-class efforts to attract such jobs would not promote structural change, i.e. they would not unsettle local power structures.

When the OEO attempted to implement maximum feasible participation years later during the War on Poverty, most of the middle class sided with local elites in order to preserve the power structure. When challenges threatened the structure, local elites quickly took steps in order to preserve their monopoly on power. They attempted to contain external threats by filling antipoverty positions with friendly locals, steered antipoverty funding into patronage networks, and labeled agitators as outsiders, communists and troublemakers. They also mobilized their patronage networks in order to discipline and punish dissidents. For example, they reassigned an uncooperative school teacher to a remote schoolhouse in a distant part of the county, manipulated public contracts in order to boycott local businesses, and threatened highway department jobs. They also carefully guarded the flow of information and shaped public discussion—especially with regard to public "non-decisions" regarding matters like property tax rates and land ownership patterns.

In an attempt to make sense of the defeat of Shale's poor and their overall low rate of participation in the War on Poverty, Arnett concluded his study by arguing that:

> The dispossessed are not innately apathetic, but through a long history—almost a hundred years—the mountain people of eastern Kentucky have come to expect defeat. And to anticipate defeat, given such a history, is not an irrational phenomenon (p.262).

Arnett argues that War on Poverty contained a fatal flaw—it attempted political modernization without meaningful economic reform. As a result, the poor who attempted to participate and air their grievances faced economic rebuke and were left vulnerable to the local establishment. Some lost jobs and other were intimidated into casting unwilling votes. Many others never participated at all due to fear of reprisal. He compared the OEO's community action program to the Reconstruction's promise to enfranchise Southern Blacks, most of whom never voted due to fear of economic reprisal:

> I submit that for any program aimed at rescuing eastern Kentucky from its current underdevelopment to be successful, that program must address both political and economic reform…The issue of absentee ownership and control must be taken out of the "non-decision" category and addressed directly. Something must be done to break up the large corporate landholdings and to return the land to the people who live there. In addition, the marginal industries run by multinational corporations and geared to export trade must be replaced by cooperatively owned local industries. The infrastructure of dependency must be dismantled, and the political system must be made responsive to the needs of the people it purports to serve (pp.264-5).

Unfortunately Shale's "infrastructure of dependency" remained intact—not only during the War on Poverty, but after Johnson's Great Society initiative met its demise with the beginning of the Republican Revolution in 1980. Indeed, as Reagan asserted in his 1980 inaugural speech: "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem." With his presidency began a massive rollbacks in CAP, VISTA and ARC funding. These policies were continued under George Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush.

6.11 Conclusions

The neoliberal doctrine of state retrenchment did little to alter the position of Shale's elite. The county's poor never recovered the independence that it lost when subsistence farming began to decline—in fact, their economic dependence has only deepened since the time of Arnett's study. Because the local elite thwarted the maximum feasible participation clause of the EOA, the poor never achieved a meaningful voice in the public sphere and have remained

politically subservient to the elite. The economic development efforts that began in the 1960s, moreover, were misguided. Not only did they benefit the middle class and elite in lieu of the poor, but they attempted to attract heavy industry at a time when international competition was eroding the viability of manufacturing across the nation. Large factories, as such, never surfaced as a panacea for the county's economic woes.

Coal-related employment, moreover, entered into more or less permanent decline in 1970s due to declining reserves, increased mechanization, elevated environmental standards, and competition from both western seems and cheap natural gas. If opportunities in the waged labor force had always been scarce, they became almost non-existent in the 1980s. By the end of that decade, many observers had begun to describe the county as a "mailbox economy," kept afloat only by the residual transfer payments brought into being by Great Society initiatives. A 1989 survey of Shale County found that 25 percent of residents were unemployed (the unofficial rate was almost certainly higher), and that 50 percent lived off of unemployment checks, Supplemental Security Income, food stamps, and other welfare benefits.

Drug sales began to supplant the income that was once generated through coal, with local police and prosecutors estimating that at least 40 percent of county residents grew and sold marijuana in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As the county attorney put it, "people had to go into some other business after coal…People figure, 'Why not marijuana? I've got to make a living, support my family.' People look at it as a necessary evil'" (Kelley 1989: 1). Today, the drug problem is worse than ever. Although the sale of marijuana has tapered off, the illegal sale of prescription drugs and methamphetamine has taken its place, reaching epidemic levels over the past ten years.

While a number of forces have contributed to drug abuse, which I discuss in the next chapter, it is in part owed to ever worsening economic prospects. In 1996, Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, which "end[ed] welfare as we have come to know it." As numerous studies have shown, Clinton's austerity-driven workfare philosophy eroded the limited economic stability of the rural poor even further (Pickering 2006; Tickamyer et. al 2007; Harvey 2011). Transfer payments, which had provided an economic base since the early 1960s, lost viability.

Shale's poor are more vulnerable than at any point in the county's history. Until a protracted FBI investigation sent more than 50 local officials to federal prison on corruption charges during the mid-2000s, the local elite had remained as powerful as it ever was. They remain powerful even in spite of the convictions. Local power brokers have maintained their dominance by controlling civil jobs—now the predominant employment opportunity in the county—manipulating government contracts and public spending, using their influence with the courts and local social workers in order to influence transfer payments, and deepening the nexus that has always existed between the coal industry and state/national politicians, who allocate tremendous amounts of pork for the area, which fuel patronage opportunities.

CHAPTER 7

SHALE COUNTY TODAY

7.1 A Deficit of Hope

> The plight of a people. Appalachia hills people—depressed by oppression. Dismayed by dependence and devastated by drugs. No money can supplement, no man can suffice, no regulations can control nor change the plight of our people. Enslaved by a taskmaster not of this world. Only Jesus Christ can free those we love from captivity…When the heavy burden of bondage is lifted, God shall get the Glory!!!
>
> -Quote from Bruce's Facebook[98]

Throughout my study, almost all of the participants with whom I spoke told me that a profound sense of "hopelessness" pervaded the county. Participants used the word so often in their conversations that capturing its gravity is difficult to accomplish. Sentiments of hopeless and despair have a long history in the mountains—one that numerous analysts have reflected on. They plague both activist citizens and those who retreat from public life. In a recent story regarding child illiteracy in Appalachia, Nicholas Kristof (2012) noted how:

> Of American families living in poverty today, 8 out of 10 have air-conditioning, and a majority have a washing machine and dryer. Nearly all have microwave ovens. *What they don't have is hope*. You see it here in the town of Jackson, in the teenage girls hanging out by the bridge over the north fork of the Kentucky River, seeking to trade their bodies for prescription painkillers or methamphetamines (p. SR1, my emphasis).

Observations like Kristof's have been made for years. Harry Caudill began writing about "helplessness and hopelessness" in Central Appalachia 50 years ago, describing the region as "whipped and dispirited." He himself eventually succumbed to the despair that he analyzed in

[98] Bruce was a 60 year old recovering drug addict who became a key participant within my study. Although unemployed during the course of my study, he filled his days by volunteering at The Lord's Table, a local ministry that oversaw a "drug court" program, provided addiction counseling, offered material help to distressed families (e.g. clothing, furniture and occasional petty amounts of cash), and temporarily sheltered several individuals who lacked homes.

his work. Due to the intractability of the region's social problems and the social suffering that its inhabitants endured, Caudill became overwhelming cynical about the region's prospects for change toward the end of his life. Estep and Cleves (2013) describe his descent into cynicism in the passage below:

> Even after Kentucky passed education reform to finally put more money into the mountain school systems, [Caudill] said it was just a sham and it wouldn't do anyone any good anyway. Ultimately, Caudill concluded that Appalachia could not be fixed because its people were broken [and] its gene pool hopelessly watered down by inbreeding among the "dullards" who wallowed in ignorance and "welfarism" in isolated hollows. Having publicly blamed coal operators and crooked courthouse bosses for the region's troubles, Caudill privately told friends that he had "come full circle in my thinking and have reluctantly concluded that the poverty…is largely genetic in origin and is largely irreducible" (p. 7).

Caudill took these sentiments to the grave. He killed himself in 1990. His story, which foretells how advocates can come to heed dark, pessimistic, venomous, and vindictive attitudes toward their subjects after years of frustration and failure, is not uncommon.

Although they held disparate social and political beliefs, Caudill's inner demons reminded me of David's in many ways. Both cared deeply about the mountain region, and both struggled to make sense of their inability to forge positive change. As an active pastor who had risen from humble roots in order to minister to the "whipped and dispirited" people of whom Caudill wrote, David often struggled to keep his head up. Although he guarded his trepidations by maintaining an outward countenance of cheerfulness, it was not difficult to see that the unfortunate things that he saw—and his inability to remedy them—weighed heavily.

While volunteering at The Lord's Table one day, David told me that he needed to run a few errands and asked me to tag along with him. As we exited the building and walked toward his car, a heavily tattooed man standing in the parking lot asked if we could transport the two mattresses that had been donated to him and his girlfriend back to their apartment. David agreed.

After I helped load the mattresses atop David's SUV, we departed, with the tattooed man following on foot behind us. Although one of the mattresses fell off the roof soon after we pulled out, we eventually made our way to the apartment building. It was located next to a rundown house in an inconspicuous corner of downtown Valley Town. An older couple was sitting on the porch of the adjacent house. The husband, who was shirtless and had rotten teeth, looked upon us suspiciously through a haze of cigarette smoke as we pulled up. The apartment building was also dilapidated, resembling a flophouse. As we approached, David gestured to several people who were loitering about the property and stated that it was a very rough neighborhood.

When we parked, my eyes caught site of a woman sitting on the building's steps. She was thin—almost emaciated—and had frazzled blonde hair, a pallid complexion, wrinkled skin, and no teeth. Although she looked like she was in her 50s, David later told me that she was just 29. She was obviously high on drugs and appeared to be in a daze. When David saw her, he turned to me and with a concerned but resigned look and murmured, "man, she's bombed out of her mind."

He then rolled down the window and greeted another woman who was standing outside of the complex. The woman smiled, and asked if her boyfriend had sent us down to deliver the mattresses. David nodded in affirmation. He then inquired about the dazed woman's well-being. The woman turned around, looked at her, and then looked back at us. She motioned with her hands that she was in a drug-related stupor. The way in which she quizzically shrugged her shoulders suggested that there was nothing to be done.

David called out to the woman nonetheless: "Hey…are you all right?" The woman uttered a woozy response, clumsily waving her hand and slurring something to the effect that she

was fine. As she mumbled incoherently to David, the tattooed man showed up and asked me to help him bring the mattresses up to his apartment. We picked them up and entered the dilapidated building. Its insides were old and unkempt. Dust and dirt covered the steps, and holes riddled the walls. It had the appearance of a bombed out edifice that one might encounter in a city beleaguered by war. Sadly, it resembled an equally substandard apartment building that I had delivered clothing to a fewer weeks earlier, also while volunteering at The Lord's Table. After we carried the first mattress up, we returned for the second. All the while, the man thanked me profusely, insisting that David and I were "good people" while grousing about how he had been unable to get anyone else to help him transport the mattresses.

When we pulled away, David appeared visibly shaken. I asked if it was common for people to live in such poor housing, to which he nodded. After a few moments of riding in silence, he began to express his concern with the dazed woman whom we had seen. "I don't know how to help her except to pray for her," he sighed. It turned out that David had known the woman for 22 years—from the time that she was a child. He explained how he had provided assistance to her through The Lord's Table for a long time, but how she kept "regressing and regressing." While she had once been a very attractive young woman, he lamented how her body and health had deteriorated over the years due to drug use. All of her teeth had been pulled in order to obtain pain medications. "Do people really do that?," I asked. "Yes, they do," he responded. Before changing the subject, he told me that she had worked as a prostitute for a number of years. Now, he claimed, she could no longer rely on the occupation because people no longer desired her. "Just look at her; she's all used up," he muttered.

David's inability to aid such people sometimes caused suffocating duress. It certainly did with Tonya, one of the young women who had moved into the church's shelter while I was

conducting my fieldwork. When David and Bruce first began ministering to her, she was living in a broken down Winnabego in a remote holler that had become notorious for its drug problems and crime. Bruce told me that the trailer was tiny, and that part of the roof had collapsed. Tonya and her husband had covered the caved in portion of the roof with plastic in order to protect themselves from the elements. While they had electricity, they did not have running water. I remember Bruce becoming very sad when recounting to me how Tonya had described how painful it was to sleep in their bed, which was tucked into a tiny corner of the trailer, requiring them to crunch their bodies up in order to fit into it.

Tonya likely would have died if David had not allowed her and her husband to live in The Lord's Table. After she moved in, he not only helped her husband to obtain a part-time job at the local grocery store, but ensured that she received transportation to a medical facility in Rock City three times per week in order to receive her required dialysis treatments (she was in need of a kidney transplant). Until that point, she had found it difficult to secure rides, which resulted in an accumulation of missed appointments and hence close encounters with the grave. I remember an instance during which she came into church one Sunday before David had taken her into the ministry. Her face and body had become puffy and distended. Her skin was jaundiced, and one side of her chest was discolored with dark red and blue hues due to a collapsed vein. She was on the cusp of death. Margaret, an active church member and volunteer at The Lord's Table, brought her to the altar to receive prayer in order to prepare for the worst.

In the end, David could not save Tonya either. Soon after she moved into The Lord's Table, she was arrested. When a car that she was riding in was stopped for a minor traffic violation, the officer ran the licenses of the occupants. Tonya's name produced a bench warrant

for a precursor to methamphetamine charge that had been issued several years earlier.[99] While driving home from a movie that we had gone to see in Rock City two days after it occurred, David rued about the situation. Despite approaching multiple government officials and spending hours on the phone, he had not been able to get her released from jail. He lamented how being in "filthy" conditions in an uncomfortable jail cell put her at increased risk for kidney failure. He feared that she would die if convicted and sent to prison long term.

It thus made sense to me when David let his guard down shortly before I left Shale County. While driving back from a hike in the mountains, he hinted that the ostensible ineffectuality of his ministries was eating away at him. As we drove up the long gravel path leading to my apartment, he confessed that he often felt impotent in the face of the community's problems. He also told me that he sometimes even envied the people to whom he ministered: "They know how to ask for help when they need it. I don't know how to; I don't even know who to ask," he lamented. Although he was a devout Calvinist who believed in the absolute sovereignty of God, David needed someone to help him cope with his finiteness—that is to say, his limited ability to effect change in the ocean of sadness around him. Because the problems that he battled tended to feel insurmountable, and because victory and change occurred so infrequently, his ministerial work felt hopeless.

Feelings of hopelessness were not unique to social advocates like David, who worked primarily in drug and addiction-related ministries. They plagued those involved in all manner of social change initiatives. While asking Maria, an educator and anti-MTR activist in her mid-60s, about how to achieve "community empowerment," she expressed her own feelings of powerlessness in the face of structural inequality. Despite holding very different cultural values

[99] Tonya insisted that these charges were fallacious and attributable to an old boyfriend. While David, at least in his commentary to me, seemed to believe her, I was somewhat skeptical of her alibi.

and political beliefs relative to David, her emotional response to advocating in Shale County was nearly identical:

> I'm not being very helpful, because I see how bitter and partisan I sound [laughs]…I think I might have given you a different interview sometime in the past. I feel like I'm becoming old…I don't want to be embittered and don't want to be cynical, but I feel somewhat experienced with this kind of thing, so I don't feel particularly hopeful about any kind of grassroots community thing being able to change…the drug epidemic or anything in the coal industry, because they're such powerful forces…One of my heroes in the labor movement is Aunt Molly Jackson…She was at the Battle of Evarts[100]…[where] it was the coal companies, the local power structure and the local law…versus some of the miners. [The miners] had the courage to do that, and…I think we have to admire that…but they totally lost, I mean *they were crushed*. The unions were driven out…they just could not stand up against that power.

Maria's passage captures the collective sense of hopelessness among those seeking community improvement in Shale County—the feeling, in essence, that the status quo, which had held for generations, was intractable, and that the county's problems were too overwhelming to confront. Often, this was because the powers that were, as Maria noted, "crushed" challenges. Her husband, Alexander, who edited the local paper, told me that his own years as an activist ended in the same fashion.

While active community members often became discouraged and cynical about the utility of their efforts, ordinary people—i.e. poor residents who were less active in advocacy efforts—experienced hopelessness perhaps the most profoundly. Many abandoned the area altogether because they felt unable to establish a comfortable life there.[101] Not long after I moved to Shale,

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[100] The Battle of Evarts was a mining strike that occurred in Harlan County, Kentucky in 1931. It began when the Harlan County Coal Company cut wages and fired several employees. The UMWA responded by holding a 2,000 person rally in nearby Pineville and eventually holding a strike in Harlan County. The strike became violent when the company brought in numerous guards who were armed with rifles, sawed-off shotguns and machine-guns. The strike ended approximately one month later after the governor called in the National Guard. Four people were killed in the related violence.

[101] As development economist Albert Hirschman (1970) has observed, "exit" is one of the primary survival strategies that individuals embrace in the face of chronic dissatisfaction and hardship. As a wealth of historical work attests, tens of thousands of individuals have adopted that strategy in order to negotiate joblessness and disadvantage in Central Appalachia (Schwarzeller et. al 1971; Eller 2008). The other survival strategy that Hirschman propounds is "voice," which refers to the process through which the aggrieved attempt to redress unsatisfactory conditions

an article in the local paper profiled one such a family. After their home was robbed of cash, guns and prescription pills before being burned to the ground, the family stated that they were "giving up" on the county, devastated by the loss. Sam Fields, a prominent local pastor involved a variety community improvements initiatives, told me that he encouraged his own children to leave the county, because he feared for their safety:

> I was really glad when my daughter went to college…She was a good girl, and I was happy when she got out of town, you know? …As bad as I miss her and my grandson…I was glad they weren't in Shale County, just because it was so bad.

Others, like Benjamin—an environmental activist and mechanic whose daughter had developed severe respiratory problems due to the coal dust pollution released by the processing plant located adjacent to their trailer—wanted to leave but lacked the means. The powerful passage below captures his dissatisfaction with his life, as it stands, in the county:

> My advice to you, brother, is get the hell out of here as quick as you can [laughs]. I don't think you're stuck here for life, so you know: There ain't no work here, Phil. There ain't no [opportunities]. My child has no opportunities to look at when she grows up. You know, if I don't get my own girl away from here, she's not going to have no future… When I use the word hillbilly, I'm talking about myself now, because I'm a hillbilly. I'm proud of it…But they don't want everybody around here to see what I've seen, you know? You go to California, man, you see true wealth. I mean, you see rich people. That's not around here, because that opportunity—the jobs that they got out there and stuff—are not given to us, you know? We're kept to a slick. They want to keep us to where we have just a few options, and that's it, you know? That's all they want…They don't want you to be able to make a couple millions dollars a year. They want to keep their thumb on you. They want to keep you broke. They want to keep you uneducated, and that's the way they want you, you know?
>
> Just like my little girl right now. She's a straight A student. I'm so proud of my little girl…But if you took her to New York or California, somewhere like that, she'd probably be lucky if she's a passing student in comparison to them children, the way they're educated. You get what I'm saying? You know, we think, yeah, she's a straight A student here, but you take her out of here, she's not that educated.

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through communicative action. Both "exit" and "voice" are moderated by "loyalty." Thus, because some community members retain a cultural loyalty to Shale County and the mountains more generally, their willingness to "exit" is reduced.

PL: Is it that the local educational system isn't very good or the teachers are not qualified?

B: I mean, it's not that. They—you know…

PL: They just don't demand a lot out of the students?

B: They don't demand…They don't demand more out of the system.

Benjamin's sentiment was very common. He believed that to remain in Shale County was to face an impoverished and hopeless future. In his case, that future would entail the inability to find work, substandard education for his daughter and premature death for the both of them due to the unchecked coal dust spewing onto their property, which was slowly poisoning them.

While a dearth of opportunity and a lack of self-efficacy accounted for much of Benjamin's sentiment of hopelessness, hopelessness also derived from the feelings of social exclusion that he had experienced since boyhood. His opaque and tenebrous use of the pronoun "they" suggests that he feels as if the world is against him and other residents within the county—that, like Job, they were born into senseless ostracization at the hands of an unjust other. We observe this when Benjamin asserts that "they," i.e. the outside, urban, colonial faction of the United States, want to "keep him to a slick," "keep him broke," "keep him uneducated," "keep their thumb under him," and "keep him to where he has just a few options."

His comments indicate that he does not simply feel as though he lives in a *depressed area*, but that he and his neighbors inhabit a *socially excluded area*.[102] Benjamin believed that his "hillybilly" status marked him as an outsider, that is to say, as a second class citizen who

[102] This is an under-explored issue in most North American studies of poverty. As Newman and Messengill (2006) have noted, while American sociologists tend to focus on lack of income and material hardship, European sociologists—working under the umbrella of a more expansive welfare state—more often focus on "social exclusion" when analyzing poverty (Hills and Stewart 2005; Silver and Miller 2003). Because families in Europe more often benefit from cash transfers, studies therein focus on exclusion from civic participation as a source of disenfranchisement—that is to say, how the poor are cultural, politically and social marginalized. Even when they are protected from material hardship, the poor in this context are social segregated, stigmatized and excluded from exercising their citizenship rights. Thus, emphasizing polarization, differentiation and inequality, European poverty scholars explore how the poor are blocked from integrating into mainstream citizenship, and their "social exclusion" creates a subjective sense of separation and inferiority (Zuberi 2006).

could neither fully participate in mainstream society nor achieve acceptance in it. Many other research participants also felt this way.

While at The Lord's Table one day, I asked David if the church had found an organ donor for Tonya yet. He shook his head and looked down in despair. When I made a remark about the inefficiency of the US' organ donor system, he swiftly looked up. Almost glaring at me, he retorted that it was not "the *inefficiency* of the system" so much as the "*inequality* of the system." "Someone like Tonya," he protested, who was "poor and from Appalachia," would never receive priority for a transplant. With anger, he lamented how Mickey Mantle, who had drank himself into renal failure, received a kidney. "Someone like Tonya," on the other hand, who had been drained of moral value and dehumanized by outside stereotypes, would be left to suffer, he repined.

Benjamin and David's commentary speaks to how they felt structurally, socially and psychologically separated from the "outside world," i.e. the people and institutions that comprised urban-based communities (Fitchen 1981; Duncan 1992, 2000). The polarity that they expressed between themselves and others, however, did not necessarily represent "class consciousness." As Fitchen (1981) notes:

> When ideas of class struggle were expounded by young urban radicals in the late 1960s, they fell on deaf ears among rural poor people, who appeared to be totally opposed to notions of revolution and were not interested in uniting with other "poor, oppressed peoples"…Their opposition quite clearly flowed from the fact that what they really wanted was to be accepted by the outside world, not to overthrow it…They wanted to be identified, treated, and accepted as people, not as *poor* people. To carry the banner of poor people was contrary to their long-term hopes (p.169-170).

People like David and Benjamin sought access to the same opportunities that those in the "outside world" enjoyed and recognition as ordinary people. Revolution and romanticization did not interest them. Their poverty was experienced not as pride, anger or indignation, but as

shame (Portelli 2010). Given the connotations that society has long attached to the poor, this was unsurprising. Poor and working class individuals have been represented as "excess, as waste…as lacking in taste, as unmodern, as escapist, as dangerous, as unruly and without shame" (Skeggs 2013: 99), and as "tasteless, feckless, vulgar, and the subject of middle class derision" (Vincent, Ball and Braun 2008: 63).[103] Given these labels, why would anyone want to be viewed as poor or working class? The label only exacerbated Shale Countians' sense of hopelessness.

This sense of social exclusion, hopelessness and dissatisfaction formed a common theme in the public record, especially among regular columnists in the local newspaper.[104] Contributors articulated a sense of unjust deprivation—an "us" versus "them" narrative in which Shale Countians had been made to unjustly suffer. One of the paper's more polemical columnists penned the following incendiary column in 2004. It was aptly titled "Where We Live:"

> I know the insurance is too high, and the education is limited, and our kids don't have anything to do so they get into trouble. I know there's no jobs and no adult entertainment and you have to leave town to eat out. I know the county is broke and we have bad roads. I know our politics is all bought and sold. I know you can't buy a legal drink anywhere, and we have a drug problem that's completely out of control. I know there's no place you can go out with your family for the evening to enjoy yourself…I know there's no place to go shopping or to just go walk around. I know there's drug dealers everywhere, and we have no type of treatment programs, and our court system is overcrowded, and our jail is bursting at the seams. Our cell phones don't work in half the county…there's not nearly enough economical housing, no boat docks, no good old fashioned swimming holes. They're all filled up with trash and slush. I know we got turkey, deer and other wild animals because nobody hunts anymore, and what few hunters we do have leave town just so they can take a trip somewhere. BUTTTT, we've got all kinds of pharmacies and all kinds of lawyers and all kinds of policemen, and all kinds of criminals, all kinds of stealing. We've got all kinds of churches, and all kinds of preachers, and all kinds of Christians, and all kinds of do-gooders that never do any good, but they talk a lot.

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[103] They use Rubin's (1976) classic study, *Worlds of Pain*, as an example: "She portrays [the working classes] as living unrelenting grim lives filled with pain: Limited social relationships, restricting, unfulfilling jobs and battles with poverty" (p.63-4).

[104] The local paper employed writers from various neighborhoods in the county to keep those in other neighborhoods abreast of the various going ons and happenings that occurred within them.

In a column that he published shortly thereafter, he propounded the same theme of omnipresent problems without solutions, noting how Shale leads the nation in:

> Poverty, heart disease, lung disease, welfare, drug abuse, unemployment, malnourishment, non-graduates, minimum wage jobs, high auto insurance rates, high home owners insurance, drug users, dependency, pain doctors, pain clinics, bad roads, bad bridges, garbage out of control, dogs out of control, nothing for our teens, nothing for children, no movies, no bowling, no skating, living good the first three days of the month, buying all of their food stamps in pop and selling for half price to local stores to have pill and bill money. Half the children in this county have never eaten in a restaurant and most of the other half only on the first of the month at a drive thru window.

Given these conditions, he felt that change and improvement were hopeless. In a final column, he ridiculed the local government's economic development efforts, which often revolved around attempting to lure factories into the area by way of infrastructural improvements and tax incentives, as foolish and futile:

> Tell me, why would one man or company ever put a factory here, just one reason? No entertainment, no work-force, limited schooling, very limited housing, no stores, no dining, limited motel space, bad roads, very little medical care, you have to be air lifted here with anything more than a sprained ankle. No youth activities whatsoever, limited sports programs, hardly any care for the elderly, no social programs or events, no bowling, no skating, no malls, one little theatre, one little swimming pool, enough parks to handle two events at a time. An overwhelming drug problem, insurance double of everywhere else. One auto dealer, one eye doctor, few dentists, one drycleaner, no taxi, no public transportation, I could go on for ten more pages but you should get it by now.

By the time I arrived in Shale County, the situation had deteriorated even further. The theatre that he referenced had shut down, the pool had closed indefinitely due to an inability to pay for necessary repairs, and one of the county's few health clinics had shut down after the physician who operated it was arrested for sexually molesting a 14 year old patient.

An additional aspect of hopelessness within the community thus arose from a collective sense of "lack." Residents not only felt like they lacked economic opportunity but that they lacked opportunities for achieving personal growth. Commenting on a group of unemployed

miners who had struggled to persevere through an Eastern Kentucky winter several years ago, Bigart (1963) wrote: "This is what happens to a…population when you abandon it, give it just enough food to keep alive and tell it to go to hell." Indeed, this is how most Shale Countians felt: That the country had abandoned them, given them just enough to survive, and told them to go to hell. When participants spoke about their relationship to the rest of the county, a sense of inequality and abandonment thus almost always inflected their rhetoric.

7.2 Hopelessness as a Structure of Feeling

Hopelessness enveloped Shale County as a palpable "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977). Williams' concept is more temporal, conjuctural and contingent than the idea of "culture," which has a permanent, static connotation. He uses it to describe things that people think of as being currently "present" in their lives, that is to say, *facts of the moment*. In Shale's case, the facts of the moment included addiction, joblessness, poverty, orphaned children raised by grandparents, corruption, "hillbilly" stigmas, and the ever present threat of tragedy/death.[105] These "facts" congealed into an overall sentiment of "hopelessness," a term that participants used in order to describe the overarching emotional pattern that ran parallel to social life in the community (Dollard 1937).

The hopelessness that Shale Countians described was not merely a description of their feelings. It was palpable. It had a weight to it. A few days before returning to Athens after having spent my first summer in Shale County, I described the sensation in my fieldnotes:

> Given all of the poverty, the scarcity, the police roadblocks, the violence, personal conflicts, etc., the town carries a particular "structure of feeling" that has become discernable to me. The emotional structure/pattern that runs parallel to the town's social structure is one of uneasiness, apprehension, nervousness, and fear. One develops almost a sense of paranoia—a sense that he is being watched, whether by cops, people eaves

[105] (e.g. from poor public health, auto accidents, violence, etc., which Portelli describes).

> dropping (Lauren does this to Dawn, and claims that Dawn does it to her), etc. It is hard to feel relaxed. A sense that something bad is going to happen lingers in the air.

The friends that I made in Shale County expressed an almost identical feeling. As I arrived at The Lord's Table one day, I went into the conference room in order to speak with Bruce and David. Because David was chatting with someone on the phone, Bruce struck up a conversation with me. Without extending much of a greeting, he began what amounted to a sermon in which he depicted Shale County as a "mission zone." He explained how he and his wife had traveled to Lexington over the weekend, and how as he neared the city, he could feel—he made a circular, enveloping motion with his arms and hands—"the oppression lift" from around him as if it were a fog. When I asked what exactly he meant by "oppression," he responded that he was referring to the poverty, drug use and social suffering that permeated Shale County. In a clamoring voice that fell just shy of a shout, he asserted that Lexington was free of the poverty that devastated his home. In its place, he exclaimed, were stores, restaurants and "things going on!" Leaving the county, as such, did not merely emancipate him from the "isolation of rural life," as Marx (1990) put it, but from the emotional weight of deprivation, injustice and despair.

Max, a 60 year old pastor and educator who was without a job and thus donating his time to The Lord's Table during my fieldwork, also observed this phenomenon. During his interview, he somberly related how hopelessness was inscribed into the community's social geography—how it had acquired a sense of place:

> Can you imagine living in a place that's called "Lossville." There is a place called "Lossville" [here]. There is a place called "Hell For Certain." I think that not only talks about, you know, the humorous stories about southeast Kentucky, and the backwoods kind of mentality, but it says something about the people who named that and…about the people who are willing to live under lost conditions or hell for certain conditions and are not willing to change it…I mean, there's no want of change [here].

Max, who often mentioned Lossville and Hell For Certain in everyday conversation, believed that hopelessness had persisted for so long that it had become objectified into local place. Entire

neighborhoods—perhaps even the mountains themselves—had absorbed the pain that mountaineers had diffused into the landscape. Their suffering did not simply evaporate but weighed upon the area as a fog. This was the "oppression" of which Bruce spoke. It resembles the "evil" that tourists often express encountering when visiting places like Auschwitz and Dachau. Stewart (2007) calls these sensations "ordinary affects." They refer to:

> Public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation…They give circuits and flows the forms of life. They can be experienced as pleasure and as shock, as an empty pause or a dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation...They pick up density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas and social worldings of all kinds. Their significance lies in the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible (p.5).

Ordinary affects are thus collective emotions that take on an immanence in physical place. An invisible wallpaper, an inaudible soundtrack, a dream world (Shelton 2007), they shape—and perhaps haunt—the thoughts and behavior of those who live amid their presence.

The affect that enveloped Shale—a sense of hopelessness—sometimes took on an even darker hue. The emotional undertones that inflected participants' quotidian commentary reflected the omnipresent threat of death in the face inexorable struggle and overwhelming odds. As Portelli has (2010) noted of Harlan County, KY: "The culture is imbued with the awareness that 'death could come anytime'…Because death is always at hand, the culture centers on the struggle to stay alive; survival, indeed, is not just a word (p.9). Portelli encountered almost no one in Harlan who did not face daily struggles with survival and extreme hardship. I observed the same situation.

Residents struggled to make do each day. A commentator who penned a piece for the local paper speaks to the community's collective sense of struggle:

> In Shale County we all have to agree on one thing. We are a small, economically, socially depressed community. We kind of do live in a bubble as my mother puts it. We have no skyscrapers to get on top of and hide, nor do we have Wall Street to get lost in

> among busy people. What we do have is trenches. What are trenches? Frontline people…fighting tooth and nail, struggling to overcome what lies ahead of the horizon…

The threat of failing to meet those struggles—the reality of death—from addiction, lack of medical care, poverty, violence, and other forces—lingered inexorably in the air like a putrid scent. At religious services, preachers spoke of death's inevitability while those whom had come for worship discussed how they "couldn't wait to go home." Many whom suffered illness and misfortune requested prayer. When announcements were made at the beginning and end of services, the commentary was replete with news regarding deceased community members. Obituaries were prominently featured in the local paper, and residents—much more so than anywhere else I have lived—visited and decorated graves. It was thus no wonder that pastors, especially at the small Holiness churches that were predominantly attended by the poor, routinely admonished their congregants to "be ready" for death. Indeed, the admonition to "be ready" embodied the structure of feeling in which participants lived. In a context of hopelessness, pain, struggle and death always lurked around the corner.

7.3 Seeking a Return to Tradition: The Narrative of Social and Cultural Decline

In the context of hopelessness, most of the individuals with whom I spoke articulated a sense of retrogression as opposed to progress in the community. When I interviewed Clancy Howard, the director of a local Christian school that had served as an anchor for the community for more than 100 years, he depicted a community that was becoming ever more devoid of amenities and slowly transitioning into death:

> [Shale County] is obviously a community that's in transition, but the problem is, the question becomes, what direction is it transitioning to? It doesn't appear to be transitioning in a more flourishing direction. They tried to open up a restaurant down here. It didn't make it...Farther out they had a restaurant called the Mountain Grill…but it closed. So you say, okay, what is there here in town? We have the convenience store...We've got the fire department. We have an [internet service provider]…two churches...[and] the elementary school [laughs]. And that's it...there's really not this huge

> thriving community, and in terms of jobs [there are none]...How do you help a community that may be dying?

As Clancy describes, the impending sense of death within the community—that is to say, the collective perception that its population, institutions and opportunities were withering away—had produced not only material hardship but a sense social and cultural decline marked by feelings of isolation and anomie.

Many people thus longed for a return to "traditional ways" even as the conditions for those patterns of social organization and interaction had lost possibility. Maria, in the extended passage below, attests to this contradiction at greater depth by expounding upon how community life had changed since her coming of age years in the 1950s. While she waxes nostalgic for the past, like Schwarzweller et. al (1971), she acknowledges that what has been lost cannot be resurrected given socio-economic change:

> My grandparents had this store [when I was growing up]…that, like now, is just all deserted and covered up with vines [laughs]…It was really lively when I was a kid…But what I see now is so much an absence of things that I saw before, like that image of all these cars and people being down at that store…I would be up here, and they would be laughing and talking so loud that you could hear all the way up here…[It was like that] even up through the 70s when my uncle was running it. But when my husband and I [took it over] in 92'…we had to close…[Everyone was] *going to town* to get everything at Wal-Mart because it was cheaper…
>
> So now you see that up and down the road, all these empty stores. To me it's a symbol that these local communities are just not what they used to be, because we *go to town* for so much…We used to sit out on the porch when I was a kid and look at the cars going by: This was great fun [laughs]. And there wasn't that much traffic then, but enough to keep one interested…But now you don't see very much traffic at all. It's kind of creepy to me. We can go from here to [another community about 20 miles away] and not meet a car… There are a lot of coal trucks, more coal trucks than I've ever seen since the 70s…but not that much other traffic, and I think that's weird…But then..the hugest thing is…the drug epidemic. I mean, *it's just incredible* [drawn out, sounds sad]…
>
> And then…back when I was a kid…my grandparents had a farm here; we just have dogs and kudzu [laughs]…And in addition you see all the little stores abandoned, you see a lot of abandoned houses, you see where people have, I guess, just given up on the idea of living here…I think it's because of the drugs and the fear of crime, and because there's

> still not any jobs. So I think the general trend has been…that we're losing population. You see…the physical evidence of a culture that at one time maybe worked…but hasn't really been replaced with anything that works for most of the people…

Maria's commentary captures how economic modernization has changed Shale County over the past 60-70 years, and how it has engendered perceptions of decline among the residents who have lived through it. Corroborating what Eller (1982) has argued elsewhere, Maria speaks to how modernization has undermined economic independence in her community. Not only have Shale Countians ceased making their own way through farming, but they now "go into town" in order to purchase goods, which has undermined the community store. This has not only caused wealth to flow out of the region but has eroded the institutions that once functioned as pillars of community life—i.e. the places where people got together in order to talk and laugh and engender a civil society.

Maria's commentary also reveals how outside industry had fully infiltrated the area since the time of Brown's (1988) study. Because the county did not begin to modernize until the eve of the Second World War, coal production was in its infancy when Maria was growing up.[106] Today, however, it is fully developed as an economic enterprise: "They're just mining the hell out of it around here," she repined. While "tradition," i.e. the system of socio-cultural organization associated with agriculture, shaped community life during the 50s and 60s, those preindustrial residues had attenuated by the time that I interviewed Maria in 2012. Farming, as she noted, was "no longer a viable thing." While her parents maintained a garden, cultivated corn and raised cattle, hogs and mules, she cared only for "dogs and kudzu." While small stores

[106] While this was true of Shale, it was not true of other nearby counties such as Harlan, Pike and Perry. Possessing larger coal seems, these were some of the first areas in the mountains to receive attention from energy speculators. Mining thus arrived earlier in those communities as did transportation infrastructure and other developments associated with modernization.

anchored community life in the 50s and 60s, almost all of them are now closed and covered in brush and vines. She and others experienced the loss of tradition as decline.

The way in which the death of tradition had become etched into the landscape and built environment contributed to this perception. When driving through the community, one continuously encountered the innumerous abandoned stores, barns, houses, and burned out edifices of which she spoke. Often these sites were interspersed with roadside memorials and crosses, marking the many places in which residents had prematurely perished from car crashes, illnesses and, increasingly, drug overdoses.[107] Several interviewees and newspaper columns, moreover, complained about problems with feral animals, which only intensified their sense of social disorganization.[108] And many residents, of course, felt that pollution—both from coal and illegal dumping—had taken a toll on the area's natural beauty. Altogether, these changes reflected—if not embodied—the feelings of retrogression that residents expressed.

As Maria notes, the county has not yet produced a viable alternative to the "traditional culture" that bounded residents together prior to social change:

> I guess the question is: What does [the county's agrarian lineage] get replaced with that works. I'm sure the traditional culture didn't work for many people who were maybe not good at farming or didn't inherit land…But I remember James Brown talking about how amazed he was when he came here in the 40s that so many people were living so well…They didn't have that much coming in and going out…[but] in that way of life they were connected to each other, because they worked together and they were doing the same kind of work, and they would get together for…work-ins and family gatherings and church…but now we really don't do that.
>
> So now I feel kind of isolated…It's like if you're not in the church, or if you're not in the meth culture…it's hard…to be in a group…Families…tend not to all live so close together as they used to, and…when we do see each other—like…at Wal-Mart…or at the funeral home—we always say the same thing: "Well people just don't visit like they used to; well, we ought to get together." But we never do…So life doesn't throw us

[107] Portelli (2010) has noted this phenomenon as well in his work in Harlan County: "Death was a presence in this land: the dead animals, the road accidents, and of course the coal mines. Guns. And black lung" (p.4).
[108] The county had improved the situation considerably by the time of my arrival.

> together like it once did. And then [we don't have] the store that was a place where people could get together just to hang out…So…I don't want to sound like a romantic…but certainly some of these [changes] have been negative.

In the passage, Maria laments how "folks don't visit like they used to," how "you see all the little stores, houses and barns abandoned," and how, as a result, "these communities are just not what they used to be." Hardly a nostalgic lament for an idealized past, Maria's observations of community change describe the erosion of public space and the shriveling of social institutions within the county, both of which had undermined civic life.

7.4 The Shriveling of Public Space

Although the state-led modernization efforts that began in the 1960s were intended to better connect Shale County to the "outside world" by improving transportation infrastructure, increasing access to information-technology and creating linkages to broader markets, in many ways they resulted in greater isolation. By undermining agricultural kin networks and the conditions for community stores to prosper, social life in the countryside imploded. No longer collaborating in harvests and without jobs to integrate community members into work organizations—let alone a broader division of community labor—neighbors interacted with one another with diminishing frequency. They simply lacked the occasion, and apart from places such as Valley Town's Wal-Mart, they lacked the public space in which to do so. As Maria asserted, "life doesn't throw us together like it once did."

Because middle-class residents had to travel farther and exert more effort in order to socialize, they found social integration to be much *more difficult* than in past times. The poor, however, faced a much more severe plight. Because they lacked mobility, they confronted a set of circumstances that made social integration *nearly impossible*. Even if social and recreational opportunities had emerged in agriculture's wake in order to "throw people together again," the poor would lack access to them. Although the state and federal governments had improved the

county's transportation infrastructure since the 1960s, the improvements had done little to increase the poor's mobility. For the most part, they faced the same barriers to transportation that they had faced for generations.[109] These barriers trapped them in declining neighborhoods without outlets for socialization.

A recurring theme among the economically distressed residents with whom I spoke was thus the urge for social stimulation, i.e. the opportunity to see and speak with other people from the community. After waking up one morning, I went outside to throw out the trash and let my dog out. One of my neighbors, Mary, was standing outside and came over to chat with me.[110] After some small talk, I mentioned how I planned to visit the library later in the day. Mary began telling me about how she enjoyed "going into town" just to walk around and see people. She noted that because she did not own a car or have any way to leave the house, she did not have the chance to go very often, which, she noted, was "very boring." She discussed how Kevin, her brother-in-law, would sometimes drop her and his daughter off just so that they could "walk around." Mary then entreated me to take her with me sometime, saying that she "never g[o]t to go," and that she would very much like to "just walk around."

A few days before, I had met a woman in her mid-60s at The Lord's Table. The woman, Evelynn, also lacked a car and relied on her son who lived almost an hour away for rides. Every

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[109] Due to underdeveloped roads and lack of access to rail, poor Shale Countians found it difficult to move among neighborhoods—let alone leave the county—during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Billings and Blee 2000; Brown 1988). Although railroads eventually linked mineral rich areas of the county to outside locations, poor farmers still had to follow creek beds in order to get from one hollow to the next, which was a long and cumbersome process. Arnett (1978), as such, asserts that Eastern Kentucky's infrastructure—especially in terms of transportation—was built to facilitate extractive industry, not ordinary people. I observed the same phenomenon. Although ARC and EOA projects had resulted in myriad new roads and bridges, the projects mostly benefitted coal operators, the timber industry and local elites. The poor, who often lacked vehicles and/or the money to fuel and travel in them, rarely availed themselves of these improvements. Lacking a means with which to get around, they spent most of their time at home. Making arrangements for rides required immense time and effort.

[110] Mary lived in the apartment below me with her brother-in-law, his wife and their three children. She was 45 years-old, unemployed and made ends meet through a monthly SSI check and assistance from her family. I made a habit of chatting with her whenever we happened across one another. This occurred fairly frequently, as she rarely had occasion to leave her apartment.

two weeks, he dropped her off at The Lord's Table just so that she could chat with other people and get out of the house. Apart from attending a church service on Sundays, this was her only outlet for socialization. Like Mary, she told me that she constantly felt bored and loathed her inability to go into town. Given the fuel costs associated with living in an impoverished rural area, even those with vehicles struggled to socialize. A man whom I met at the laundry mat in Valley Town—the only laundry mat that I knew of in the county—told me that he had to commute 35 minutes each way in order to wash his clothing. For many, covering the gas that such commutes required was simply untenable. As a result, they stayed at home and suffered boredom.

The collapse of neighborhood institutions and social stimulation in "deep rural" area of the county had hit children especially hard. Citizens and educators frequently expressed concern about young people's the lack of leisure and socialization opportunities. Youth in remote parts of the county endured commutes to school that approached an hour long each way. Living so far away from school, many lacked the ability to participate in extracurricular activities, such as sports, because they could not arrange for transportation back home if they missed the school bus.[111]

Thus, with family farms dissolving, community stores/institutions closing, population emigrating, and those left behind growing poorer, a creeping isolation had begun to envelop Shale County. Given that Shale was large, sparsely populated and without access to public

[111] A young teacher named Taylor, whom I met after one of David's church services, was attempting to improve this situation while I was conducing my fieldwork. He had established a program called "Shale County Outreach." The idea was to provide leisure opportunities to Shale's youth in order to dissuade them from experimenting with drugs (as I discuss further into the chapter, boredom is the impetus that most of Shale's drug users cite for addiction). On an uncharacteristically cool Friday night in October, I spent the evening driving around with him in a rickety old van in order to pick up teenagers living in remote parts of the county. After spending nearly two hours traversing remote roads within the county, we convened at a local church. Taylor and a few other volunteers provided a brief worship service before turning the kids loose to play board games, shoot baskets in the church's gym, eat pizza, and simply talk. With only one van and a handful of volunteers, however, Taylor only had the capacity to provide the service once per week—and only to a miniscule portion of the county's youth.

transportation, the neighborhood decline that followed on the heels of modernization imprisoned residents within the confines of their homes.[112] This was the natural outcome of state and federal development policies favoring "urban growth areas" over "deep rural" neighborhoods (Eller 2008). Thus, while modernization brought infrastructural improvements and created new markets, it submerged many residents in a pressure cooker of isolation, boredom and deprivation.

7.5 The Lumpenization of the Poor

Whereas socio-economic transition had ruptured the communities that middle-class residents like Maria lived in, it ensnared poor residents in a more severe plight—one characterized by debilitating states of alienation and anomie. Those who lacked the material resources and human capital required to succeed in Shale's contemporary milieu, in sort, underwent a process of "lumpenization."

Marx conceptualized the "lumpen" as a residual class: "The historical fall-out of large-scale, long-term transformations in the organization of the economy" (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009: 17). He asserted that the lumpen have no "productive raisond'être;" having been "expelled from engagement with the means of production," they become "drop-outs from history" (p.17). Although Marx himself dismissed the lumpen as "scum, offal [and] refuse," Bourgois and Schonberg have resurrected the structural sense of the concept in order to describe "vulnerable population[s] that [are] produced at the interstices of transitioning modes of production" (p.18). Their notion of "lumpen abuse" seeks to illuminate how changes within the political-economic organization of society wage structural violence on vulnerable categories of people. It exposes how "structurally imposed everyday suffering generates violent and

[112] As Fitchen (1981) notes: "In poverty-stricken rural areas there are neither viable local-level social groupings nor satisfactory structural bridges linking people with the new larger community" (p.188). A number rural communities have become more isolated and disorganized as a result of modernization (see also Duncan 1992, 2000).

destructive subjectivities" among those who have been made "redundant" by structural economic processes and who have been forgotten by state policy (p.19).

Shale County's process of modernization had rendered much of its population "redundant," i.e. without purpose vis-à-vis the local community and national economy. No longer able to earn a living through subsistence farming or coal, and increasingly cut loose from the state assistance programs that had arisen during the War on Poverty, they were "expelled from productive engagement with the means of production" and banished to oblivion by state policy. Like the distressed residents in William Julius Wilson's (1996) study of the inner city, most of these Shale Countians lived within a spatial and temporal vacuum. It was not simply that they could not find work, could not make ends meet and that their neighborhoods were imploding under the weight of population loss and state retrenchment; it was that they had nowhere to go, nothing to do, and no way to get anywhere on a day to day basis.[113] They lacked, in short, a sense of meaning, direction and purpose in daily life.[114]

In the absence of economic and community disciplining structures, opportunities for neighborhood socialization and leisure and work, Shale' spoor were charged with using the few resources that they had at their disposable to innovate their own forms of economic survival and socio-cultural organization. Given the lack of options, this often involved "hustling" and drugs. While "doing the hustle" and consuming drugs allowed Shale's lumpen class to eke out a living

[113] As Wilson (1996) found in the inner city ghetto, I found that lack of transportation was a major social problem in rural Shale County. Lack of transportation, in fact, seemed to plague the rural poor even more severely than the urban poor. It also had a historical basis. Arnett (1978) and Billings and Blee (2000), for instance, discuss how lack of transportation infrastructure complicated life in Appalachia during the 19th century as well. While railroads eventually came to link mineral rich areas to broader regional grids, poor yeomen still had to follow creek beds in order to get from one hollow to the next. This parallels today's transportation challenges. While the development of roads benefits coal operators, the timber industry and local elites, it does little for ordinary residents who often lack vehicles and/or the money to fuel and travel in them. As Arnett has argued, Eastern Kentucky's infrastructure—e especially in terms of transportation—was built to facilitate the extractive industries, not residents.

[114] Rendered purposeless by industry restructuring and deemed unworthy by state austerity measures, it is no wonder that many felt this way.

and meaningful (if fragile) moral cosmos with which to ward off structurally imposed feelings of anomie, it also generated resentment among economically secure contingents of the county and patterns of self-destruction among the lumpen themselves.

Auschwitiz survivor Primo Levi coined the term "gray zone" in order to describe the "ethical wasteland imposed by the Nazis on concentration camp inmates struggling to stay alive under genocidal conditions" (Bourgois and Schonberg 2009: 19). In gray zones, the imperative of survival overcomes standards of human decency that prevail in more favorable social environments. Gray zones form not only amid the horrors of internment camps, but in all manner of situations in which resources are scarce and one's survival is uncertain. Many of Shale's lumpen population lived within this state. The everyday "state of emergency" that they faced as a function of poverty, social isolation and cultural marginalization demanded behavior that would be unlikely to occur in more favorable circumstances, including drug abuse, drug dealing, neglect of children, theft, and brazen entreaties for money and favors.

This is precisely the social dynamic that Bourgois and Schonberg's (2009) concept of "lumpen abuse" illuminates: How structurally imposed violence interfaces with intimate forms of violence, which often appear to result from poor choices and individual acts of self-destruction. Drawing from this concept, the next two sections illuminate the economic survival strategies and patterns of cultural adaptation that many within Shale's lumpen class had developed in order to economically survive and ward off existential feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness that they experienced as a result of isolation and material deprivation.

7.6 The Social Structure of Rural Drug Addiction

Most of the "experts" with whom I spoke in the community (e.g. reporters, pastors, government officials, rehab counselors, and social workers) believed that the hopelessness that accompanied living in the face of limited economic opportunity was responsible for the area's

widespread drug abuse and civic disengagement.[115] In the following quotation, Alexander, for example, hypothesizes relationships among limited opportunity, hopelessness and drug abuse as a method of escape:

> PL: Do you have a sense of how the escalation of drug use and drug sales began? That is to say, what factors precipitated it?
>
> E: My personal theory is that…in this part of the country, which is so desperately poor, people…grow up knowing they don't have opportunities, and if they don't move away or get a few of the opportunities that exist, they're in a situation where they take drugs to escape…It's people who have no hope of a future...The most recent census numbers that I saw showed a high school graduation rate in Shale County…[of] something like 59%....Those people are not looking for a future.

Mike Strong, an established regional reporter who has written about Appalachian social problems for more than 30 years, also elaborated upon the "no future" orientation that ostensibly undergirded the choices and behavior of many of the region's residents:

> Think about if you're…a senior in high school; I want to stay close to…the community where I've always lived, but what am I going to do? There's no jobs here. So it contributes to this…general feeling of helplessness, hopelessness…this pessimistic outlook that they just don't have a lot of chances…that there's really not much point in [attempting to better oneself]…and I think that feeds drug abuse.

Like countless others, Mike and Alexander contended that Central Appalachia's rural poor used drugs in order to temporarily *escape*—that is to say, zone out from—the "hopeless" and "helpless" conditions in which they dwelled.

Although exhibiting a measurable degree of empathy with regard to the disadvantages that they faced, middle-class residents ultimately construed the poor's economic and cultural survival strategies as—to use Alexander's words—an "easy way out." Rather than confronting unfavorable odds in order to better their lot, they believed that the lumpen skirted by through a

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[115] Transportation barriers also materially precluded participation in many cases. Many residents—especially those living in the most remote hollers within the county—lacked the means to attend public meetings and/or participate in activist initiatives. Many residents lamented how children from some areas had to endure 45 minute bus rides to school. One man with whom I briefly spoke at the local laundry mat groused about having to drive 40 minutes to wash his clothes.

combination of collecting government assistance (often by way of fraud), hustling, and consuming drugs in order to escape their problems as opposed to facing them.

My own observations, however, conveyed a starkly different portrait of addiction's social structure. While those who commented on the county's rampant drug abuse construed addictive behavior as a mode of escape from material hardship, my own observations suggested a more mundane impetus for drug consumption: A profound and suffocating sense of boredom with everyday life. Boredom resulted from the socio-economic transitions that had "lumpenized" drug users.

When I asked Lauren, a long term drug user whom I shadowed during my early months in Shale County, why so many people turned to drugs one night, she responded, in an almost incredulous tone, that people were bored and that "there [was] nothing else to do." On another occasion during which I had unwittingly driven her to a friend's trailer in order to make a drug deal, she confessed that while inside she had taken a "drag off the joint that they were smoking." Embarrassed, she accounted for her behavior by stating that "there [was not] anything to do in these parts but sit around and drink, smoke pot or take pills." On yet another occasion when I noticed that she was high, she began asserting in a defensive tone that she was "sick of being bored."

Indeed, lacking regular employment, the drug using participants in my study appeared to lack a sense of meaning, purpose and order in daily life. As Wilson (1996) argues in *When Work Disappears:*

> Work is not simply a way to make a living and support one's family. It also constitutes a framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction because it imposes disciplines and regularities. Thus, in the absence of regular employment, a person lacks not only a place in which to work and the receipt of regular income but also a coherent organization of the present—that is, a system of concrete expectations and goals. Regular employment provides the anchor for the spatial and temporal aspects of daily life (p.73).

Wilson's important study found that joblessness brings about social isolation, lack of discipline, lack of role models and social resources, lack of goals, and low self-efficacy (see also Rubin 1994). Unemployed participants in my study often endured all of these consequences. In fact, my data suggest that rurality exacerbated the outcomes of unemployment that Wilson reports, given that opportunities for transportation and social stimulation are much more limited in rural areas relative to the inner city.

When I asked Linda, a local social worker who had worked with poor addicts for more than 15 years why drug abuse had escalated, she thus asserted: "Lack of things to do. Lack of employment. Lack of this. Lack of that. Especially the children."
Because geographic isolation and estrangement from social institutions generated profound feelings of boredom and anomie, many individuals who were rural and poor turned to intoxicants. As the author of an op-ed in the local paper noted about the county's high rate of tobacco use:

> Our state just got another couple of top finishes such as worst smoking state in the country. Where does Shale rate in state? Worst of course, so we're worst in the country…Why do we smoke like freight trains? I'll tell you why: "We don't have anything else to do."

In many ways, a cultural template guided individuals into alcohol, tobacco and drugs as an outlet for relieving boredom and experiencing leisure.[116] As Eller (1982) notes, both have functioned as a historical antidote to boredom and lack of stimulation in Central Appalachia. After modernization undermined agricultural self-sufficiency and replaced traditional

[116] A collective pattern of reliance on pain medication has exacerbated this tendency. Due to the region's lineage of dangerous work, which has historically resulted in severe injury for many mine and timber employees, and poor public health, a disproportionate number of individuals in the region have relied on pain medication in order to cope with chronic ailments. Research participants, ranging in occupation from physicians specializing in addiction medicine, to drug rehab counselors, to journalists who had covered the drug epidemic, to the county coroner, emphasized in their interviews that the widespread use of pain medication for the management of legitimate pain had, over time, normalized the consumption of powerful prescription narcotics. Many people viewed such medication as innocuous due to drug-related deviance being "defined down" (Moynihan 1993).

communities with coal camps, many individuals found themselves without much to do, let alone institutions to regulate the rhythms of daily life:

> During most of the year there was little do in the way of recreation. Almost every [town], however, had its saloon…when coal was king and wages were high, the boom-town saloon became the focal center of entertainment in the isolated mining towns (p.186-7).

Conventional institutions, like churches and schools, which might have filled the voids created by modernization, "came late to the mining districts" (p.187). Moreover, where they existed, they were "poor, understaffed, and scarcely adequate for the educational needs of rural mountaineers" (p.187). Thus, in a context of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment, alcohol and drug abuse arose as mechanisms for coping with boredom and anomie.

I found that drug use filled the socio-cultural voids of the rural poor, at least temporarily, in three ways. First, it integrated users into a "community of addicted bodies," which provided social support in a context of collapsing institutions (Bourgois 2010); second, it required the execution of a set of daily tasks oriented toward sating one's addiction, which imposed an organizational schema upon daily life that unemployment (and agricultural decline) had undermined (Wilson 1996; Rubin 1994); and third, it reduced the strain of structural socio-economic disadvantage by introducing possibilities for creativity, uncertainty and autonomy in everyday life through the development of one's ability to "hustle."

This clearly appeared to be the case for Amy and Lauren, the young couple that I shadowed for several months after first arriving in Shale County. Poor, unemployed and socially ostracized, both were addicted to prescription pills. On a typical day, the three of us spent countless hours driving from house to house so that they could scrounge up enough income in order to satisfy their daily need for cigarettes, pop and drugs. My fieldnotes are littered with commentary about the unhealthy lifestyle that these pursuits engendered and the hours of

daylight that they squandered. The way in which they organized their lives around the consumption of harmful substances struck my health and fitness-oriented sensibilities as insane.[117]

Yet, as I spent more and more time with them, I realized that the help that I provided in securing these items conferred important micro-level benefits that refracted off of the academically-oriented nature of my habitus. Similar to Lauren and Amy's dogged pursuit of pop and cigarettes, the top priority of subjects in Bourgois' (2010) study of homeless drug addicts involved obtaining and using heroin, often by any means necessary. Beyond providing an ephemeral fix, Bourgois argues that the quest for heroin provided "super-exploited" factions of the urban poor with a sense of purpose, creating a "community of addicted bodies" in a labor market that had no productive use for them (p. 241).

In Amy and Lauren's case, addiction had integrated them into a drug subculture, which acted as an ad hoc system of institutional support. While the subculture's primary function was to ensure uninterrupted access to the substances that they required, which worked to hedge against the threat of withdrawal, it also provided a buffer against the stigmatization that they faced as a function of their class standing. Although middle-class individuals implicitly knew that few jobs existed in Shale County, they tended to chastise the lumpen as lazy, unproductive and undeserving.[118] The drug community into which they were integrated, however, provided a partial buffer.[119]

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[117] Interviewees and those whom I encountered during fieldwork expressed similar incredulity at the lengths that local addicts went to in order to satisfy their fixes.

[118] As Newman (1999) argues, employment is the key mechanism that integrates individuals into US society; it functions as a dividing line that marks worthy citizens from those of a second class stature. Given that the moral order of the mountains emphasized self-reliance and hard work (Brown 1988), the cultural sanctions that one faced for accepting "handouts" and failing to secure work were particularly severe in Shale County.

[119] The lumpen were also stigmatized for their rural, Appalachian lineage. While urban and Northern stereotypes targeted all Appalachians, the poor bore their brunt. Not only did their life circumstances most closely approximate the offensive caricatures that circulated through popular media, but middle-class residents sometimes attempted to

The pursuit of drugs also imposed a sense of order on everyday life, which helped to hold the feelings of anomie that they experienced at bay. In the absence of work, addiction became the overall structuring principle in their lives. Like the homeless heroin addicts in Bourgois and Schonberg's (2009) study:

> Their needs and priorities [were] unambiguous: They must solve their most urgent physiological problem before worrying about anything else. Finding employment, acquiring food, obtaining shelter, appearing in court, applying for public assistance, or treating an abscess become inconsequential Society's opprobrium and personal public failures are the least of their worries (pp.80-1).

Addiction thus functioned to generate a sense of order by ensuring that users knew exactly what they needed to do upon waking each morning, filling the void that work fills for the employed.

The process of sating and supporting one's addiction, which usually involved "hustling," also allowed Lauren, Amy and other addicted individuals to exercise creativity, experience autonomy and achieve pride of accomplishment in a context of limited opportunity and boredom.[120] As Venkatesh (2002) explains, "doin' the hustle is both a 'survival strategy' and a means of crafting an identity;" it is not only about "adapting to material constraints" but about "reproduce[ing] a self-efficacious, meaningful existence" (p.93). Smilde (2007) has underscored

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manage their own stigma by redirecting it onto the lumpen class. Rather than contesting the stigmatizing discourses directed at "hillbillies," such individuals adopted them while working to exclude themselves from the category. This involved stating one's educational credentials, self-reliance and cultural sophistication while pointing to areas of the county where things were "worse" (i.e. the deep rural pockets of the county with the most concentrated poverty). The unemployment and hillbilly stigmas thus reinforced one another: The inability to find work was symptomatic of one's hillbilly identity. While such othering and stigmatization sometimes elicits anger and mobilization, as Portelli (2010) observes, Appalachians have historically experienced it as shame. The subculture that evolved around drug use thus helped to shelter the poor from the twin stigmas that they faced (while perhaps reinforcing if not reifying local class divisions).

[120] By hustling, I am referring to a mode of securing a living that involves informal or illicit activity within the underground economy. In Shale County, hustling took numerous forms, including selling one's food stamps for cash, feigning mental illness or disability in order to secure SSI/DI payments, selling drugs, collecting scrap metal that could redeemed for cash at a local facility, selling items obtained through ministries (e.g. clothing, toys, etc.) at yard sales, petty theft, performing various odd jobs (everything from day labor, to babysitting, to providing informal taxi service, to cultivating small patches of tobacco), and so on. While not always illegal, as the connotation suggests, hustling was stigmatized because it was viewed as an illegitimate means of achieving the normative goals within the regional moral order, which included exhibiting a strong work ethic and garnering financial self-sufficiency (Merton 1938).

this point as well, arguing that informal survival strategies not only ward off hardship but help to maintain a sense of agency in the face of destitution.

People like Lauren and Amy prided themselves on their ability to hustle as a means of cultivating self-efficacy and an empowered identity. Getting through daily life by way of shrewdness became part of an affirming, meaning-generating game. It allowed one to be deft and creative.[121] Lauren explicitly stated this one day. After several hours of driving through town, during which she had exchanged food stamps for cash from an elderly friend, exchanged pills for the promise of a ride to Rock City the next day and bartered some unneeded items for cigarettes, she complimented herself on her ability to "hustle," noting how she had procured everything that she wanted for the day.

Many members of Shale's lumpen class, as such, used drugs in order to achieve a sense of order and integration within the interstices of alienation and anomie. Hustling, similarly, presented an opportunity for achieving meaning and pride of accomplishment that their position within the social structure precluded. The activity contained all of the attributes of a fun game: An occasion to exert skill, a possibility for reward, and an uncertain outcome. Although both ran against the grain of the moral order that Brown's (1988) work depicted, they did not emerge in a vacuum; they developed ontogenetically from the forgotten socialization and from elements of structure.

7.7 The Social Origins of Drug Addiction

Numerous "expert" interviewees asserted that the development of Oxycontin was the decisive factor precipitating the region's problem with prescription pill addiction.[122] Because

[121] For accounts of similar activity within the context of boring, degrading and alienating work, see Hodson (2001), Burawoy (1979) and Roy (1959).

[122] Oxycontin, released by Perdue Pharma in the late 1990s, is a time-released pain medication that produces a consistent high over many hours. It can also be crushed and snorted in order to produce a more intense experience

Perdue Pharma engaged in illegal marketing practices, it was widely and inappropriately prescribed throughout Central Appalachia during the late 1990s and early 2000s.[123] Oxycontin and other prescription narcotics were imported into a culture in which the use of pain medication had been normalized. Mike, who had authored a highly influential series of newspaper columns on prescription pill abuse in Eastern Kentucky during the early 2000s, explained to me how, although most people would be "aghast" at the prospect of using heroin, many saw nothing wrong with consuming pills. Several other interviewees involved with anti-drug efforts echoed his observation.

Pain medications—albeit less addictive ones—had been prescribed and utilized throughout Central Appalachia for generations. Because mining and other dangerous manual occupations historically dominated the region's labor market, severe work-related injuries were common. Severe car accidents were also common due the area's winding, poorly maintained roads. Poverty, moreover, resulted in chronic physical conditions and "nerves." Shale's residents, as such, became heavily medicated. From an early age, many learned that it was not only safe but normal to consume powerful prescription medications.

Alicia, a physician and board certified addiction specialist, emphasized how the habit of drug use had ossified as a sensual coordinate within the habitus for many:

> It's a learned behavior. I have a lot of patients now who it's become a generational thing. ..It's not at all infrequent for young adults to tell me…that their parents first showed them how to snort a pain pill. It's become a way of life for a lot of people… People think that if it's prescribed, then somehow it's not as bad as using something else that's not.

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of intoxication. Relative to substances like marijuana and alcohol, it exposes users to a much higher risk of addiction.

[123] Perdue Pharma's drug reps encouraged doctors to prescribe Oxycontin for a variety of conditions and procedures for which it was not FDA approved—i.e. cases in which less potent medications were indicated. The company settled with the state of West Virginia in 2004, paying $10 million in damages.

Drug use, as Alicia attests, had become part of the social fabric. She states that drug use had "infiltrated our culture," "become a way of life," and that addiction had become "generational," with parents giving their children pain pills to consume. Abusing pain and anxiety medications, as such, formed an ostensibly "natural" outlet for coping with pain, boredom and alienation.

The widespread availability of such prescriptions—and their intractability to regulation—converged with their enculturation in order to ensure that they remained a ready option for navigating boredom. Three additional factors maintained the steady supply of narcotics in the region. The first involved the practice of "doctor shopping," which involved illicitly obtaining medication for diversion by visiting numerous doctors and using Medicaid to pay for the expenses Because the poor get prescriptions for very little, they could afford to sell them on the cheap. This increased the availability of pain pills while simultaneously reducing their price.

Second, and more saliently, the pharmaceutical industry continues to create and aggressively market ever more potent medications, which find an outlet in Central Appalachia's pain, poverty and social duress. Their marketing has coincided with a campaign by the American Medical Association that beseeches doctors to do more to treat pain. Although well-intentioned and appropriate in some circumstances, it has encouraged a higher incidence of prescription pain use in the mountains. As Tommy, a drug prevention activist who worked as the county coroner, told me:

> A few year ago, maybe a Darvocet or something would be about the most you could get from a physician, and that was if you really had a need…But now we're just prescribing at a rate much greater than we used to prescribe…The patient community is demanding those type of things simply because of the advertisements that we're seeing…And it's very lucrative [for the companies].

Beyond offering incentives for physicians to prescribe their medications, stimulating demand through advertising efforts, and lobbying state and federal government for lax regulation and

expansive indication, moreover, the power and tenacity of the industry's political influence has blocked regulatory efforts by law enforcement officers and anti-drug activists. Thus, just as the energy industry has exploited Central Appalachia for its natural resources, the pharmaceutical industry has begun to exploit the social suffering left in its wake.

Third, and last, longstanding problems in the local justice system often made drug enforcement efforts futile. Many people felt that local justice system suffered from a fundamental inability to adjudicate cases with fairness and impartiality. Rather than embracing universalist criteria (Parsons 1939), legal officials frequently relied on personal relations and allegiances in order to render important decisions (and sometimes bribes).[124] It was common for offenders to personally know the prosecutors and judges in their cases. It was also common for them to know their jailer and their arresting officers. If they did not, one of their family members likely did possess relevant network connections. A personal plea or strategic phone call, as such, had the capacity to mitigate their woes. As such, few legal procedures were standardized, rationalized or universalized within the local courts.

In an affidavit submitted for one of the county's corruption cases, for example, an FBI agent described how a young man approached the Democratic Election Commissioner for legal help. According to the document, the young man asked the commissioner if he could "haul votes" in return for assistance with a drug charge. The commissioner agreed, and subsequently

[124] Corruption within the Shale's courts has a long history. Both Billings and Blee (2000) and Arnett (1978) cited it as a major contributor to persistent poverty and political dysfunction. As Adam told me: "So go your courts, so goes the county." A number of media reports have commented on Shale's peculiar form of "mountain justice" as well. A newspaper story written in the 1890s, for example, began: "Justice is impossible in Shale County…and the courts have been abandoned...The court offices and the town are controlled by [the county's elite families] and justice is a mere mockery." A 1953 *Colliers Weekly* article, similarly, commenced with a story about a well-known local judge who allowed a prisoner to leave the jail in order to seek his own bond. The writer also noted how the courts play a pivotal role in Shale's community life: "The city dweller may be born and die without seeing a courtroom...It is a rare mountaineer who has never attended a trial, often as witness or participant...Their interest is great in any trial, even where they have no personal concern; going to court is a break in their lonely lives, as city people go to the movies."

approached the Circuit Judge in order to arrange for the young man's charges to be reduced. The judge consented, lowering his charge from trafficking marijuana to possession of marijuana. Wire-tapped telephone conversations, which were later admitted as evidence exhibits, showed how the Election Commissioner often boasted about his capacity to influence the outcomes of court cases.

Particularism in the courts operated as a double process. On the one hand, officials abused legal posts for their own ends, offering leniency and favors in return for political support. On the other, the public applied pressure for favors given their personal relations. When Tonya was arrested on a methamphetamine precursor charge, for example, she telephoned David from jail. According to David, she was "hysterical" and implored him to find a way to get her out. Because she had been arrested in Rock City, David told me that he had few options. "I don't have any influence down there," he lamented. He told me that if she had been charged locally, "it would be no problem" and that he already would have had the charges dropped. Nonetheless, he eventually managed to have her released on a surety bond. A local judge who attended his church knew some people in the Commonwealth Attorney's office in Rock City and helped to secure Tonya's release. These situations occurred with unfailing regularity. It seemed that David, Bruce and Max were always on the phone with local judges, prosecutors, and jailers in order to intervene on behalf of those who besot help. Although well-intentioned, it contributed to the particularism that dominated the local courts.

Particularism made it very difficult to prosecute drug-related crime. Repeat offenders avoided jail-time by capitalizing upon their network ties in order to secure leniency. If that did not work, they attempted payoffs. Beyond interfering with the administration of justice and entrenching the drug problem, this had the added effect of undermining respect for the rule of

law. Many people viewed court proceedings as a sham. A cynical and mocking attitude thus prevailed during them. This only served to heighten residents' sense of hopelessness and disorganization.

7.8 The Social Origins of Hustling

Hustling, which often involved petitioning everyone whom one encountered for money, rides and favors—especially those who possessed more resources than oneself—was firmly grounded in the "patriarchal moral economy" and clientelistic arrangements that had developed early in Shale's history. These traditions precipitated a cultural expectation that those with resources were beholden to assist those without them. This social dynamic has been observed in numerous other pre-capitalist economic configurations (see, for example, Scott 1977). An almost universal refrain among research participants was thus that "people help each other out around here." Although the county's socio-economic structure relegated most to the margins, it usually ensured that they did not fall below them. Many, in fact, cited this as their rationale for remaining in the county despite its limited opportunity structure. They asserted that they would be left to fend for themselves if they were to leave.

Middle-class residents, such as landlords, pastors, business owners, and politicians, were thus frequently approached for help—they were culturally expected to help, and from the standpoint of the poor, socially obligated to do so. Such help took a multitude of forms. While at The Lord's Table one day, for instance, a young girl, about four years old, opened the door and entered the building. Max said, "what can we help you with honey?" The shy little girl replied that her mom wanted someone to come talk to her. David then followed her outside into the parking lot. A few minutes later he returned to grab his cell phone. He made a call to a local gas station, and, greeting the attendant by name, told him that a woman and her daughter would

be coming by in a red car in a few minutes. He said that they needed $30 in gas, and to allow her to bill it to the church account. Such situations occurred nearly every day at The Lord's Table. Because David almost always did what he could in order to help those who sought him out, the community esteemed him as a "good man." Indeed, my willingness to provide rides, favors and small loans, it seemed, accounted for the many situations in which poor participants characterized me as a "good person."

Violations of the social insurance/mutual aid precept, however, were met with feelings of contempt and indignation. While at The Lord's Table one day, Bruce began a conversation with Tonya. For almost 30 minutes, Bruce attempted to persuade her to make her husband visit a local clinic in order to have an ailment from which he was suffering treated. Tonya was very resistant. In a condemnatory tone, she retorted that she did not like the staff and physicians at the clinic, as they had once refused her treatment when she could not cover the $20 co-payment: "They did me wrong when I needed help!" she exclaimed. Neither she nor Russell would ever return there, she asserted. As Tonya's response to the situation indicates, the guarantee of social insurance is paramount for the poor, given that so many people lack the capacity to pay for the exigencies of daily survival. It is thus rigidly enforced by labeling the giving as "good people" and those who neglect to give as "bad people."

I observed a similar phenomenon while Lauren and Amy were living above Dawn and I's apartment. My fieldnotes are littered with commentary regarding how Lauren and Amy praised Dawn as a wonderful, noble woman in one instant, only to demean her as "anti-social," "the devil," and "horrible" the next. At times they discussed the need to protect her from unscrupulous people in the area. At others they plotted to take advantage of her. Amy and

Lauren's estimation of Dawn, I discovered, turned on her willingness to "help them." When "help" was provided, they praised her. When it was withdrawn, they villainized her.[125]

The critical criteria by which poor individuals judged the moral integrity of middle-class residents, as such, involved their willingness to commit favors—especially loan money. This suggests that for the poor, social esteem continues to depend on abiding by codes of mutual aid, and social insurance. When Lauren and Amy were eventually evicted, their esteem toward Dawn permanently turned. The situation was not framed in terms of Dawn breaking a legal code, ripping them off, or taking advantage of them. Rather, the moral claim that underwrote their rage involved the helpless and hopeless position that the eviction put them in—i.e. the violation of the social insurance principle. Both expressed the sense that Dawn had a moral obligation to house them until they were able to find different accommodations.

Although the system of reciprocal relations and mutual aid that Billings and Blee (2000), Brown (1988) and Schwarzweller et. al (1971) described persisted for the poor, however, it had less pull on middle-class residents in the present. Class inequality had deepened since the days of subsistence farming. The poor had become poorer and more dependent on economic aid, while the middle-class had become more independent and less dependent on aid, if they were dependent upon in at all. While the poor—out of necessity—had come to fully embrace the norms of reciprocity, aid and social insurance in order to make ends meet, the middle-class had come to exist at a tangent to them. Their experience of the present thus involved a sense of being continuously and brazenly entreated for help while receiving little if anything in return. While

[125] Whether casting her as "wonderful" or the "devil," Lauren and Amy not only attested to Dawn's moral integrity but to their own. Dawn's willingness to readily loan money and offer favors without trepidation reflected their good standing and trust-worthiness. It implied, in other words, that they themselves abided by the norms of reciprocity. When favors were denied, it was thus experienced not only as unjust deprivation—a reneging on the social insurance norm—but as an insult.

history provided a justification for the poor to entreat the middle-class for favors, social change, the middle-class felt, had absolved them of these obligations. This would eventually result in symbolic violence.

7.9 Cultural Understandings of Hustling and Addiction

Although not always proud of the strategies that they developed for economic survival and cultivating existential meaning, Shale's lumpen class tended to understand informal, illegal and ethically dubious behavior (in relation to normative standards) as justified and necessary in the face of limited opportunity and material deprivation. As Larry, a counselor at a local drug rehabilitation facility told me: "I've had several students who've come through here who are like…'I know when I get out of here, I won't be able to find a job. If I go back to cooking meth, I can make all the money I want.'" Mike, the long-term newspaper reporter, told me a story that captured the same observation:

> I spent a lot of time with a marijuana grower in [an adjacent county]…The overriding perception I got from him about why he was doing it was…that this is a hard place to live. There aren't a lot of jobs. The education system's been starved for money. So… they didn't prepare me to become a doctor or a lawyer or a dentist…so what I have to do to feed my family is okay…Now whether that same justification applies to pills, I don't know.

Indeed, my fieldwork suggested that the same justification did hold for those involved in hustling pills. While driving home from a swimming hole with Lauren and Amy one day, Lauren, sensing that I was annoyed, began to explain why she did what she did. I had grown impatient with her because I was under the impression that we were simply going swimming when we had left. On the way there—as well as on the way back—however, she had conned me into making numerous stops, during which she moved her contraband. The trip took several hours longer than I anticipated and ended with me having driven all over the county.

Lauren began her exculpatory speech by insisting that she only sold pills to long-term addicts, and that she never sold them to children. Although admitting that she often felt "low" about it, she accounted for her pill dealing by asserting that there were no jobs in Shale County. Apart from selling drugs and hustling, she exclaimed, she had no way to make ends meet. Amy chimed in, noting how one "has to know somebody" in order to obtain a job. Lauren nodded vigorously in agreement. Without knowing somebody, she explained, getting a job was impossible. As with the marijuana grower with whom Mike had spent time, they thus felt that it was okay to do what they had to do in order to survive.

Lauren and Amy's commentary was of course incisive—an example of what Paul Willis (1977) calls a "penetration."[126] Shale's stagnant economy could not support its population, as structural employment had plagued the county for years. The few civil service jobs that existed were earmarked as patronage and thus off limits to those lacking political connections. The residual private sector jobs, which mostly consisted of low-paying service work, required social capital. Other case studies of rural poverty have reached the same conclusion. As Duncan (2000) concluded in her study of another distressed community in Central Appalachia: "Everyone my colleagues and I interviewed…insisted that you get work according to whom you know" (p.30). Few possessed the connections needed for securing even low-wage work.

The unequal distribution of status within the county made matters worse for the lumpen. As Brown's (1988) ethnography reveals, Shale's pattern of social organization resembled a caste system in the sense that residents were typically defined by the reputations of their families. Given the tight-knit nature of the county, parents sometimes transmitted unfavorable reputations

[126] Willis' "penetration" concept refers to distinctly subaltern/working class cultural understandings (as opposed to hegemonic understandings) that: a) Represent life from the standpoint of the subordinate as opposed to the dominant; b) challenge the morality and fairness of the dominant group's rule; and c) present an alternative vision—no matter how vague—for how the world could and should be organized.

to their children, which resulted in almost permanent disadvantage on the local labor market. Clancy, for instance, told me that he found it difficult to hire local workers for the school that he directed. Residents often telephoned him in order to advise him not to hire certain applicants due to their poor reputations.

In this sense, the reputational baggage that some carried—in a somewhat paradoxical fashion—put them at a disadvantage for securing jobs relative to outsiders. Many lumpen individuals possessed "negative social capital." They knew many people, but because they remained in poor standing among them, their social contacts resulted in blocked opportunity. Other studies of rural labor markets have reached similar conclusions (Duncan 1992, 2000; Fitchen 1981; Hinsdale, Lewis and Waller 1995). "Spatial mismatch" complicated the process of securing work even further (Wilson 2012).[127] Lack of transportation not only resulted in social alienation and suffocating boredom, but incredible difficulty in terms of looking for work, maintaining jobs and keeping appointments.

When I arrived at Bruce's house one night in order to watch a University of Kentucky basketball game, for example, he was in a heated conversation with Russell—Tonya's husband—on the telephone. Russell was panicking because he had to be to work the following morning at 7:00am but did not have a ride (David typically took him to work but was out of town). After ten minutes of haggling, Bruce told Russell that he would drive him to work, but that if he did so, Tonya would have to find someone else to take her to her dialysis appointment (Bruce typically drove her to these appointments but lacked the means to do both). The situation resulted in a plethora of phone calls and considerable rigmarole to resolve.

[127] Spatial mismatch refers to the way in which economic restructuring imposes increasing geographical distance between the poor and employment opportunities. Although most scholars use the concept in order to describe the migration of unskilled jobs from the inner city to suburban areas, I use it here to describe the consolidation of work in county seats and "urban growth areas" in lieu of "deep rural" neighborhoods.

Instances like these, which occurred almost every day, put pressure not only on those without transportation, but on those who provided it. Bruce, in this case, made a nearly 50 mile trip the following morning in order to transport Russell four miles to work. Such gestures were necessary, because unlike urban areas, Shale County possessed no public transportation system and no taxis. Individuals who lacked family and friends with vehicles were forced to rely on an underfunded and under-resourced transportation program administered by the county's Community Action Agency. The program, however, only provided complimentary transportation to those commuting to jobs and medical appointments (and had restrictions even for these clients). Those who sought to find work (let alone simply "go into town" and run errands) were required to pay hefty fees. As a result, rides formed a scarce commodity.

Economic underdevelopment, clientelism, negative social capital, and spatial mismatch thus conspired to render the process of securing work magnificently difficult. Lauren in many ways was speaking the bitter truth when she told me that she had no choice but to sell pills.[128] When I ran her account by Mike, he corroborated it:

> That statement by your neighbors that you have to know somebody to get a job—that's pervasive in the mountains. It's related to that old spoils system where…there's only a few jobs, and this little clique that got elected to fiscal court…or the school board controls the jobs—and so I gotta do what they say: Buy votes for them, sell my vote to them, whatever, in order to have a shot at that job.

Although some middle-class residents like Bill bemoaned the structural inopportunity that the lumped faced, however, most exhibited little empathy in relation to the lumpen's hustling and drug dealing. Rather than attributing unemployment and its corollary problems to structural inequality, they viewed them as symptoms of a county plagued by welfare dependence and a lack of a work ethic.

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[128] That written, like the young men "on the run" from the law whom Goffman (2009) studied, she and other dealers/hustlers sometimes invoked the economic inopportunity that they faced in order to save face, i.e. account for situations in which their own unscrupulous behavior had resulted in economic woe.

The lumpen, in this narrative, were the architects of their own problems. During a concerned citizens meeting in 2004, for instance, the former school superintendent—who was eventually convicted of spearheading a criminal enterprise—decried the "culture of addiction" that plagued the county. While giving a speech, he impugned:

> We have so many people on government assistance, so many people that don't have to devote any time or energy to making a living. It's easy to sit around stoned when you can make a living just by going to the mailbox. The Federal Government is the biggest enabler of drug addiction I've ever seen.

The County 911 Director, who was also eventually convicted of corruption charged, weighed in as well, asserting "most of the drug dealers arrested here are on some kind of check. They have the time to do all this." While the lumpen understood addiction and hustling as solutions to structural problems, the middle-class, as such, typically viewed them as their cause.

As opposed to attacking those were primarily responsible for the supply of prescription narcotics in the area, such as the pharmaceutical industry, corrupt doctors and unscrupulous pharmacists, middle-class residents typically directed their anger toward users themselves. This stemmed from the fact that poor addicts constituted the most visible front of the drug problem. Bryant O'Neil, a former police officer who directed a regional anti-narcotics organization, told me that although they represented the bottom rung of the drug hierarchy, small-time dealers received the most public scrutiny:

> The one the public sees is what we call "the runner," the drug addict who goes from house to house all day selling one to two pills to his buddies to keep them high, and he gets one to keep him high. You know, that's the ones that everybody's complaining about.

Thus, rather than viewing the lumpen as individuals who had become ensnared in the interstices of sweeping socio-economic change, the middle-class viewed them as instantiations of moral, cultural and generational decline. Two factors belied this symbolic violence. First, processes of modernization had aggravated local class antagonisms. The class divisions that

Brown (1988) described during Shale's subsistence farming epoch were based largely on unequal distributions of honor and status. Since almost all of the county's residents made ends meet by way of farming, social and economic differentiation was minimal. Little more than social reputation, farm productivity and household upkeep, that is to say, distinguished kinship units. In the context of modernization, however, income, wealth, educational attainment, and occupational prestige had entered the mix. As they transitioned into professional jobs, middle and high class residents became more affluent, more independent and more socially differentiated.

Low class individuals, on the other hand, became poorer, more economically dependent and more isolated. While increasing educational attainment and geographic mobility had integrated middle and high class residents into the "outside world," the horizons of the poor remained limited (indeed, I spoke to a number of individuals who had never left the area). Because the processes of lumpenization had mandated hustling and addiction as an economic and cultural survival strategy, moreover, they came to obdurately mark the lumpen them as separate class. Thus, if Brown's work described classes that were different in degree, the advent of lumpenization had engendered a local class structure marked by differences in kind.

Second, because the poor had become poorer and more socially and culturally differentiated, elite and middle-class residents took greater measures to distance themselves from them. Their efforts to achieve cultural separation resulted not just from a desire to achieve status locally, but from a desire to manage to the stigma associated with their Appalachian identity. Affluent residents, in other words, often coped with their sensitivity to "hillbilly" stereotypes by excluding themselves from the category. Educational attainment, broader horizons and professional identity encouraged them to stake claim to "mainstream" culture. Doing so required

that they participate in the very processes of Orientalism that had historically "othered" them, i.e. impugning the morality, work ethic and social value of poor hillbillies. This represented a tactic of defection, and the lumpen made an ideal target for the transference.

7.10 Addiction and Hustling: Magical Solutions to Stigma and Inequality

Addiction ultimately exacerbated the problems that the lumpen confronted. According to a study by the Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center, overdose related deaths increased 296 percent in the state of Kentucky between 2000 and 2010, rising from 6 per 100,000 residents to 22.9 per 100,000 residents—the third highest rate in the nation. These rates were dramatically higher in Eastern Kentucky (Estep 2012).[129] According to Shale's coroner, 43 people died of drug-related causes in 2011—making the overdose rate almost 198 deaths per 100,000 residents. Addiction, as these figures reveal, forged a path to self-destruction.[130]

Although the pursuit of drugs provided temporary order, community, purpose, and solace, in the end addiction represented a "magical solution" to entrenched structural problems (Clarke et. al 1975; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1977). Like the subcultural solutions to lumpenization that scholars from the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies analyzed, drugs not only exacerbated structural disadvantage but deepened feelings of hopelessness and exasperation. Bruce, for example, told me that his addiction eventual resulted in "spiritual bondage." The dogged pursuit of drugs, he repined, came to govern every facet of his existence, eventually costing him his marriage and family.

As one' addiction worsened, to put Bruce's words in different terms, the pursuit of drugs ossified as the center point of one' habitus and came to define her lifeworld. Beyond organizing

[129] Coroners often classify drug overdoses as instances of death due to natural causes in order to avoid generating additional stress among families of the deceased. This means that these figures likely, in fact, underestimates.
[130] Those most likely to die, according to the report, were white men between 35 and 44 years old who were abusing opioids (e.g. OxyContin, Lortab and Roxicet). Benzodiazepines, such as Valium and Xanax, also played a significant role in deaths and hospitalizations.

their everyday life around the pursuit of pills, pop and cigarettes, for example, nearly all of Lauren and Amy's efforts to intersubjectively connect with me involved attempts to establish shared experiences with drug use and addiction. From the moment I met Lauren, she began interrogating me about drug use, urging me to confess that I had experimented with and/or enjoyed drugs. Conversations about others typically revolved around their known or suspected drug use. Indeed, nearly every line of discussion that I had maintained with Amy and Lauren activated drug-related thoughts. When I mentioned gardening on one occasion, Lauren inquired if I grew pot. Whenever I mentioned my university, she made references to stereotypes regarding experimentation with drugs on college campuses. When I discussed how I enjoyed hiking, the discussion turned to growing pot in the mountain groves. As Bruce asserted, addiction governed the totality of one's life, defining her way of being in the world.

In the extended excerpt below, he reminisces about the endpoint of his addiction, i.e. his own experience of "spiritual bondage." He describes how he obtained drugs, the measures that he took in order ward off withdrawal, and how unsatisfied he came to feel:

> PL: Can you tell me about the experience when you were most addicted....just in terms of how you got by on a day to day basis, and how your life was organized?
>
> B: You do whatever you've got to, man. Okay, you get up in the morning, you go the methadone clinic...you don't care if it's sub-zero...When you didn't have your methadone, you laid in the bed and you shook. And you were sick, very. And the only thing that motivated you to get out of bed was to go back and get more methadone. And my wife, who was younger than me—I was wore out after 30 some years of this stuff [laughs]—she would do anything...She liked women, so she had sex with women to get Xanax and pills and methadone. I never did that stuff, man [laughs]. You know, I had a little—I had principles, like a drug addict has principles [shakes his head].
>
> ...The daily life of a drug addict. You go to the clinic. You get your methadone, and you go home. You get a pack of cigarettes...and you sit there, and while the buzz is kicking in, you know, you watch TV or whatever, nod off. If you think about it, you eat...About a year after, the methadone no longer gets you high. It just gets you normal, because of the tolerance level that's built up. Then you supplement. You take Xanax or Klonopin, which means then you've got to go doctor shopping, lying to doctors...Every time it got

> real hard, I'd have to check into [a rehab facility], where they would detox me with methadone...I'd stay there a few days and then come back out, same junk…
>
> And I don't know, time just goes by. You spend your whole life [high]...I don't know, Phil. My wife, she was coming and going, and I was living in the hood. Life was hell. Can I say the word: Life was shit. I had no furniture. It was all burnt up with holes of cigarettes burnt in it, and dirt everywhere and cobwebs…
>
> I was totally in bondage...I no longer controlled drugs. They controlled me. They were my God. I woke up in the morning with them on my mind, and I went to bed at night with them on my mind. My whole world was consumed with "how can I get high?" I could not even talk to you today, Philip…unless I had taken the right amount and the correct pills to do so. You understand that?...The drugs—they controlled everything I did. Everything. And the bad thing about being in bondage is this: It never gets better. It only gets more devious, and devious, and depraved.

During the few months prior to his religious reawakening, Bruce told me that he hit "rock bottom," that his addiction had become so severe that he sought death:

> After 34 years, Phil, I gave up. I wanted to die. I didn't want to live no more. So I laid down, too coward to kill myself, to die. I just wanted it all to go away like Tonya told me. That scared me the other day. She said, "Bruce, the reason I want to lay down and go to sleep is I just want it all to go away." See, that's what I did.

The temporary purpose and order that addiction offered, as Bruce's commentary describes, resulted in worsening disorder, purposelessness and pain in the long run.

Moreover, while drugs offered membership into a "community of addicted bodies," the community did not provide the same level of social support that normative institutions offered. While discussing the addiction ministries that he oversaw at his church, David explained how the county's "drug subculture" revolved around "getting high" and little else. As soon as one's "friends" interfered with that goal, they ceased to be friends he claimed. My discussions and interactions with Lauren, Amy, Cindy, and others revealed this as a relatively accurate assessment (cf. Bourgois and Schonberg 2011).

The bonds that Lauren, Amy, Cindy, and other addicted participants formed were very unstable, consisting of ever-shifting alliances. Their addiction-oriented friendships developed

quickly and dissolved even more quickly. Often, this was because they consisted of "disposable ties:" Strangers who were befriended and used for their resources but who were "burned" when the resources ran dry (Desmond 2012). Friendship, as such, was often based on little more than survival and access to favors—that is to say, instrumentality—rather than interpersonal concern.[131] Addicts forsook and even betrayed friends who came between them and an opportunity for material betterment. While Amy and Lauren befriended our neighbors (who were also addicted to prescription pills) in order facilitate access to drugs for example, they eventually double-crossed them in order to ensure their own survival. Wanting to move into their garage apartment, which carried a cheaper rent, they pressured Dawn to evict them by propagating rumors about their drug use, irresponsibility and immorality.[132] Ethnographers studying economic survival in the inner city ghetto have developed similar findings. As Venkatesh (2002) observed: "Even if it means taking advantage of friends or kin, no opportunity is missed to procure a good or service or to supplement income and symbolic capital" (p.93).

Addiction thus sounded the death knell for social capital in the area. Because addicts had to rely on cunning and deceit in order to secure their fixes (i.e. hustling), the social structure of addiction eroded community trust. As Tommy told me: "A lot of them become very efficient con artists, because let's face it, they're living for their next fix. Everything else is basically

[131] Amy and Lauren, for instance, consistently praised Dawn as a wonderful, noble woman when granted favors but quickly reversed their positive appraisals when requests were not granted. During those moments, they castigated Dawn as "anti-social," "the devil," etc. Cindy's feelings toward the "disposable ties" in her life conformed to this pattern as well. At one moment Edith, her landlord and a source of occasional patronage, was characterized "saint." At others she was despised and lambasted with vitriol.

[132] The situation reminded me of Eli Wiesel's (1960) novel *Night,* in which Wiesel reflects on his experiences at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in the Holocaust. During his internment, Wiesel eventually abandoned his own father in order ensure more food for himself and hence preserve his own survival. Drug users' community of addicted bodies also hampered the efforts of those seeking to "get clean." A number of interviewees expressed to me how one of the primary challenges that individuals undergoing rehab faced involved removing themselves from people and environments that place them at risk for relapse.

immaterial to them in that state, and they will go to extreme, dramatic means to get that…next fix." In the vignette below, he provides an example:

> I personally know emergency room situations where drug addicted individuals would be out of medications, they'd call an ambulance, when the ambulance takes them to the emergency room, they get to the emergency room, they found out which physician is on call in the emergency room. Is it the one that will prescribe, or is the one that won't give them any medicines? If it's the one that won't give them any medicines, they'll jump out of the ambulance and leave. You know, so I mean…what you have is, we have our emergency rooms and our ambulance services that are just basically used as taxis and supply [laughs] for drug addiction.

Countless residents expressed incredulity at the lengths that addicts went to in order to nourish their addictions.[133] Beyond generating bewilderment, these feats resulted in tremendous community distrust.

7.11 The Community-Level Consequences of Addiction: The Erosion of Civil Society

Because duplicity governed so many socio-economic transactions within the community—and because a generalized level of distrust already enveloped the region due to its long history of outside exploitation and local corruption—many people exhibited suspicion and wariness about the intentions of others, especially those whom they did not personally know. Take the following situation that I encountered during fieldwork. While volunteering at The Lord's Table one day, a relatively well-dressed woman in her mid-30s entered the building. In a somewhat frantic voice, she asked to speak with David. After emerging from one of the back

[133] A story that Bruce told me illustrates how adept addicts become at feeding their addictions. As he stated earlier, the lengths that addicted individuals will go to in order to satisfy their cravings only get "more devious...and depraved." While in one of the best treatment facilities in the country, Brice discusses the strategy that he devised for staying high: "I had learned from an inmate that you could break open Benzedrex, these little inhalers, and take those things. They taste like crap, by the way. Don't ever try it. Pure crap, but also pure ephedrine, speed. And I'd be up for days, man, bouncing around the walls at that Mayo Clinic psych unit over there, and then I would sit there, and I knew a nurse on midnights that I was flirting with, got in good with, and she'd give me sleeping pills, man. So I'd take sleeping pills, maybe a little methadone, whatever, and then go crash for days." The combination of stimulants, depressants and psychotroics that Bruce ingested while in treatment eventually caused those at the clinic to diagnose him—most likely incorrectly—with a mental illness: "They said, he's manic depressive. Highs, lows, it's, you know, reflective of that, if you look in the DSM, Diagnostic Psych—you know, the mental diagnosis of manic depression, I fit the mold perfect, so they pinned that on me."

rooms, he approached her and asked who she was. She responded that he had helped her several years before after her house had burned down, and that she was in need of help again. She then explained how she had a sick grandmother who had recently returned to Valley Town after living with a different relative in Cincinnati. The woman asserted that while she would never "put her out," her landlord had told her that no additional residents could live in the house, because it would violate the terms of the lease. She stated that she could not neither risk nor afford getting kicked out of the house and thus needed to find alternate accommodations for her grandmother.

After providing some additional detail, she asked David if the grandmother could live in The Lord's Table until they could arrange for a more permanent solution to the problem. She asserted that she wanted her to be in a safe location, whispering that she feared that someone might harm her in order to access her money. David asked where the money was and who controlled it. The woman claimed that her grandmother controlled her own money. After some further discussion, David told the woman that he would need to consult with the other people who were living in church shelter before making a decision.

Later on in the day, after the woman had left, David raised the issue with Tonya, Stacey (another young woman living in The Lord's Table) and Bruce. After explaining the situation, he inquired if anyone knew the woman. Tonya replied that she had seen her around McDonald's when she used to work there. She reported that she knew the woman's boyfriend, whom she described, with tremendous disdain, as a "drug addict, drug dealing, lying snitch—slash, all of the above!" Tonya then explained how she had worked with the boyfriend at McDonald's, and how he had been on the run from the law during that period. When the police eventually came to McDonald's in order arrest him, he was released the next day. Tonya purported that he had

snitched on someone in order to gain his release, which elicited further consternation (snitching is a grievous wrong within the local moral order).[134]

After Tonya concluded her report, the others who were present expressed their doubts about the woman's story. Bruce, Stacey and Tonya hypothesized that woman lacked the will to take care of her grandmother and wanted to co-opt her social security payments and prescription medications. They asserted that putting her in The Lord's Table would be a convenient way to get her off of their hands while simultaneously taking control of her resources. David agreed. He decided to tell the woman that they would house the grandmother only if she provided some of her social security payments to the church and gave them control over her medications. He thought that this would quickly dampen her desire to house the woman in The Lord's Table and would thus serve as an ad hoc answer of "no" to the request. The vignette reveals the skepticism and cynicism that had come to undergird community life. While I took the woman's story at face value, the others—wearied by years of hustling and drug-induced duplicity—reflexively doubted the woman's narrative.

Drug abuse and addiction not only wounded the willingness to assist strangers, but also undermined trust among established social ties. When I called Bruce one Sunday morning in order to make plans for attending a baptism that his son-in-law was performing that afternoon, for example, he immediately embarked on a tirade. He told me that he was furious at Cindy, who had apparently barged in on his lifeline meeting that morning. Bruce stated that she had shown up during the middle of the meeting claiming that she was dying, and that she had "interrupted the whole meeting."

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[134] Later in the conversation, after Tonya had left, Bruce mentioned that he had attempted to get Tonya, Pat and some of the others to abandon their participation in the culture of silence that the sanctions against snitching originated from. Bruce stated that Pat continued to harbor anger toward his snitch, and stated his desire to cause the person physical harm. Paula stated that in reality snitching probably saved the lives of most people who wound up arrested or in drug court.

When I met him later that afternoon, Bruce resumed his complaints about Cindy as soon as I entered his car. He groused about how Cindy wanted him and David to speak to the judge adjudicating her case in order to modify her sentence. Bruce state that Cindy claimed to be sick—so sick that she was "dying" (she apparently told him that she had "holes in her bowels"). Bruce stated that she was "full of crap," however, and added that she had cited something like six different ailments from which she had allegedly been "dying" from during the past two weeks. He and his wife, Minnie, who was also riding with us, each agreed that one could not distinguish fact from fiction with Cindy, because her stories vacillated so wildly. This was a very common sentiment. Indeed, by the end of my first trip to the county, I had become incredibly suspicious of nearly everything that Lauren and Amy told me, given their tendency to employ duplicity in order to extract favors.

Skepticisms and distrust weighed most heavily when it became directed toward family members. A story that Adam told me spoke to proliferating hustling had undermined even the intimate bonds of the primary group:

> One night [at a concerned persons meeting] we had a new lady in the group—a mother—and we were just talking about how parents would do anything for their children…This lady spoke up, and she said: "I think I would give my life for my children to be free of drugs…but…I believe that if I laid down in the road and let a mac truck…take my life to save my children, they would run over to me…and say, 'hey mom, have you got twenty before you die?'" And she said "isn't that really, really tragic that you would have such a low opinion of what your children would do?"… We just heard this repeated over and over through our groups.

Because addicted individuals had to mislead their sources of sustenance, including their families, in order to secure favors, they were distrusted at the same time that they received help. At the aggregate level, this functioned to undermine trust, cooperation and goodwill across the county, straining familial and neighborly bonds.

Distrust afflicted not only personal relationships but also filtered into local institutions. Social workers, religious charity organizations and healthcare personnel all exhibited suspicion toward the poor's motives given the exigencies of hustling. Dane, the CFO for Valley Town's Hospital, for example, spoke at length to me about how substance abuse and drug seeking behavior had affected local medical care. He asserted that addiction had negatively impacted the relationships that physicians had with their patients:

> One of the problems is that now our providers are scared. A patient comes to them, and the physician doesn't have a lot of history of the patient, and the patient is saying, look, I'm on these drugs. The physician automatically reacts with, I don't want to deal with you, because the state's going to be coming down on me. And we have to deal with that, especially in the hospital here.

Alicia expressed the same fear. She described how working as a provider in an area with high rates of addiction was "very frustrating," because "it's very hard to tell who is legitimate and who is not legitimate. People lie to you, and so you almost feel like a police officer." Despite taking numerous precautions, including utilizing the state's prescription monitoring system and drug testing patients, she lamented; "I definitely have been fooled. I have been fooled many times."[135]

Addiction-related distrust and fear were problematic, because the county had little social capital to lose. Independent of the drug situation, fear and distrust had already been fueled by the county's lineage of corruption and the associated violence. While driving to Max's house one day for breakfast, for example, I told David that I was considering interviewing the mayor and some of the other public office holders for my project. David bellowed a sarcastic laugh and told me that the mayor was corrupt and not to bother speaking with him. He also told me to be careful in terms of asking questions about corruption in the town, noting that one could get killed

[135] This exhibits how people like Bryant sometimes unfairly blamed doctors for unscrupulously prescribing addictive medication to patients. Alicia and Dan present the other side of the story.

for saying the wrong things in front of the county's leadership. Most people in town, he asserted, kept their lips sealed with regard to local malfeasance due to the fear of retaliation.

Only the day before, coincidentally, a businessman named Dominique, who was attempting to open a liquor store in Valley Town, attempted to convince me—by way of a long and angry tirade—that David himself was corrupt.[136] Dominique told me that the mayor had given tax-exempt status to a restaurant that David's church owned in return for political support, and that David was "cashing in on it."[137] Several other people whom I had met, in turn, told me to be wary of Dominique, whom they suspected of dealing drugs. As these competing accusations illustrate, corruption, suspicion of "outsiders" and epidemic drug abuse had conspired to produce widespread rumor, fear and gossip in the county. As Alexander told me: "Don't believe anybody about anything."

Whether in relation to individuals, families or institutions, skepticism and distrust prevailed in relation to community relationships. Residents were quick to impute shady motives to other people. After an incident in which a pharmacist was unable to process a prescription that Amy needed using her Medicaid card, for example, she and Lauren—with no hesitation—accused him of fraud. For the next several days, they speculated profusely about his ostensible scheme to double-bill them. Because corruption dominated local politics, and because hustling dominated social life, such assumptions served to protected residents from exploitation.

While perhaps protecting them from harm, institutionalized skepticism crippled the county's civil society. Not only did Shale Countians suffer from atomization, transportation obstacles, and a lack of public space in which to reinforce social ties, but they increasingly

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[136] I had met Dominque in a shopping plaza a few weeks after arriving in Valley Town while waiting to meet David for coffee. He was canvassing local businesses in order to rally opposition to a restaurant tax that the city council would be voting on the following week.

[137] The claim was spurious, as David neither owned the restaurant in question nor supported the mayor. David in fact despised the mayor given his efforts to pass an alcohol ordinance that he opposed.

distrusted one another. This tendency had exacerbated local social problems throughout history (Billings and Blee 2000) and continued to do so in present day. During his interview, Benjamin, for example, lamented how:

> People around here have forgot what love thy neighbor means. They have took that commandment—that's one of the Ten Commandments, love thy neighbor…They threw that commandment out the window. People around here do not care about their neighbors no more.

Because factionalism had historically divided churches (Billings and Blee 200), even religious elements of the county had trouble coming together. Rather than mobilizing around similarities, Shale's Christian population had divided around theological and class differences—a phenomenon copiously documented in my fieldnotes and reflected in the fact that nearly 130 congregations existed in a county of only 20,000 residents. As Sam repined: "We [are] more about church splits than churches coming together."

Additionally, because the poor rarely had the opportunity to "go into town," and because few possessed steady access to telephones and internet service, many relied on the haphazard rendezvouses that occurred when they secured rides in order to exchange news, information and shore up social networks.[138] Whenever I drove Lauren, Amy and Cindy around, they eagerly sought out others in order to catch up on news—oftentimes requesting me to stop when acquaintances were spotted walking down the road, hanging out outside of gas stations, etc. Relying on these "communication interlocks" in order to keep up with local news converged with other characteristics of Shale's social structure in a way that established "gossip" as the defining feature of the county's civil society.[139] Passing along out-of-date information during

[138] Although many impoverished individuals possessed phones, they often utilized pre-paid plans. When their minutes expired, it was not uncommon for long periods of time to elapse before they were refilled. Many, such as Cindy, dreaded these situations, as one's phone served as a lifeline to the outside world.

[139] Indeed, Shale's poor have historically maintained their social networks in this fashion. In an 1899 special report on Shale County that appeared in *The New York Times*, the special correspondent noted how: "News gets about the back country largely by word of mouth. The few daily newspapers taken reach the educated persons who try to keep

fortuitous run-ins represented the equivalent of playing telephone. Occurrences and events underwent numerous mutations as they were communicated among different parties.[140]

The epidemic nature of local corruption, however, played the most significant role in generating gossip. For one, the pro-forma nature of public meetings left citizens to speculate about the activities of officeholders, who made real decisions behind closed doors. Moreover, while all knew that corruption occurred in local government, it was nearly impossible to verify specific allegations about local power brokers due to the information control and legitimation tactics that they employed. In one week's paper, for example, a candidate for magistrate accused the incumbent of paving private drives in order to buy votes. In the next week's paper, the incumbent dismissed the allegations as "false rumors." Similarly, when the owners of a subsidized housing complex criticized the former mayor's intent to pursue a housing grant (she claimed it was unnecessary, as exisiting housing was under-utilized), he and other local elites blasted her as money hungry in the following week's paper. Whenever citizens brought criticisms against officeholders, in short, officeholders used their connections with the local media in order to debunk them.

Civil discourse thus manifested as a host of unverifiable claims about local power brokers, which were nearly impossible to substantiate. When combined with the presence of corruption, community distrust, leeriness toward outsiders, legal particularism, isolation, and reliance on communication interlocks for news, this gave rise to a particular type of civil society: One marked by a dearth of impartial media outlets, limited public space, a crippled public

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up with events as they happen. The illiterate get the news as they pick it up." Much as it was on the cusp of the 20th Century, the poor continue to pick up news by way of the sporadic rendezvouses that transpired when they went into town.

[140] The prevalence of drug abuse and crime exacerbated this situation. Because the gossip exchanged during communication interlocks often involved arrests or drug-fueled dramas, those transmitting information narrated stories in a way that presented their actions in the most favorable light, which often created muddy and conflicting accounts of events.

sphere, and information circulating via gossip. The medium through which political discussion arose, and its embellished and unverifiable nature, ultimately benefitted elites, who could plausibly dismiss allegations against them as gossip, rumors and lies. Because distrust prevailed, citizens had limited capacity for collective action vis-à-vis their grievances in any case.

7.12 The Contemporary Class Structure

While Brown's work offered a revealing glimpse into the nature of social life in Shale County on the cusp of modernization, his depiction of class relations was somewhat flat. Because Brown studied under Parsons, he conceptualized class in a valuational way, taking stock of patterns of association among social units and the relative honor that distinctive kinships were assigned in the area. His conception of class is thus emic rather etic, typological rather than relational and unidimensional rather than dynamic. In short, it captures what Weber calls "status" while missing other factors implicated in stratification.

While those in the area continue to associate and assign social value on a similar basis to Brown's descriptions from the 1940s, I found that stratification was more complicated in current day. Shale Countians were stratified on the basis of class, status and party (Weber 1968). The "political elite" whom Billings and Blee (2000) and Arnett (1978) analyzed had remained stable. The county's elites, in most cases, had descended from the salt baron families and held government office, civic posts or worked as attorneys, judges, attorneys, or liasons to the coal industry. While elites sometimes lacked "status" due to the county's lineage of corruption, they possessed land and inherited wealth, wielded political influence via voluntary associations and elected positions in the community, and controlled—and profited from—the economic patronage associated with those positions.

Below "political elites" within the local stratification system rested a small professional-managerial class. Possessing education, human capital and reputation, these individuals

possessed a privileged market position within the county, had forged careers as attorneys, educators, pastors of large congregations, and so on. While they did not directly control patronage resources (e.g. contracts and jobs associated with local government), they often exhibited influence in community affairs by participating in voluntary associations (e.g. the "concerned citizens group," anti-drug groups, the chamber of commerce, and various boards). While this grouping possessed fewer economic resources and wielded less political power, it enjoyed higher status than the elites.

Below the professional-manager class rested the working class. This class consisted of blue collar workers who had achieved economic stability through waged work, typically in coal-mining, construction, the railroads, or something similar. While they did not routinely participate in political affairs and thus lacked political power, they possessed tremendous status due to the way in which their occupations reflected the region's moral order, which emphasized the value of masculinity and hard work. Because these individuals were integrated into stable families that often participated in the community's religious life, their status achieved even greater weight.

Finally, at the bottom of the stratification, lied the lumpen class. The defining features of this class involved unemployment, familial strife and addiction. Lacking human, social and economic capital, those in the lumpen class maintained an almost impossible relationship to the labor market. They were born into disadvantage and had poor chances for securing even unskilled work. As a result, they were at a higher risk for relying on government assistance, participating in the informal economy and succumbing to addiction. Many also had criminal records and/or precarious legal statuses. These factors created not just economic hardship but extreme stigmatization and symbolic violence.

Because the class system that Brown described had emerged primarily from differences in farming productivity, length of residence and family reputation, a relatively common culture—the patriarchal moral economy—undergirded life for more or less all. The diversification that took place after modernization, however, had had rendered the county's culture a contradictory mash up. While tradition continued to resonate for most people—especially older residents who had become part of the professional-managerial class—it mapped on only poorly—if at all—to the culture understandings that had emerged from the growing lumpen class.

Broader socio-economic forces, namely Appalachia's colonial and hence unequal relation to the metropolis, further confused the situation by creating insider/outsider distinctions and a tension between what Marx calls town and county, and what Desmond (2009) calls "country boys" and "city boys." Stratification, in short, was multi-dimensional, and interests were interwoven and contradictory. Rather than representing a hierarchy of distinctive interests groups, class relations in Shale took the form of a Venn diagram.

Residents, especially the lumpen poor, were classed through a double process. On the one hand, they were assumed to be part of a retrograde, white working class by the outside world due to their rurality. On the other, they were classed and stigmatized through local processes, facing the derogatory remarks and stereotypes of the local professional class, who lamented their alleged drug abuse, poor parenting skills, vulgar behavior, welfare dependence, and lack of work ethic. Shale's poor thus faced a double stigma: Outsiders living in urban areas reflexively classified them as "poor hillbillies." Affluent members of the community, often in an attempt to exclude themselves from those classifications, then conveyed lumpen members of the community as lazy, addicted, uneducated, and so on.

Class, status and party thus all conspired to inflict immiseration, often reinforcing one another. Given the county's geographical isolation, low-functioning institutions and economic underdevelopment, few residents occupied a favorable position on the labor market. Even those with professional qualifications, such as attorneys and physicians, earned less income on average than those living in other parts the country. Class relations thus resulted in widespread poverty and material deprivation. Party, that is to say relation to elites who controlled local government, also stratified the county. One's network connections to locate elites determined access to job opportunities, job training programs, cash and food assistance programs, legal aid, and municipal services like road work.

Status relations, however, which engendered symbolic inequalities, perhaps played the key role in producing social duress. While class and political inequalities generated material hardships, status inequality resulted in feelings of social exclusion. Low status was deepened, moreover, by the middle and elite class' efforts to improve their own symbolic standing. Stephanie Lawler (2005) argues that the construction of a middle-class identity depends on the ability to successfully disparage the working class' practices of everyday life. "Middle-classness," she observes, depends on the ability to exclude oneself from the categories of the white working class.[141] Working class people are thus typically described in terms of a "lack," i.e. they lack taste, knowledge, self-control, and propriety, neither saying nor doing what is right and proper.

The emphasis on what the working class lacks, Lawler (2005) argues, is accompanied by assertions of decline. The story goes that

[141] Orr (2003) makes this point as well: "The term carries with it implications of the worst sort of conservative, retrogressive values, including bad food, bad taste and dreadful gender assumptions. You don't have to be comfortably off to be middle-class, you just need to subscribe to progressive attitudes (as the respectable working classes so recently did). Likewise, you don't have to be poor to be working class, just common.

> there was once a respectable working class which…[has been] consigned to a workless and workshy underclass which lacks taste…In such narratives, the decline of heavy industry—often seen as emblematic of working-class existence—is linked with a decline in the worth of the working class (p.434).

Indeed, Lawyer's account maps almost seamlessly onto the narrative that Shale's middle-classes had adopted to describe their own county. When I asked pointed questions regarding how the county had changed over time, middle-class participants responded with a narrative of decline. The narrative bespoke of population loss, a fading work ethic, the weakening of community bonds and neighborly reciprocity, the loss of respect for parents and elders, the erosion of discipline and respect among children, and the disintegration of the family structure, often due to negligent parenting.[142] Most participants viewed these changes as indicative of a moral and cultural regression that coincided with generational change. When pushed on the sources of the decline, participants typically cited drug abuse and "welfare dependence," which, they claimed, began with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. These developments were believed to have corrupted the strong work ethic that hitherto undergirded community life, precipitating a host of undesirable consequences, which had converged to splinter the community.

In the last analysis, however, such commentary represented symbolic violence. The feelings of decline that participants articulated stemmed not from an abstract "cultural decline," out-of-control drug abuse or "government handouts," but rather from the social changes that had lumpenized the former farmers. The rapid changes that the county experienced had transformed it from an economically independent agricultural community to a post-industrialized on that relied largely on federal assistance funding and civil service jobs for economic support while

[142] Participants cited the loss of community businesses and amenities, widespread welfare dependence and manipulation, epidemic drug abuse, the growing phenomenon of grandparents raising children (due to parental loss of custody), high rates of school absenteeism and poor academic achievement among youth, and people "not visiting like they use to" as symptoms of the so-called decline.

remaining infrastructurally/institutionally underdeveloped and retaining a "traditional culture" (Schwarzeller et. al 1971).

Cultural residues from the not so distant agricultural past co-existed and often clashed with current socio-economic realities. Specifically, this involved the cultural strategies associated with the county's "patriarchal moral economy" (Billings and Blee 2000), which had evolved from small-scale subsistence farming, butting against the cultural strategies associated post-industrialization, which was marked by a "moral economy of sharing and mutual betrayal" complimented by other informal economic activity in the context of agricultural decline, industrial decline, state retrenchment, and widespread addiction (Bourgois 2010: 4).

This situation generated confusion and dissatisfaction among residents, accounting in many instances for the aforementioned feelings of "decline." While subsistence farming arrangements had produced a univocal class system with a relatively monolithic culture during the reign of subsistence agriculture, socio-economic transition had produced entropy. Beyond population loss, it eliminated the possibility of self-subsistence, atomized communities and, in a word, engendered a sense of hopelessness.

7.13 Poverty, Hustling, Addiction, Childhood, and Symbolic Violence

Addiction—and the various forms of hustling that it entailed—marked the point at which intimate violence intersected with the structural violence of political and economic inequality. It is where structure and agency converged, and where history resurfaced as present-day phenomena. A historical legacy of limited economic opportunity, institutional underdevelopment, work-related pain, poor public health, state neglect, and pharmaceutical lobbying structured the "choice" to take pills, the "choice" to do whatever was necessary to obtain them, and the "choice" to hustle to survive.

These "choices" resulted in patterns of self-destructive, anti-social behavior—a lifestyle that Howell (1973) calls "hard living." The "ingredients of hard living" include: A preoccupation with the problems and dramas of daily life; an unstable work history; marital instability; rootlessness, in the sense that hard livers frequently move among abodes; toughness, in the sense that hard livers are more profane, crass and prone to violence relative to the settled; and a propensity to abuse substances.[143] Hard living results in numerous forms of intimate violence—domestic abuse, self-destructive drug abuse, parental neglect, and emotional turmoil. Children often bear the brunt of it.

Fitchen (1981) has documented the ways in which structural violence passes into intimate violence among children, and how the choices made within impossible circumstances wage their own forms of devastation upon the poor She argues that "the experiences of childhood, first in the homes of a rural poverty-stricken neighborhood and later in the 'outside world,' have long-range effects on an individual's psychological adjustment and the quality of his social interaction, and thus on the continuing cycle of poverty" (p.198). Her case study of rural poverty examined how unresolved emotional and social problems inherited from growing up in an impoverished, insecure and unstable rural household shaped life after childhood. Likewise, many young people in Shale County suffered as a result of growing up within a context of deprivation, disorganization and hardship. An almost universal lament within the county, many children came of age in broken families, were reared by grandparents when their parents lost custody of them, faced food insecurity, lacked leisure opportunities,, endured long commute times to school, and received subpar educations.

[143] In his study of working class families in Washington D.C, Howell developed a typology to distinguish the "hard living" of the poor from the so-called "settled living" of the middle-class.

The epidemic nature of addiction, which resulted from the convergence of cultural attempts to cope with unfavorable socio-economic circumstances and the imposition of structural forces like dangerous work and pharmaceutical lobbying, exacerbated the situation several fold. The story that Bruce told me about growing up in a poor, addicted and abusive household illustrates the sad and violent circumstances that many rural poor youth endure:

> My father was an addict and an alcoholic. Very early on in my life, I remember my dad when he mixed alcohol and pills. He was very abusive, not to me, but to my mother, and it certainly left scars in my mind and on my heart, that are still, to this day, not healed. I remember being very scared as a child. You may know…the insecurity of not knowing whether your dad is going to come home drunk or not and beat your mother or somehow harm her…[it] caused a lot of fear and anxiety as a child in my life. Around the age of eight, my father came in extremely high and drunk, and he literally beat the crap out of my mother. She required 72 stitches, and at that point, I remember he lost his mind…Most addicts are alcoholics, blaming everybody else for what they do, and he went over to this man's house and pulled out an arsenal of weapons and shot up his house. He didn't kill anybody. Thank, God. At that point, they put him in jail.

Bruce describes some of the personal traumas that his father's prescription pill and alcohol abuse caused him as a child. He describes "being very scared" and discusses how the "insecurity of not knowing whether your dad is going to come home drunk or not and beat your mother or somehow harm her...was really stressful and caused a lot of fear and anxiety as a child in my life." The experience of growing up in such a household, as a whole, "left scars in [his] mind and on [his] heart that is still, to this day, not healed." These scars—and the learned patterns of behavior that his father inculcated—would come to shape his own addictive in the future.

After his father was released from jail, Bruce and his siblings moved into his grandmother's house for eight months so that his father could "sober up." Although he got his addictive behavior under a degree of control, he soon began using again, and life again deteriorated: "It was a nightmare. The best way I can describe it is like a dark cloud was over our house…I lived in fear, constant fear." Soon, Bruce's father

> hit rock bottom from his drinking, and drugging, and lifestyle…He had no way to support us, so he joined the Army…We were very poor at the time, and it was always a façade. We had to put on the airs that everything was fine at our house…that we were special. We weren't. The house was crumbling, physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, it was crumbling. My mother probably suffered a nervous breakdown. I do remember the Christmas of '68, we had no tree, no food. We ate oatmeal every day, and no presents…I had one pair of pants.

Life reached its lowest point when Bruce was 11 years-old. The suffering that prevailed in his household during this time dealt him a blow from which he would never fully recover:

> I went to school one day. My dad was gone. He was in basic training…The cops came—the state police—and they pulled me out of school…They took me to a neighbor's house…I saw my older brother when I got out of that police car…and I looked in my brother's eyes—he was 14—and I knew something wasn't right here. He had been crying. And the [neighbor]…said, "should I tell him?" And my brother said, "yes." I'll never forget it. She said, help me carry this tricycle, Bruce, around back. And as I was helping her carry this thing, she said, "your mother is never coming back. Your mother pulled up on a railroad track, turned her truck off, and she's dead." Profound effect on me. At 11 years old, man, I hated God. I hated everybody…Nothing really got better.

After Bruce's mother took her life, he and his siblings temporarily stayed with an aunt and uncle, whom Bruce described as "very good people." Wanting to preserve the family, however, their father soon retook custody of them. "We had to go, forced. I did not want to. I had no choice," Bruce said. "It seems like I never had a choice as a child."

Bruce's life, which had always been marked by fear, neglect, insecurity, and pain, soon reached another low point. His step-mother, whom his father had married while in the army, also attempted suicide. Bruce told me that his inability to share his experiences with others perhaps weighed upon him the most heavily during this time. The violence, uncertainty, and gnawing sense of anxiety he experienced demanded release, but he lacked an outlet:

> When you live in an [addicted] household where you literally...You cannot tell [anyone]. …So all this horror that's going on, you just have to live with it, and then when you're told that you have to put on some kind of façade…and make people believe that everything is okay, it's like a raging tornado inside of you, an emotional, mental wreck, that's just encased with a body, and you're ready to explode, but you can't, because if you do, you're going to get yourself beat, you know?

Because the manifestations of intimate violence that participants like Bruce experienced appear to result from "choice" and unscrupulous behavior—in this case, bad parenting—they form a fixed point of symbolic violence—that is to say, a point at which the effects of economic and political inequality become "mis-recognized" as the "natural" result of poor choices, lack of ability and lack of integrity (Bourdieu 2000).

The way in which poverty and hard living became embodied and inscribed onto the skin of its bearers contributed to this perception. Hard living—the lifestyle structured by macro political-economic inequality—was inscribed onto the bodies of the poor. When I first met Lauren, she directed my attention to her left wrist, on which there were four healing cuts. They were reddened, deep and unsightly. Lauren proceeded to ensure me that she was neither "crazy" nor "suicidal," and gave an ambiguous explanation for their presence. Several weeks later, however, she confessed their true source.

Lauren told me that a friend had visited her and Amy's apartment. The friend, during a drug-fueled romp, had stolen $485 from one of the drawers in their dresser—all of the money that they had had to get through the month. They "tore the place apart" before realizing that the money had been stolen. In a fit of frustration and desperation, Lauren told me that she cut herself in order to release the tension that she was feeling. In a shameful tone, she explained how she felt embarrassed about the cuts, implying that they marked her as someone who suffered from mental instability. Her body bore many such scars.

Lauren thus harbored insecurity about her appearance. She made numerous self-effacing remarks, often asserting that once she straightened out her life, her appearance would improve. The first time that I hung out with them in their apartment, she showed me pictures of her and

Amy when they were several years younger. While neither was beautiful, both were attractive. They were thinner, wore cleaner clothes, looked younger, and had more healthy looking skin.

Although young adults, both looked older than they were, and both had pallid skin riddled with scars that evidenced years of poverty and "hard living." Lauren, only 34, had lost all of her teeth. Amy was missing a front tooth and had scar tissue than ran along the length of her jawline and neck due to a severe staph infection that had nearly killed her several years earlier. According to Lauren, when she finally visited a hospital "she died twice" while being treated.

Poverty, stress, sickness, and substance abuse, in short, had become woven into the fabric of their physical constitution. They bore the marks of structural violence like scarlet letters, and they frequently made suggestive comments about how those marks set them apart from people like me. On one occasion, the three of us had ventured to the grocery store in order to purchase a watermelon. Lauren waited outside while Amy and I went into the store to pick it out. While standing in line, I asked Amy if she wanted me to buy it or at least help pay for it. She responded that it was not necessary, as she had $10 on her WIC card that was allotted for fruits and vegetables.

When it was our turn at the register, the cashier, a young and attractive blonde woman in her late teens, told Amy to swipe her card. Upon swiping it, the cashier told Amy that there was a problem—that either she did not have enough money on her card, or that WIC did not cover watermelons. She spoke very loudly throughout the ordeal, such that all the people waiting in line behind us—a middle-aged man, an older man, and a middle-aged woman—grew impatient and indignant. She eventually interrupted the proximate cashier—announcing to an even larger

audience that Amy had attempted to purchase a watermelon with WIC, and that it would not work. The latter cashier did not know what to do, and recommended that she page the manager.

The whole ordeal felt impossibly long. During it, the two cashiers continued to talk very loudly and unabashedly about WIC, speculating as to why it would not work. Amy held her head down throughout the proceedings, her face red with embarrassment. She felt self-conscious about holding up the line, the way in which the two cashiers were broadcasting the fact that she relied on government assistance, and the fact that she could not afford to pay the $3.62 charge on her own. Eventually the manager arrived. He did not know why her WIC card would not work either. Finally I volunteered to pay for the watermelon, as Amy scuttled outside in shame.

After I paid, I went outside to meet Amy and Lauren. Amy, who was smiling by this point, exclaimed: "That was so embarrassing!" The two continued to discuss how unreliable their WIC cards were, and how stultifying situations such as the one that had just occurred could be. Later that evening, I asked Lauren some follow-up questions about the reliability of WIC and other assistance programs. After denigrating both, she recalled a recent incident during which her SNAP card had denied the charges associated with several gallons of milk that she had brought to the register. The cashier, in condescending fashion, forced her to reshelf the items. Casting her eyes down, she murmured: "Amy's still too pretty for that." With her toothless smile and pock-marked body, Lauren acknowledged that she had fully descended to lumpen status. It was no longer a cultural category; it had ossified as an embodied way of being in the world.

As Howell's "hard living" concept connotes, subsisting as a poor addict in Shale County was not easy. Although the middle-classes construed the rural poor as "masters of manipulation" who would do anything to avoid work and responsibility while labeling their drug abuse as an

"escape" and "easy way out," my field observations conveyed a starkly different story. Hustling, ran against the grain of laziness. The legal risk, emotional stress, time, effort, and sacrificing of one's character and reputation that it entailed required an incredible amount of work. Making ends meet through normative employment arrangements would have been easier, more secure, less stressful and far more rewarding than was hustling. If they had the opportunity, Lauren, Amy, Cindy and others would almost have certainly taken work. The notion that their income and resources were easily acquired and "unearned" was thus absurd.

Amy, Lauren and Cindy's lifestyle required an exceptional amount of effort, offered a minimal pay out, and put one at continuous risk for experiencing the pangs of withdrawal, eviction and social ostracization. So much so that it got under the skin. "Welfare queen" stereotypes thus represented little more than manifestations of symbolic violence. If the poor did everything that they could in order to avoid work, it was because work did everything that it could to avoid them.

7.14 Barriers to Mobility: Disentangling the Symbolic Violence of Lumpenization

While at The Lord's Table on a hot and sunny day in July, I became party to a long and erudite theological discussion between David, Max and a man named Dave. Dave was a hip-looking seminary student who was about my age and had conducted missionary work in Shale County several years earlier. Although he had since returned to his home in Chicago, he happened to be passing through the area and stopped in to visit David and Max. They were smitten when he arrived and exchanged greetings with delight. After catching up on small talk, Dave stated that he was working on a paper for a seminary course and hoped to ask them a few questions before he left. They excitedly ushered him into the meeting room in order to talk,

The conversation lasted for more than an hour and never ceased to engage Max and David. Among other topics, the three questioned whether contemporary "self-indulgence" in the

Protestant Church was heretical in the same way that indulgences within in the Catholic Church had been; discussed the ostensible contradiction between a God who was both wrathful and loving; pondered the nature of heaven and salvation; ruminated about whether Adam and Eve were real or metaphorical figures; and attempted to clarify the relationship of Jesus to God during the crucifixion. As a secular Catholic-Jewish hybrid who had not attended church in years, I had trouble participating in the conversation and simply listened.

Toward the end of the conversation, as Max was giving his interpretation of a bible verse, Cindy burst into the room in loud and dramatic fashion, bringing the discussion to an abrupt end. Cindy had come to thank David for a variety of favors that he had provided that week. After David told her not to worry about them, she began attesting to how far she had come and how well she was doing. She described how not long ago, when she was "messed up on pills" and working as a prostitute in order to get them, she was laying in her bed wishing that she would die. On the night that Jesus saved her, she stated that she felt Him take her breath away. Grasping herself around the neck, she explained that she felt Him grip her from the throat. "I don't think he took away your breath," David responded, "I think he breathed life into you." Cindy agreed and began discussing how she had gained weight, and how she looked and felt much better than she did before.

Both David and Max agreed that she looked much better than when she had arrived a few weeks ago. She thanked them for the compliments and asserted that she was praying all the time and studying her bible every day. As she spoke, she went to the back of the room and picked up a revised copy of the bible from a large stack that David maintained. Asserting that it was much easier to read, and that it "broke things down" for her, she asked David if she could exchange her "black bible" for it. "Take it," David replied. As she began to make her way toward the door,

she told David and Max that she had made arrangements to begin working toward her GED, and that when she finished she was going to try to become a social worker: "It's what I always wanted to do," she exclaimed.

After offering words of encouragement, David and Max asked if she had everything that she needed to begin her coursework. At this point, Cindy's thoughts became somewhat unhinged, as she began to cycle through all the barriers that stood between her and getting her life "straightened out." First, she recalled how her guidance counselor had told her that she would need a computer in order to complete her coursework. She lamented how she did not have one and how she could not afford one. She then began to discuss how she needed to get a job in order to earn money, given that the small apartment she was living in was not sufficient for her two children, whom had recently been returned to her from state custody. She also noted how she was unable to wash their clothes—let alone her own—because she did not have a washer and dryer there. Finally, she repined about how she would need to get a car in order to find a job, and about how she did not know anyone who was hiring. "Do you know anyone, David?"

At this point, David and Max told her that she needed to take one step at a time—that she needed to worry about getting enrolled in GED classes, completing her GED classes, and that she could worry about the logistics of obtaining a car and job thereafter. Cindy nodded, thanked them profusely and began to proceed out the door. The "drug court" van that she relied on for transportation had arrived. Max summoned her back, however, and told her that the church was her family now. He led us through a brief prayer, in which he thanked God for seeing her through her transformation, and for the work that He was doing through her. Cindy skipped back

toward the door after we said "amen," proclaiming that she could "maybe contribute to the church" after she got her life fully "straightened out."

This story is notable for two reasons. First, it speaks to the way in which poverty overwhelms individuals with too many problems at the same time. A 28 year-old woman who sought to get her life "back on track," Cindy simultaneously faced myriad challenges. Although she sought to finish her GED, she lacked the required supplies. Moreover, she lived in a cramped apartment with two small children that had to be cared for while she attempted to complete her schooling. Unemployed in a context of economic deprivation, she had no job with which to provide for them, let alone accumulate savings. She did not even have a car with which to seek work and get to and from her classes. On top of everything else, she was attempting to ward off an addiction to prescription pills as well as several chronic health problems while confronting these dilemmas. To make a long story short, she faced harrowing odds with regard to completing her degree.

As Fitchen (1981) states:

> One result of the confusing and rapidly changing panorama of problems [that the rural poor face] is emotional exhaustion and/or behavioral paralysis. The overwhelmed person is rendered nearly incapable of initiating action: Where to start? What to do? (p.192).

Faced with several urgent problems simultaneously, the impoverished rural individual finds settling and solving one problem at a time difficult if not impossible.

The overwhelming prospect of facing too many problems at once resulted in other complications for Shale's lumpen and working poor individuals. For many, the stress and cognitive overload that they faced contributed to poor health.[144] This held especially for those with addiction in their families, i.e. most of the families in Shale County. The medical expenses

[144] An emerging literature in medical sociology has begun to examine how stress and social suffering get under the skin, i.e. the negative physiological consequences that result from living in the context of socio-economic distress.

associated with illness and poor health further strained budgets and exacerbated the poor's already unfavorable market position. As Alicia, the local physician and addiction specialist whom I interviewed told me:

> There are so many patients that I have that when they come in to see me, the thing that's foremost on their mind—or the thing that they think about more than anything—is their child who is on drugs. They don't know if they're going to, you know, get that phone call that they've been found dead somewhere, or that they've stolen everything that they have…Or else they're raising grandchildren that they're not able to raise. When those kinds of things are going on in your family, it's hard for them to check their blood sugar twice a day, you know, make sure that they plan their meals so that they have healthy meals…It's just not what they think about the most, and so it really affects their healthcare.

As Alicia's commentary suggests, because poverty and addiction-related stress consume so much of the poor's daily thought, they often lose the capacity to engage in future-oriented behavior, such as consistently taking medication and enacting preventative healthcare.

Several recent studies within the disciplines of psychology and behavioral economics have begun to elaborate the nature of this phenomenon (e.g. Bertrand, Mullainathan and Shafir 2004; Mani et. al 2013; Vohs 2013). They argue that the human brain possesses a finite amount of mental "bandwidth," such that within a given day, one's brain is capable of carrying out only a finite amount of complex thought. Higher-level cognition, they have found, is zero-sum; mental acumen devoted to one area of life comes at the expense of acumen devoted to others.

As Cindy's commentary with regard to finishing her GED illuminates, the innumerous problems that the poor face on a daily basis consume a tremendous amount of their mental bandwidth. Tasks that require little thought among the economically secure—such as accessing a computer, getting from place to place, washing one's clothes, and paying one's bills—require incalculable mental power among the rural poor—not to mention time and effort. In an article

summarizing much of the recent behavioral economics literature vis-à-vis the poor's deficit of bandwidth, Brooks (2011) notes how:

> Poorer people have to think hard about a million things that affluent people don't. They have to make complicated trade-offs when buying a carton of milk: If I buy milk, I can't afford orange juice. They have to decide which utility not to pay. These questions impose enormous cognitive demands. The brain has limited capacities. If you increase demands on one sort of question, it performs less well on other sorts of questions (p.A23).

While adherents of the culture of poverty thesis attribute poverty to the "present" as opposed to "future" time-orientation of the poor, this nascent research suggests that the "cognitive demands" of poverty are what result in poor choices—that because the poor deplete mental bandwidth on problems that the economically secure do not face, they make artificially poor decisions in other areas of their life. For example, in a recent article in *Science,* Mani et. al (2013) found that inducing thoughts about finances reduced cognitive function among the poor but not among the well-off. Given the dearth of resource in their possession and the complexities that making ends meet required, thinking about budgeting and finance depleted a greater quantity of their "mental reserves."

In a different experiment that was part of the same study, they found that the cognitive performance of small-scale farmers diminished before harvest—when the farmers were poor—relative to after harvest, when the farmers possessed more money. They argue that neither time, nutrition, work effort, nor stress explain the results. Rather, they conclude that "poverty itself reduces cognitive capacity…because poverty-related concerns consume mental resources, leaving less for other tasks" (p.976). Vohs (2013), in another recent *Science* piece, makes the same argument, concluding that "being poor taps out one's mental reserves" (p.969). Cindy's academic underachievement during youth, and some of the ostensibly poor choices that she made

as an adult, in other words, derived in part from the cognitive dysfunction that poverty had imparted.

Outside commentators and middle class residents of the county, however, often "mis-recognized" the poor choices that struggling individuals such as Cindy made as the products of unintelligence, lack of restraint and poor parenting within their families. The structural deprivation of bandwidth and biographical availability resulted in other forms of mis-recognition as well—especially with regard to civic and political participation. The poor's material and biographical inability to participate in civic and political life—and the limited mental bandwidth that they possessed for even considering political and community affairs—was often chalked up to "apathy" and "selfishness."

Although I do not have hard quantitative data, my fieldwork gave me the firm sense that the poor—especially the lumpen—were less civically involved than Shale's middle-class. I observed that they attended public meetings with less frequency, turned out less frequently for elections, attended fewer religious services, and volunteered less often than middle-class individuals.[145] Often lacking cars—let alone the money to fuel them—how could they participate? Brown (1988), Arnett (1978) and Billings and Blee's work (2000), although covering different historical periods, reached the same conclusion. Contemporary studies conducted in similar counties cultivated the same findings as well. As Fitchen (1981) writes: "The rural poor play little part in the panorama of voluntary organizations of the larger community…[they] rarely belong to or attend groups connected with school or church, or any

[145] Many did watch broadcasts of public meetings on the local television station, however. Additionally, when the actions of local government resulted in direct, negative consequences for the poor, they did participate. These situations typically occurred when the fiscal court neglected to maintain local roads (i.e. when remote roads required gravel or needed to be resurfaced) and when school board took consolidation measures (i.e. attempted to close under-attended schools, re-routed buses, etc.).

other formal groups" (p.177). Even when they do participate, their participation tends to be more sporadic and short-lived (Fitchen 1981).

Apart from non-participation, I also observed that individuals like Lauren, Amy, Cindy, and the drug court workers thought about politics with less frequency. Although rarely a day passed that I did not discuss politics and current events with middle-class research participants, nary an occasion occurred when I discussed politics and community events—with the exception the county's lack of jobs and widespread drug addiction—with lumpen individuals. Most of the time, they lacked the bandwidth with which to consider that which did not bear upon daily survival. Dawn, the 71 year-old missionary with whom I shared my apartment for several months—who herself struggled financially—thus told me:

> I don't think that the average person thinks too strongly about [local politics and corruption]. I would say the average person, their mind is filled with how to get up and have a job, and bring home enough money to pay your bills and raise their children and see the needs are met. That's the high priority. I think a lot of this other stuff is just out there. It's not important…Let the politicians fight it out, and let the ones who are striving for notoriety or wealth, let them at it. We're all about trying to live a life that gives our children the best we can possibly give them…That would probably be the cry, as you asked earlier, of this [community]—let the world know that there are a lot of people here that are just decent people, who want to get up and do their thing and raise their children, and go to church and be decent, you know…go to ball games and do what normal people do.

As Dawn asserts, local problems and politics are off the radar for many of Shale's struggling families and individuals. Instead, they are overwhelmed with the exigencies of daily survival (especially in the case of addiction, which establishes the avoidance of withdrawal as an additional layer of "survival"). Because politics cannot contribute to survival unless one is well positioned vis-à-vis the local establishment, it is placed on the backburner: It is "just out there."

In short, the lumpen—and some of the working poor—neither had the time nor means to participate in the community's civic and political life nor saw the payoff. For example, after

driving Amy and Lauren around one day in order to complete some errands one day, Lauren asked if I wanted to go swimming in a nearby lake the next day. I told her I did not know if I would be able to, as I was going to visit The Lord's Table the following morning in order to inquire about volunteering. She looked back at me with a blank and incredulous stair. After a few seconds passed, she exclaimed "volunteering never got me nowhere," and then proposed that we mow her sister's yard for $100 instead. The idea of volunteering one's time in lieu of pursuing immediate needs seemed foreign to her. As with others who live within the gray zone—the exigencies of survival filtered every perception, interaction and choice. The middle-class, however, viewed this structurally imposed self-interest as willful selfishness—as a symptom of cultural deficiency as opposed to socio-economic constraint.

PART FOUR: THE POLITICAL EPISTEMICS OF THE RURAL POOR

CHAPTER 8

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF LOCAL POLITICS:

PERSONALISM, PATRONAGE AND COERCION

8.1 Introduction

A defining feature of Shale County's history is the way in which community elites have used local government to establish a corrupt and nepotistic spoils system, divert state and federal monies into their own pockets, use municipal services—whether gravel or access to city water—as political bargaining chips, extort kickbacks from contractors and developers, protect drug trafficking, and, generally speaking, organize ordinary people's interests and concerns out of the political process. The abuse of local institutions is not secret and has not persisted due to ignorance. Rather, through sustained control of the county's economic wealth and political institutions, local elites have achieved a situation in which they can more or less operate as they wish with impunity.

This chapter will examines not only how such sustained corruption deepens economic hardship and political cynicism, but why it endures for long periods of time in spite of popular discontent and protest. First it foremost, it will analyze how local elites produce consent among subordinates—a process that I will show is bound up with the county's traditions of personalism and patronage relations. Second, it will consider how elite community actors maintain patterns of inequality by restricting access to the political process, and how those restrictions generate the false appearances of quiescence and passivity in the face of glaring abuse when citizens withhold

consent. In order to inform these questions, I will analyze the dynamics of the political process in Shale County as well as a number of local efforts to enact political change. Much of the chapter will focus on the dynamics of local elections as well as the efforts of several local pastors who took a stand against politically protected drug trafficking and election fraud within the county beginning in 2004.

Ultimately, I will argue that elites suppress citizen activism and consolidate political power through five interrelated processes:

- First, by personalizing politics
- Second, by using the considerable resources at their disposal in order to mobilize bias in their favor
- Third, by conveying criticisms directed against corruption and pollution as attacks on miners, mountaineers and traditional Appalachian ways of life
- Fourth, by using violence and/or threats of violence in order to precipitate an environment of fear
- And fifth, by using more subtle means of violence, or what Charles Tilly calls clandestine kicks and invisible elbows, which I will elaborate further into the paper.

Despite these obstacles to mobilization, I want to be clear that activist citizens put up a great deal of resistance to prevailing arrangements in Shale County—even though the costs were often steep. This flies in the face of the stereotypes that Steven Fisher (1993) discusses in his excellent anthology, *Fighting Back in Appalachia*, which convey Appalachians as quiescent people complicit in their own oppression. The issue, however, is not so much whether communities resist—because they unequivocally do—but how effectively their resistance plays out in the face of entrenched networks of power.

8.2 "It's not about Policy; It's about Personalities:" Personalism and Patronage in Local Politics

Personalism formed the fabric of local politics. Personalism functioned as the primary criterion on which voters evaluated local candidates for office, and correspondingly, it constituted one of the primary tactics that local politicians used in order to legitimate themselves.

Rather than evaluating candidates based on their professional qualifications and/or ideological homology,[146] voters made decisions based on their personal knowledge of and connection to candidates.

As Mike, the long-time Eastern Kentucky newspaper reporter, told me:

> Things are more personal in Appalachia. We want to know who you are and who you father was. And that's a reason to vote for you. Not are you are a good educator or do you have a plan for moving our county forward…It's slowly changing, but you still see this pervasive sense of it out there, and the closer to the people the worse it is…I mean people here wouldn't want to know does my magistrate candidate have a plan for economic development or any of those things…It's not driven by policy. It's driven by: "Do I know them? Do I know who their family is…Do I like that person? Do I trust that person? Is he like me?...Did my father like him"…There is this sense that politics is personal. It's not about policy; it's about personalities.

As Mike notes, politics in Shale County was rarely driven by policy considerations; it was instead driven by personal relationships and personalities—especially for low-level offices like magistrate. People did not necessarily prioritize a candidate's plan for economic development or their capacity to for forge social progress in the county. They prioritized whether they and their families (particularly their fathers) knew and approved of them. More than anything, they pursued candidates whom they believed would "help them."

The personalism of mountain politics was strongly reflected in the ads that candidates disseminated while running for office. Campaign ads rarely if ever provided one's platform or political party. Instead, they took the form of biographies, elaborating who one was, who one

[146] I must note that there was little, if any, variation in terms of the political ideologies of most local candidates. Local offices were rarely approached as vehicles for implementing a political platform; rather, they were designated as opportunities for officeholders to help people, help themselves and administer basic services. Those in the region thus often used the somewhat pejorative term "gravel judge" in order to refer to the judge executives of fiscal courts (the chief executive post within county government). In most cases, it accurately described their administrative activity. During a fiscal meeting in Shale County, for example, a businessman questioned court members about their plan for rectifying the county's economic malaise: "We hear so much about our county being a distressed area. Are you working to make an improvement in the welfare of the people of Shale County?" In response, the magistrates mentioned their work on the new water/sewer projects and their efforts to keep county roads in good condition. One magistrate then retorted: "What more is there for a fiscal court to do other than provide infrastructure like water and roads?"

was related to, where one lived, how long one had lived in the county, where one worked, and where one attended church. Rather than attempting to establish one's credentials and political persuasions, the ads imparted personal knowledge. The following text, for example, formed the ad for a local candidate for Judge Executive:

> My name is Robert Bishop. I am the son of Billy Baker and the late Jean Eda Smith. I am the grandson of the late Ray and Laura May Bishop, and the late Jim and Clara Howard Smith. I am a lifelong resident of Shale County. I spent 18 years working in the coal industry and for the past 5 years I have been employed by the City of Valley Town. In addition I have a small excavating company and I have also spent most of my life farming. If I haven't had the opportunity to ask you personally for your vote, I am asking for your support now.

Just as elected officials legitimated themselves by appealing to personalism, voters provided that legitimacy accordingly. While tailgating at a high school football game with members from David's church in August, one of the candidates running for state senator, Rodney Hugh, approached me and handed me a coozie with his name on it, stating "I need your help." As he told me about his background, Minnie (Bruce's wife), who was sitting at a picnic table behind us, smiled and waved at him. As he prepared to make his next round, she intervened in our conversation: "I know him; he's a good man," she intoned with a smile. Rodney pointed at her and smiled back as he walked away, encouraging her to spread the word.

After he left, Bruce approached me and asked if I would vote for him. I told him that I was not registered in the area and thus could not vote in the local races. He asserted that he preferred his opponent, Mitch Parker. "I know Mitch," he said, before detailing how Mich had "done a lot for the county" and gotten behind the church's drug prevention efforts.

David supported Mitch's campaign for the same reason. While driving to a local park in order to embark on a short hike in early November, David noted how looked forward to the conclusion of the forthcoming election. "It's gotten nasty," he complained. He told me that he

had received a mailing from Rodney Hugh that morning, which he retrieved from the backseat to show me. The mailing—professionally done and fitted to paper that approximated the size of a very large notecard—featured a color photograph of pigs feeding from a trough with an image of Mitch Parker—making an awkward, huffy face-superimposed onto it. The text read: "Career politicians are like pigs feeding at a trough…Mitch Parker is one of the worst!" It then listed several bullet points with regard to how he had taken "thousands of dollars in luxury travel," provided high paying state jobs to a family member, and voted himself a "million dollar gold plated pension."

David expressed his dismay over the advertisement, reading the text aloud: "Career politicians are like pigs feeding at a trough…I mean, come on!" He admitted that parts of the mailing were "probably true" and that Mitch was not a "perfect man." Yet, the vicious nature of the ad had hit a sour note with him. David asserted that although Dunn was "flawed," he was a "good man" who had thrown his efforts behind the church's drug prevention efforts: "I know Mitch," he insisted, before stating that he "ha[d] to side with him."

After David finished expressing his support for Parker, I asked if he thought that Hugh had a chance against him. While David felt relatively confident in Parker's victory (Parker did go on to win re-election), he explained that Hugh enjoyed the advantage of "having a lot of people" in the area. That is to say, he had a large family and many people who were kin to him. David pointed in the general direction of Hugh's homestead, where we eventually arrived at the end of our hike: "That's Hugh territory out there," he stated. Sure enough, when we approached Hugh's neighborhood at the end of our hike, David pointed out his house: "We're in Hugh country now." He was right; there were Hugh signs everywhere.

The personalism associated with local politics had its origins in the county's legacy of familism and clientelism. For one, cultural pressures demanded that one exhibit loyalty to her kin; if one's uncle ran for county magistrate, voting for his adversary would amount to treason. It would also amount to an act of self-flagellation, as voting for one's kin paid by way of priority access to county jobs and social services (e.g. gravel and water lines). Second, because the well-being of one's family had historically governed one's life chances (due to the nature of subsistence farming and the intergenerational transmission of reputation), it was customary for families to vote in blocs. Corrupt politicians recognized this. When engaged in illegal vote-buying activities, they thus oftentimes attempted to buy the votes of wholes families rather than mere individuals.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the personalism that ran through campaign ads and speeches was intended to ensure voters that candidates were people like them. Voters sought to elect socially similar candidates in order to alleviate uncertainties related to trust, communication and personal evaluation (Coverdill and Finlay 2007). By developing personal relationships and knowledge of a candidate's familial and occupational background, they felt reassured that officeholders would "help them" when in need. As the incumbent sheriff implied in his re-election bid, one could only trust those whom one knew for help: "Some of my opponents may be good people, but I don't know them personally."

If voters did not personally know the candidate, they at minimum wanted to know from whom and from whence one came (i.e. did one come from a "good family?"). Although partially an artifact of the caste system described by Brown (1988), the emphasis on family of origin also derived from an effort to establish trust and reassurance. If one's father had traditionally helped one's family, voters believed that his son would be likely to do the same. Similarly, candidates

sought to demonstrate that they belonged to valued religious and occupational categories. They thus emphasized how they attended reputable churches and worked in an honorable occupation (in the context of Central Appalachia, this meant coal mining or another job involving manual labor). Given the county's history of outside exploitation and stigmatization, such personal information eased doubts about one's allegiance to the county. That is to say, it put to rest fears that one might be an "outsider."[147] Personalism thus translated into legitimacy. If a candidate could not establish a personal relationship with voters, could not establish that he came from a "good family" with long term tenure in the county, and could not establish that he was a person like them, he may as well not have run.

In their campaigns, politicians thus took pains to establish and emphasize their personal relationships with voters, and to ensure voters that, if elected, they would "help them." The following ad, which was published in the local paper by Rufus Sampson, a candidate running for Judge Executive, demonstrates this. Rufus had twice been elected Judge Executive during the 1990s but had abdicated his position in the early 2000s. Several years later, he sought to make a comeback:

> Rufus Sampson has touched lives in Shale County. He may have sent you a birthday, Christmas, sympathy or get well card. He may have sent you an Honorary Judge-Executive Certificate or got you a KY Colonel certificate. He may have sent you a certificate when you completed the 8th grade. He may have helped you at Thanksgiving or Christmas with a gift. Someway he touched the lives of Shale County people. It may have been a new bridge or a concrete top on your older bridge. It may have been gravel or blacktop. Whatever it may have been, it was Rufus helping you the people of Shale County.

Sampson's ad reveals how personalism and patronage reinforced each other, i.e. why local voters prioritized personalism in their political decision-calculus. The logic was this: "Because Rufus

[147] Distrust of "outsiders" has long been noted within rural communities (see, for example Fitchen 1981 and Duncan 2000). This stems not so much from the parochialism of rural life, but from the history of outside exploitation/stigmatization that such communities often endure.

Sampson knows me personally, he will likely assist me if I need help." Shale Countians knew that the local government revolved around a spoils system. If one hoped to have his roads resurfaced, procure water lines, qualify for a job training program, or get hired on a local road crew, it was imperative that he possess personal inroads with elected officials. As a witness noted during one of the corruption trials that followed the local FBI investigations: "In Shale County, if you're not in politics or in with the clique, you don't get nothing."

Local politicians projected their image and reputation accordingly. They emphasized not only their personal relationship to Shale County and its residents, but the lengths to which they had gone—and would continue to go to—in order to "help the people." Take Rufus Sampson's other campaign ads, which read:

> FREE CHEESE!!! The commodity program helped our citizens in a time of need. I will do everything I can to BRING IT BACK! Helping people is my TOP PRIORITY. RUFUS Sampson will work for YOU!
>
> If elected county judge, I will help the children this way: I will provide four (4) $1000 scholarships for four (4) young people each year. This will be paid for by ME. Rufus Sampson takes great pride in helping you, the people of Shale County, the greatest people on God's Earth!
>
> "The Good Old Days." We all remember them. Life was a little easier back then. Day's when a man's word was his bond.[148] Rufus Sampson's word is his bond and he promises to restore Shale County back to the days when our county took care of its citizens.

Although not all politicians were as open and unabashed about the quid-pro-quo nature of their candidacy, nearly all emphasized how they strove to "help people." The ads that Sampson's opponent ran were a mirror image of his own. One, for example, read "Johnny Gregg helps people." It went on to discuss how Gregg had "made fixing roads and bridges a top priority during his time as judge," and how "over 160 miles of roads have received blacktop and 24 new

[148] According to a special newspaper report published in the 1950s, titled "Mountain Justice," a person's word literally did serve as a person's bond in many mountain localities.

bridges have been built." The ad concluded with pictures of numerous roads and bridges that were built and received blacktop under his tenure as County Judge.

8.3 The Cultural Complexity of Corruption

The personalized nature of politics in Shale County formed a double-edged sword. Although elites were the primary beneficiaries of clientelistic system into which the local government had evolved, clients received some benefits as well. Indeed, elites, as they claimed, often did "help" the poor. Although they rarely if ever engaged in actions that would jeopardize their own power, they did provide legal favors, jobs and social services to supporters when it did not conflict with their own agendas. They thus constituted a lifeline to people who had fallen into situations of desperation.[149]

The dynamics of clientelism, as such, were fraught with complexity—a complexity that outsiders, who often expressed incredulity at Shale Countians' ostensible "quiescence" in the face of open corruption, missed in their observations. Indeed, relations of exploitation are typically viewed as unidirectional (i.e. one group gains at the other's expense) and devoid of cultural and emotional content. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx (1990), for example, asserts that in capitalist relations:

> The bourgeoisie…has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations…It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation… for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

In this formulation, exploitative relations are construed as zero-sum and devoid of a subjective underpinning. This was decidedly not the case in Shale's patronage networks.

[149] Put differently, in the absence of normative economic opportunities, the poor relied on clientelistic arrangements—whether they involved selling a vote for cash, campaigning for a candidate in exchange for gravel and participating in corruption in exchange for court leniency—as an economic survival strategy.

Participating in the county's patronage system entailed gaining in some ways while losing in others. It was by no means a zero-sum game. Because many poor people operated according to the "subsistence ethic," i.e. defined exploitation in relation to social insurance as opposed to unequal exchange (Scott 1977), clientelist relations were not even necessarily understood as such. Patrons and brokers, moreover, did not monolithically dominate clients; clients also exerted upward pressure on elites. Indeed, the way in which many residents had become habituated to patronage as a way of making ends meet played a role in the reproduction of their subordinate positions within the county's unequal arrangements (see also Auyero et. al 2009).

The passage below, culled from my interview with Shale's Judge Executive,[150] illuminates the dynamic, dialectical character of Shale's unequal political arrangements. The Judge's comments respond to a question about how the state and federal oversight that followed the local FBI investigations had impacted his job:

> Well, definitely, it's been helpful, but it does…It puts a lot of strain…I'm going to say it this way: I hate to think I'm a politician, because I'm not into it…That's how [people] used to get their votes. They'd put them gravels on everybody's road…I told someone the other day…someone asked me, "could you put gravels on my driveway"…I said if you'll sign a contract that you'll go to jail in my place, I'll put gravels on there. Well, this person changed their mind about it…[So] it helps us in one way…[He proceeds to discuss how monitoring had resulted in a more equitable distribution of gravel and other county resources]. But it makes your citizens upset at you, because you can't do [favors] for them…We had one truck driver when I first started, he dumped some gravel on one of his brother's places, and we told him if he'd done something like that again, we'd have to let him go…[He discusses how this created conflict].

The Judge, Chester Palmetto, reveals how clientelism was not a unidirectional, top-down process. Given the way in which people had become habituated to clientelism, many had begun

[150] He was elected through vigorous church support after the FBI investigations and 2004 march decimated the county's power structure; almost everyone within the county esteemed him as "honest" and breath of fresh air in the wake of the "bad old days."

to actively pressure officeholders to grant illegal favors—especially road work. Indeed, they expressed anger, even incredulity, when elites denied their requests. A moral undertone undergirded these feelings. Such voters believed that elites had reneged on their obligation to "help the people" and "taking care of the county's citizens," and that they had thus violated the social insurance principle.

The following letter to the editor, which was published in the local paper and directed at a county magistrate, exhibits the upward pressure that clients applied on elites:

> Oak Hill's folks are still waiting for their road to be fixed. There are around 60 homes on Oak Hill—that's a lot of votes. Hopefully some caring person will come and resurface it for us, or patch it real good. They came and cut the bushes off the roadsides over on Muddy Gap, but Oak Hill's roads weren't cut.

Soon thereafter, the magistrate capitulated and laid gravel on Oak Hill's roads. When the magistrate lost his bid for re-election a few months later (perhaps because he was an unindicted co-conspirator in the local FBI investigation), the same woman published another letter in the paper. This one, title "Rick will be Missed," noted how her district will miss Rick "for all he did for the people, not many times you went to him to ask him for help that he didn't help if he could. We truly appreciate all you did for us Rick and most of all for caring about the people."

As the letters reveal, clientelistic exchange had ossified into the cultural fabric of the county. Local officials had cultivated the belief that they had a right to use public resources as they saw fit without public oversight. As Mike, the newspaper reporter, told me when I asked him about the phenomenon of nepotism in local government, he asserted:

> I did a series of stories back in the early 90s about corruption and problems in county government…This was around the same time…[that the state legislature] decided to require all counties to adopt a county code of ethics…[which had to] address nepotism…I was covering a debate down in McCrary County. They were debating their local ethics code…And one of the magistrates…said during the public meeting: "If I don't help my family, who will?" And it was a very clear illustration of the sense that government

> exists—that, you know, if you get access to that power, that it's completely okay to use it to benefit yourself and your family, and in fact, if you don't, you're kind of stupid and shirking your responsibility. I mean if you've won that office, then you have a responsibility to use it to help your family. And that mindset still exists in some places.

Clients, on other end of the spectrum, had adopted the understanding that they had the right to petition officeholders for favors, and that officeholders should "help them" regardless of legality. In our interview, Alexander, the local newspaper editor, told me a story that underscores this point:

> The Federal District Judge in the so called "Shale Eight" case said that there was a culture of corruption in Shale County, and that is very accurate. It goes from the highest levels to the lowest levels. A few months ago before the primary election year, as I would be traveling around the county, I would see piles of gravel appear in different locations. And now I know there's no such thing as a gravel fairy, so I had a pretty good idea of what was happening. And I stopped one day, camera in hand, and asked this fellow who was putting some in the back of his pickup truck how this happened to appear and what he knew about it. Well, he was very nervous, because I'm a newspaper guy. But I said, "don't worry. I'm not identifying you. Explain to me what's happening here." And he said, "well, county government drops these piles off and refills them periodically, so that people can come and get some and put in their driveway or do whatever." And so I asked him, "well, doesn't that bother you? Because after all, it's a low level of corruption." And he says, "no, they need to do that for us. They need to do more for us." And this guy was a fairly honest, hardworking individual, but he saw that level of corruption as okay. That being the case, they can also then approve corruption at a little higher level, or at least accept it, and see it for what it is. And so those people in government know if they can get away with that, they can get away with more.

As Alexander's story reveals, many poor individuals expect even demand that county officials abuse public resources as a way of "helping them." As the individual referenced here stated, he sees nothing wrong with low-level corruption because "they need to do more for us," which is a strong reflection of the regional moral economy, which demands that those with resources provide social insurance to the poor. The contradiction, however, is that because the poor accept

illegal government patronage out of desperation and necessity, they become willing to overlook higher-level and more damaging instances of corruption by patrons.

The personalism that underwrote relations between patrons and clients—and the "help" that formed the nexus between the two parties—also cultivated warm feelings between crooked politicians and constituents. These warms feelings encouraged county residents to identify with individuals who ultimately exploited them. Given that clients and patrons typically shared a variety of collective identities—as Appalachians, Shale Countians, schoolmates, friends, and sometimes even family—the phenomenon of identification was unsurprising. The tendency to esteem crooked officeholders resulted not from misinformation or false-consciousness, but from a commonality of experience, personal relationships and a certain degree of shared interest. After all, although local forms of inequality pervaded the county, the county's rich and poor all belonged to the maligned and exploited category of Appalachia in the grand scheme of things.

Perhaps more importantly, the county's elite, like all human beings, were dynamic and complex individuals. They were not unadorned embodiments of exploitation and abuse, but rather community members who maintained authentic friendships with constituents and, in many cases, exhibited sincere concern for their well-being. Remarking on the conviction of Shale's school superintendent, whom federal prosecutors conveyed as a "political boss [engaged in] acts of extortion, mail fraud and bribery," of my interviewees, for example, described him as "a very nice man and a caring educator." He then stated: "I don't doubt [his] commitment to trying to educate kids." Indeed, although the superintendent had spearheaded a racketeering conspiracy that had corrupted the democratic process and misappropriated millions of dollars in public funding, he had also implemented numerous measures to improve local education and actively participated in community drug prevention efforts. Residents typically experienced local

officials through these visible sets of behaviors. Because corruption and conspiracy occurred behind closed doors, public actions and personal relations are what defined constituent relations, forming the content of public perception.

Many residents thus attempted to defend the officeholders whom the FBI investigation targeted. The comments below, which come from the US attorney who prosecuted those involved in the county's racketeering case, illuminate the personal and emotional connections between patrons and clients. They were made during a bond revocation hearing for an elections official in the county, who had intimidated a witness prior to his trial. The man, Harry Marcum, contacted a potential witness in the case, who subsequently threatened two other witnesses by sending a photograph of himself with a gun pointed toward the camera. An attached message read: "Look at what your lies have done!"

Attempting to explain why the witness would intervene on the Marcum's behalf, the attorney told the court:

> What do we have here? We have an unemployed 20 year-old, seeking to be a police officer, who has known [Marcum] for his entire life and been a friend of his, who his family has trusted with some of their most intimate problems in life over the years, who they trust as his neighbor, and as someone who they can trust with the court system in Shale County [Marcum had previously helped the witness get his bond lowered after being arrested]. These people are unashamedly admitting that there's nothing wrong with trying to get bonds lowered by going through certain people and talking to certain people. They don't see anything wrong with that. They don't see anything wrong with a lot of things in Shale County.

The attorney goes on to describe Marcum as "a king maker:"

> You can be unemployed, live in the holler, and not have a chance in the world. Who do you look up to? You go to Harry Marcum. How do we know [the witness] looked up to him? He [told his father so]. Also, where did he go to get his first job as election commissioner? He went to Harry Marcum...What was his [ultimate] goal? His goal was to get a job with the state. His father said, "[the conspirators] know how to get that too." Go to Harry Marcum...Harry Marcum gladly took [the witness] to…another co-defendant

> in this case...[and] there clearly was an understanding that he was to get him a state job...So again, under those circumstances, we look at what would motivate [the witness] to send this threatening message. After he has this meeting with Harry Marcum where they have discussed this, [the witness] says to the FBI agents: "Look, you SOB's, look what you've caused to Shale County. You've ruined our county." That's what he got away from the meeting with Harry Marcum.

In this telling passage, the US attorney illuminates several components of Shale's patronage system. For one, he speaks to the way in which corruption had been normalized among both patrons and clients—how officeholders believed they are entitled to use public positions for personal ends, and how constituents viewed requests for illegal favors as normal and unproblematic. This is why the federal judge who oversaw the trials, as Alexander mentioned, lamented that a "culture of corruption" had evolved in Shale. At the conclusion of the first racketeering trial, he impugned: "This is the most egregious case I've had in my years on the bench, it was a case born of the culture of corruption that exists in Shale County."

He also speaks to why many people, such as witness described above, identify with corrupt office holders. As a citizen, Marcum's corrupt behavior ultimately harmed the witness. After all, Marcum was part of a criminal conspiracy that had cost the county millions of dollars in public funding, corrupted elections, undermined the justice system, empowered drug dealers, and dismantled any semblance of democracy. Yet, given the structural disadvantages that he faced, the witness saw Marcum as his only hope—as a "king maker" who could connect him to job opportunities, intervene on his behalf legally, as perhaps even a role model—as someone who had made it and accrued power in an area plagued by powerlessness.

When the FBI initiated its investigations during the early 2000s, as such, its agents found it extremely difficult to recruit informants and persuade residents to give testimony at trials. The

US attorney quoted above described the process of obtaining testimony from the aforementioned witness as "like squeezing blood out of a turnip:"

> It's taken three interviews, a failed polygraph, and a father showing up intoxicated for an appointment with an FBI agent to do an examination. What would cause...such fear and such resistance by...this [witness] and his father [another witness in the case]? Again, it's the loyalty, I would submit, to Harry Marcum and their attempts, even here on the witness stand, to protect him, to try to throw out anything they could to protect him…That was what we saw out of the [witness'] father as well."

Other factors, of course, conspired to discourage cooperation with federal investigators and public action against corrupt officeholders. They included a cultural taboo against "snitching," fear of retaliation by elites and distrust of outside activists and agitators, given their own history of exploitation and abuse in the county. Yet, the primary factor that sustained corrupt and clientelistic arrangements stemmed from the subjective side of patronage—that is to say, the personalism and emotional investment that infused political relations within the county.

Much like Auyero's (2000, 2009) work has also shown, the stories reproduced above illustrate how patron/client relations become complex and emotionally laden. They are not "cold-hearted and calculated" relations of simple exchange. They are relations that develop among neighbors, schoolmates and friends, which are woven into a regional moral economy that assigns residents into statuses with roles of obligation, deference and loyalty. The poor pressure elites to abuse public resources in order fulfill their moral economic obligation to "help them." The elite, in return, expect the poor to provide political support, withhold cooperation from investigators and treat local government as an essentially private domain. Shale's patronage system was thus not predicated on rational-cognitive relations; it was predicated on emotional and cultural relations deriving from an unconscious and embodied way of being in the world, and complex social roles and moral obligations that were tied to a historical way of life.

8.4 Evaluating Personalism and Patronage: Costs to Local Development

The county's clientelist arrangements, however, ultimately represented a prisoner's dilemma: Political favors provided individual gain while entrenching collective disadvantage. As Billings and Blee (2000) note, clientelism and corruption within the local state paved the primary route to the county's poverty and underdevelopment. Given the way in which government resources were used for spoils instead of the public good, and given how feuding divided officeholders such that they could not develop coherent economic growth policies, corruption and clientelism resulted in anemic development and a stunted public sphere during the county's early history. Billings and Blee (2000) assert that: "In the context of clientelism, corruption, and a manipulated public sphere, the state building in antebellum Shale County failed to produce public institutions with the capacity to address local problems effectively" (p.136). Those same forces continued to reproduce collective disadvantage and undermine solutions to social problems in the present day.

For one, the rewards and spoils associated with clientelism squandered limited community resources. When I interviewed Valley Town's mayor, he quickly devolved into a fowl mood as he discussed the "mess" that his predecessors had made of the city's finances. He provided several examples, such as how the city had paid $70 thousand in order to install a water pump that supplied just one household with water in a rural part of the county. He described the ill-advised utility work as a political favor. He then attempted to dissuade me from speaking with the Judge Executive: "He won't be able to tell you much," the mayor asserted, claiming that he did nothing more than "lay gravel and waterlines." The gravel and waterlines, he impugned, were exchanged for votes, which ensured that they never ended up where they were most

needed. These practices, he repeatedly emphasized, had had a ruinous effect on the county's budget and overall development.

My research corroborated his claims. Before the local FBI investigations decimated the county's power structure, abuse far surpassed the implementation of ill-advised water and road projects. Prior to being indicted and convicted of a host of corruption charges, the former mayor, for instance, cancelled a road project that many residents had pined for after citing a "strained budget." The very week before, however, he had hired his son as "City Manager," given him the highest salary in the city, provided him with a brand new government car, and used city funds in order to purchase several vehicles from his fledging automobile dealership. These situations played out with unfailing regularity. In 2006, as another example, the county attorney—a prominent local power broker—was given a sizeable raise at the same time that the sheriff's department temporarily shut down and furloughed all its deputies due to lack of funding.

Thus, at the same time that the city and county governments withdrew basic service like road maintenance and citizen security (at one point the school board nearly implemented a four day school week in order to save money on fuel costs), officeholders hired their family members, solicited unneeded contract work from political allies and charged superfluous expenses to local government. After the long-term mayor lost his re-election in 2006 (having served for nearly three decades, the FBI described his administration as a "criminal enterprise), the new mayor ordered scores of city workers to return mobile phones that she described as "unwarranted expenses" and clamped down on the use of city-owned vehicles for personal use, which was costing the city hundreds of dollars per week in fuel expenses.

In addition to wasting tax-payer money, the local spoils system misallocated state and federal grants while resulting in a feckless approach to development. At the height of city's

corruption problem during the mid-2000s, the city and county governments pursued external funding in a manner that seemed inexorable, indiscriminate and ultimately irrational. Although both governments suffered from an inadequate tax base—a product not only of poverty and population loss but of shady property tax assessment practices—the routine abuse of authority described above necessitated much of this financial assistance.

While some grants resulted in municipal improvements, many exacerbated exisiting problems. For one, the grants monies that elites secured consolidated their political dominance by expanding their opportunities for doling out patronage. The grants also resulted in numerous instances of embezzlement and hence waste. As Maria repined:

> With the local officials running the county and city for their own good...all the possibilities that might have happened with other kinds of jobs…centers…programs... and other things that might have redefined the community in some kind of way haven't happened, because a lot of times federal monies or private money that was supposed to go to a foundation or charities…we had a lot of money coming in here for those sorts of things…but they didn't seem to work…A lot of that has gone into the pockets of people who got greedy.

Citizens sometimes even wrote into the newspaper in order to inquire how and why local government consistently failed to provide basic services, especially road maintenance, despite receiving copious grant funding. One such op-ed was entitled: "Wonder Where the FEMA Money Is?"

> There must be a lot of interest in the FEMA money that was supposed to be coming to [our neighborhood]. The road is worse…A little more rain and a little more breakage and the road will be closed. But some dude did block the road last week and open a much needed tile…Thanks dude, it helped, a little. I wonder where the FEMA money is?"

Relying on external proceeds in order to fuel the city and county governments also resulted in uneven and illogical development. As opposed to creating a sensible master plan for

improving the area's socio-economic situation, the personnel of local government pursued whatever bag of money was in immediate purview.

Ultimately, this resulted in the development of resources that were unneeded—and that therefore went unused—while pressing hardships among ordinary people were neglected. In other words, at the same time the city failed to provide basic services, it obtained grants in order to, for instance: Renovate a recreational center that almost no one in the county used; build a museum of African American history that ceased operating only a few years later; build a Justice Center that many officeholders decided not to use; and purchase new equipment for a local fire department that did not have any firefighters and thus lacked the ability to fight fires. Some of these projects generated national controversy, such as a sizeable grant from the Homeland Security Department that was used in order to upgrade police weaponry for the purpose of deterring terrorist attacks. Not only is Shale County one of the least likely targets in the country for such an attack, but the county received the grant during roughly the same period that the Sheriff's Department had temporarily closed due to a strained budget. In any case, the Assistant Police Chief was convicted of embezzling a large portion of the money.

In sum, the focus on grants resulted embezzlement, the consolidation of patronage networks, government waste, misallocation of time, resources and personnel in the face of glaring social problems, and often further budgetary strain, given that local matching funds were often required. As the current mayor told me in our interview:

> We [the city] don't have anything...the reason we don't have anything is all the mayors of the past liked to brag that they had the cheapest taxes, the cheapest water, and the cheapest everything, so that's true…We never had no money to do anything, and that always...Even right now on the council, you talk about doing something else, they [say] "get a grant." Well, you can't give grants for everything. And grants are just like welfare. They'll just give you enough to—I mean, you're just starving all the time, but they'll give you enough to survive and that's the problem we've had here.

The mayor indicted the policy of maintaining extremely low tax rates while relying on grants in order provide services—a policy that financially benefitted the patrons of local government, who could reduce their tax burden while skimming funding from external sources.

Even when officials channeled internal and external funding into the institutions for which they were earmarked, the quality of those institutions suffered due to their designation as spoils. In other words, because officeholders and administrators used public positions in order to reward supporters and benefit their friends and families, unprofessionalism prevailed. While there were of course exceptions, the most qualified and competent workers rarely made their way into civil positions and public schools. This resulted in low-functioning institutions that transmitted disadvantage to county residents, especially in the sphere of education. Mike, for instance, states:

> I mean the reason the schools [have been] so rotten in Eastern Kentucky for generations was because they were patronage factories rather than, you know, educational places. Superintendents and board members sought office not because they wanted to better educate kids, but because there were very few jobs in the county, and if you get that job then you get to control jobs and get your relatives, your friends, whatever some jobs. So yeah, they were looked at as patronage and employment machines rather than as a place to educate kids.

Numerous other participants echoed Mike's commentary. Beyond observing the prioritization of patronage over professionalism in their own lives, many had read—or were at least aware of—some of the works that had established the field of Appalachian Studies, especially Harry Caudill's (1963) *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*. A prominent regional figure, many people were familiar with the fiery indictment that he had leveled against the crooked "courthouse politics" that defined political life in much of Eastern Kentucky. As Bills continues:

> Caudill argued that part of the problem here is that we never got any new blood, you know, that the local school systems never hired that fantastic, bright, energetic, young graduate from Indiana, or Louisville, or even Lexington, or even five counties over—that

> they only hired their friends and relatives right there in the same mud hole they lived in, as a result you never got any…new talent, any new ideas. You just became this perpetuating system of turning out, you know, of doing a mediocre job educating students.
>
> And there may be something to that…When I look around at the magistrates and county judges I know, you don't see a lot of progressive ideas about how we could change this place and make it better… Think in particular about the Judge Executives here in the county. You had Charlie Oglethorpe for two terms—an unindicted co-conspirator in the vote buying. Nice guy, was famous for going around to the fire departments and community events and frying fish…So Charlie's a good ole' boy, he came and fried fish at our fire department—we like him. Does he have the slightest damn idea about how to make the county a better place—no.
>
> So when he's finally gone…They re-elected Rufus Sampson…Rufus is a nice guy. I've interviewed him…but does Rufus Sampson have the faintest idea about how to make Shale County a better place? No. I mean he doesn't have a single progressive or even barely competent idea about how to make this better. It's all about keeping the roads paved or chipped and sealed—or gravel, depending on where you live…and small donations to the fire departments…And so then you elect Chester Palmetto…Super nice guy. But have you seen a single new idea? I mean you've [been studying Shale County] for two years now...Have you seen any discussion in the local newspaper about anything that would alleviate even a little bit of the poverty in this county?

Citing Caudill, Mike argues that the local spoils system had undermined community vitality and created—or at least entrenched—social problems and hardship by ensuring that fresh talent and ideas never made their way to Eastern Kentucky. Jobs and positions, whether in education or government, instead went to underqualified individuals looking for self-betterment, not professionals with at least a limited interest in making a difference.

While his criticisms are somewhat exaggerated, they contain a kernel of truth. Many research participants—especially those were involved in political activism—echoed his complaints against Judge Executives. Oftentimes, they were pejoratively labeled "gravel judges," an invective suggesting that they lacked vision, withheld initiative and did little more than distribute shoddy roadwork around the county in return for political support. When Judges

and other elected officials did pursue economic development, their strategies, to use the words of one interviewee, were often viewed as "farcical."

This too contained a seed, if not a blossom, of truth. Although the US economy had undergone profound economic restructuring since the 1960s, little had changed with regard to the county's development strategy. Community development efforts continued to rely on the tenets of modernization theory that the participants in Arnett's (1978) study had pursued by way of Shale's Development Association and Community Action Agency. When money surfaced for city and county projects, they were directed toward integrating the area into national/international markets, connecting the city to urban growth areas, attracting investment by enhancing infrastructure, and integrating the ostensibly "backward" population into mainstream values. In short, officials in government embraced a philosophy akin to "if you build it, they will come," that is to say, if we improve local roads and infrastructure, factories will soon follow.

Given the realities of national deindustrialization, however, and given the high level of human capital that most domestic manufacturing now requires, many research participants felt that the county was spending millions of dollars to entice jobs that would in fact never come. An incredulous op-ed in the local newspaper read:

> If Shale County is to survive this onslaught we must derive a new money source. We can't live much longer on federal grants. Someday [our congressman] will be gone and with his seniority goes all of those grants. When we will realize that our waters, land and wildlife are our future. We must set a plan to enhance these assets, because they're all we have…our only resources are those that we stand on and waste day after day waiting on jobs from factories. Tell me why would one man or company ever put a factory here, just one reason?

It was not only officeholders who embraced this factory-oriented approach to development, but the majority of the middle and elite class factions from whence they came.

Those who participated in the 2004 march against drugs, for example—as well as the subsequent civic improvement projects—oftentimes explicitly adopted a modernist agenda oriented around luring outside development. Their activism bore an uncanny resemblance to the failed middle-class modernization movement that Arnett (1978) analyzed in his dissertation. As Marx observed: "All great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice…the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

As with the 1960s middle-class modernization movement, the early 2000s anti-drug activism consisted mostly of middle class professionals who sought to confront the addiction problem in order to make the county more palatable to developers. During one of the many "Citizens for a Better Shale County" meetings that preceded the march, attendees discussed the effects of the drug problem on the county's economic situation. The president of the local chamber of commerce remarked: "You can't have economic development without a stable workforce." The County Development Director, similarly, implicated the closing of a small factory in the area: "One of the big factors in the loss of the [the factory] was the fact that 30 percent of the workers couldn't pass a drug test." Thus, perhaps the main and perhaps most hoped for outcome of these efforts involved generating positive press that would improve the area's reputation and hence yield grants and development.[151]

Because most elites and professionals interpreted the drug epidemic as a barrier to development, they consequently promoted a de facto policy of excluding the poor and addicted from participating. Instead, they structured the concerned citizens' efforts around enhancing

[151] The pursuit of such development and grants was also invested in the consolidation of political control. The local power establishment, in my estimation, often understood that Shale County was unlikely to attract major investments and that a modernization-oriented development strategy made little economic sense. The rationale behind this development strategy, as such, seemed to involve consolidating power and reinforcing control. The local elite grew more powerful in direct proportion to the amount of grant money and direct investment it secured, which nourished its patronage networks. The focus on attracting big investment and government grants often arose, as such, not from ignorance, but from a sophisticated understanding of how control could be sustained.

human capital, improving the county's image and eliciting outside resources. Although several well-intentioned pastors, congregants and victims of drug addiction resisted this current, power brokers attempted to steer the course. They participated in the efforts in order to consolidate their patronage networks (accumulate more resources), shore up political support (demonstrate concrete benefits associated with their tenure) and garner prestige. [152]

Thus, an unprofessional orientation to office (i.e. a particularistic rather than universalistic attitude rooted in the winner take all spoils system), and a culture that assigned candidates legitimacy based on homophily and personal connection conspired to put inexperienced and unqualified personnel in important local government and development roles. This resulted in massive waste, an uneven distribution of local resources, low functioning institutions, and ineffective, sometimes harebrained development schemes. Many grant projects—such as the efforts to modernize police weaponry—appeared to harbor no other purpose than to aggrandize the area and provide an occasion for embezzlement.

Yet, critics like Mike sometimes inflated unprofessionalism and mismanagement of resources with exaggerated significance. Although ineffective and unqualified in many cases, officeholders, not matter how scrupulous and efficient, were constrained by inadequate budgets and a state constitution that curtailed their authority. Chester Palmetto, whom Mike criticized as incompetent, complained about how he possessed few resources for pursuing development, and

[152] Another parallel was that, rather than attempting to incorporate the dispossessed and poor, much of the activism sought to contain them. Two of the primary initiatives, for instance, involved building a rehab center and eliminating small time drug dealers. The pharmaceutical companies, drug trafficking organizations and local politicians who sanctioned the drug trade, on the other hand, were courted more than confronted. Moreover, as with the 1960s groups, the contemporary activists had mobilized around a political opportunity. An influential newspaper series regarding prescription drug abuse had recently been published; Shale's congressman had just established a large drug prevention organization; the local police had begun to make headway against small-time dealers, and participation in civil society had increased due to the efforts of local pastors to form support groups for family members of addicts. While the poor were invited to participate in these efforts, no serious efforts were made to include them. Rather, local elites and professionals took the reigns—individuals to whom many of the poor were beholden.

how he had to rely on grants in order to implement new projects given a lack of other options. This, he asserted, constrained his capacity for creativity.

The mayor echoed his complaints. The biggest problems that he faced, he claimed, stemmed from his limited budget. Many of his initiatives thus involved attempts to increase revenue by annexing property, raising utility rates, levying new taxes, and courting "sinful" industries (e.g. eradicating the county's prohibition on alcohol sales) in order to raise additional tax funding. In one of the poorest counties in the country, this was difficult water to tread. Every year, the local paper published a list of the names of those who had not paid their property taxes. The list, needless to say, was long. Moreover, although he had taken measures to curtail spoils (e.g. eliminating senseless jobs and reigning in the city's spending on employee cell phones and government vehicles), he acknowledged that so doing was bittersweet. Increasing efficiency, accountability and transparency decreased politicians' capacity to "help people." In a word, such measures inverted the prisoner's dilemma earlier discussed: It hurt individuals in order to benefit the collective.

Poor planning decisions, as such, often manifested as symbolic violence. Throughout his interview, Mike cited myriad factors that had stifled socio-economic development in Eastern Kentucky. They included, among other things, internal colonialism, national economic change, unscrupulous pharmaceutical practices, and high-level political corruption. Yet, toward the end of his interview, much like Harry Caudill, he began to attribute Eastern Kentucky's lack of progress to its people—to the lack of "new blood, new talent and new ideas."

Whether the individual was liberal or conservative, religious or secular, poor or affluent, I found that their analysis of Eastern Kentucky's problems almost always circled back to the region's people. The permutations were many: They lacked progressive ideas and were

unqualified for office; their work ethic had eroded; they lacked religious conviction; they were religious fundamentalists who could not think for themselves; they were uneducated; they were inbred and thus genetically impaired; they were too familistic; they had forsaken family values; and so on. All of these assertions, which emerged at different historical junctures and among a diverse set of commentators, played on the traditional culture of poverty—sometimes even a eugenic thesis. Their contradictions belie their inaccuracy.

They also suggest that no matter how firmly aware of structural barriers to advancement, most participants could not resist the temptation to personalize social problems—that is to say, blame victims who themselves came to victimize. As I argue elsewhere, this often derived from the social positions of commentators; they were too close to the problems that they sought to analyze and redress. As Goode (1999) notes, it becomes difficult to advocate for those to whom one is intimately connected. This is also why Bourgois (1998) argues that immersive ethnographies risk devolving into a "jumbled morass of individualistic relationships that mask historical processes[,] deny larger structural-power relations," and ultimately fuel blame the victim convictions (p.62). Precisely because they were so close to material, cultural and human consequences of inequality, perhaps no people more ardently embraced culture of poverty stereotypes than mountaineers themselves.

In this case, what those who were overly critical of poor leadership "mis-recognized" was how structural inequality had resulted in poor planning decisions that likely would not have been made under better circumstances. The local government's development efforts radiated a sense of desperation. Because the city and county were so desperate for economic investment, they courted types of development that stable, affluent municipalities often attempted to block, including a federal prison, a bio-terror facility, and, one could even argue, mountaintop removal

mining. While critics panned them, many within the county looked upon modes of development that were rife with negative externalities with approbation, viewing them as potential panaceas to economic distress. After all, poverty and unemployment created problems that far exceeded those of pollution.

These choices are not short-sighted so much as they structurally constrained. Affluent individuals, in other words, often criticize the economic behavior of the poor as short-sighted, self-defeating and irrational. The odds of winning the lottery are 1 in 100 million; why on earth do they play every week? For a poor person living in Central Appalachia with no high school diploma, no social capital, no vehicle, no savings, and no work experience, the odds of securing gainful employment are not much better. And the costs associated with pursuing work—including purchasing presentable clothing, securing rides, making a resume, etc.—are nearly as high but far less exhilarating and rewarding. Those working within the institutions of local government existed within a similar matrix of possibility.

In 2009, for example, controversy erupted in the county. Early in the year, an out-of-state company expressed interest in building a factory in Valley Town that would employ 1,400 people. For a city with a population of 1,200, this seemed almost too good to be true. In exchange for locating the factory in Valley Town, the company required the city to purchase and excavate the site on which it was to be built. The city agreed, which resulted in more than $900,000 in bills. The factory was never built, however, given that the company was running an investment scheme of sorts. Countless critics asserted that the city should have seen this coming, as there were red flags at every turn. Among other things, the business plan was riddled with problems, and the company's CEO had been previously convicted of fraudulently obtaining a $2 million loan. It is highly unlikely that an economically secure locality would have pursued the

development. Shale County, which was so desperately poor, however, took the risk for no other reasons than it could not afford not to do so? What other options were there for development? It was better to expend funding on the potential for deliverance than to prudently expend it in ways that seemed unlikely to achieve any meaningful change.

Poor performance in local government—in terms of attracting development, administering basic services and providing opportunity to residents—thus resulted from a combination of factors. Officeholders were constrained by meager budgets, poor infrastructure, limited constitutional authority, and structural disadvantage. Yet, they exacerbated their budgetary constraints by way of patronage, corruption and ostensibly imprudent choices. Patronage and corruption also resulted in institutional under-performance—a phenomenon that has been observed in other impoverished Appalachian localities wherein patronage prevails as well. As Duncan (1992) notes:

> Schools and other public programs that we expect to be open to everyone instead become part of a spoils system and fail to fulfill their role as support systems for poor people. Opportunities to escape poverty through work are blocked, and the public institutions that we expect to give people the education and skills they need to find work elsewhere are co-opted by a system of political patronage (p.112).

Patronage and personalism, as Mike noted, resulted in individuals who did not "have the slightest damn idea about how to make the county a better place" dominating political offices, social service agencies, hospitals, and schools. That written, even if they had some idea of how to rectify the area's woes, their structural capacity to do so was extremely limited.

Years of economic desperation had crippled the region's sense of possibility.[153] Officials often felt limited to begging for forms of development that most places sought to avoid.

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[153] During a city council meeting in which an ordinance that would lift alcohol position was being discussed, for example, a business women stood in order to offer a long soliloquy to those in attendance. During it, she made comments about how many in the county feared changed—that Shale had been dry for a long time, and that their

Moreover, while a prison or bioweapons facility might be antithetical to many people's notions of progressive development, to Shale Countians, a prison, which provides hundreds of well-paying, stable jobs, is far more desirable than a training program that will neither yield jobs nor money with any certainty—especially when residents seek to remain close to family.

8.5 Political Reproduction: The Legitimating Effects of Personalism and Patronage

In addition to promoting ineffective government, personalism and patronage served as the primary factors that contained anger and mobilization against the corruption that continued to cripple the county's socio-economic development. When I began my fieldwork in March of 2011, a federal judge had just sentenced the final defendants in a tangled and protracted FBI investigation of Shale's local government to de facto life sentences in prison. Altogether, the investigation, which began in 2004, resulted in more than 50 federal prosecutions—the majority on RICO charges. The associated trials brought the scope of the county's corruption problem to light. The details, which among other crimes, involved the former mayor hiring a drug dealer to burn down a resident's property and regularly soliciting a 14 year-old prostitute, the assistant police chief selling weapons to and attending drug fueled romps at a drug dealer's house, and hundreds of thousands of dollars changing hands in order to buy elections, stupefied residents.

How did this situation endure for so many generations, and, once nipped in the bud, how did residents respond? The misinformation model supplies one plausible hypothesis—that residents were simply ignorant about officials' widespread vote-buying, racketeering, extortion,

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fears were not so much related to alcohol as the county's evolution. She said that even though change was frightening, the county must do it in order to grow, become better and survive. She then asserted she was tired of being a "second class citizen," that she was ready for the county to be a place that residents could be proud of and invite their friends and family to. She said she was very excited about the county's prospects for progressive change. At other meetings, and on a local Facebook page that emerged in support of the ordinance, others made similar statements. They construed the city's decision to permit alcohol sales as a bold gesture that would "bring Shale County out of the dark ages" and spur growth through the tax revenues that it would generate. The limited prospect of attracting ordinary forms of investment and development seemed so remote that residents conveyed relatively undesirable ones as panaceas—or at least infused them with exaggerated significance.

and other crimes. The data suggest that ignorance partially—but not completely—explains the perseverance of corruption. An oft mentioned refrain among research participants regarding corruption was that they knew it was occurring before the trials began but did not understand how it worked or have a sense of its scope. Two factors were responsible for this.

The first involved local government's cultural meaning as a spoils system—as a goody bag that officeholders were privy to do with as they wished. The prevailing orientation to local politics was an attitude akin to "to the victor goes the spoils." The public, it was understood, had no real right to monitor or participate in the proceedings. This normalized corruption, and it established politics as a private rather than public domain, which discouraged residents from prying into the so-called private affairs of officeholders. This understanding was by and large engineered by the elite, as their ability to utilize government for their own enrichment relied on their capacity to ward off transparency.

The collapse of the county's civil society was the second cause of relative ignorance. Isolation and transportation obstacles prevented many citizens from participating in the political process. Until a group of concerned citizens began recording and broadcasting public meetings on a television station run by a local church in late 2004, many residents lacked the ability to follow many public affairs. Additionally, because the local newspaper lad long been beholden to the political establishment, it did not suffice as a stand-in. As Sam, one of the preachers involved in the 2004 march told me, the local newspaper "would never print anything controversial ever." He discussed how "the whole time I was growing up, there was lots of things happening, but it was never in the papers, because they was afraid they'd lose advertisers."[154]

[154] The paper had become far more independent by 2004; many cited this as one of the primary reasons that activism caught on during this period.

Beyond neglecting to print controversial stories, elites used their connections with publishers in order to carry out legitimation tactics and engage in information control. This made it nearly impossible to verify specific allegations about local power brokers. For example, in one week's paper, a candidate for magistrate accused the incumbent of paving private drives in order to buy votes. In the next week's paper, the incumbent submitted an op-ed that dismissed the allegations as "false rumors." Similarly, when the owners of a subsidized housing complex wrote a letter to the editor that questioned the former mayor's intent to pursue a housing grant, he and other local elites blasted her as "money hungry" in the following week's paper.[155] Whenever citizens brought criticisms against officeholders, in short, officeholders used their connections with the local media and public platforms in order to debunk them.

Local elites also mobilized their public relations resources in order to publically defend themselves against allegations of severe corruption. The events that followed the indictment of the Assistant Police Chief and 911 Director for conspiring to peddle $1 million worth of cocaine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, and methadone, and hiring a drug dealer to burn down a property that the police department wanted to purchase for its own use, are instructive. The 911 Director received a "standing ovation" at the city council meeting that followed his indictment, where officials praised his service to the community. Of the Assistant Police Chief, the Mayor said: "We appreciate [his] work on behalf of the Valley Town Police Department over the years. We all realize the serious nature of the charges against him, but it's important to remember that he's innocent until proven guilty." The Mayor took the further step of preemptively defending himself and his son from corruption allegations (they were indicted on separate charges shortly thereafter).

[155] The owners claimed the project that the housing grant would fund was unnecessary, as exisiting housing was under-utilized. As discussed in the previous section—grants were pursued indiscriminately. Projects that the county did not need were funded, while pressing needs went unaddressed.

Whenever allegations of wrong doing arose, other local officials took measures to defend the accused, often taking the occasion to praise their service to the county and lavishing approbation upon them. Although it is almost inconceivable that one would receive a "standing ovation" after being indicted by a federal grand jury or such severe crimes, the tight-knit nature of the elite cabal enabled them to protect one another from incriminating information. Indeed, the response that the elite proffered to the slew of federal indictments that began to surface circa 2004 had the effect of placing them in the role of victim. Beyond publishing responses in the local paper that denued the accusations levied against them, they impugned local drug dealers and the "outside" media for seeking to ruin their good names. In an interview published in the local paper, for instance, the Assistant Police Chief proclaimed that the media's false reporting had "devastated [his] family" and "put undue hardship on [them]."

Criticisms against the coal industry were rebuked in a similar fashion. Maria told me the following story regarding how industry supporters used their pull in order to mitigate an ostensibly anti-coal story that had appeared in the local paper:

> [The local coal company] was recently applying to have their license renewed…As a matter of course there was a public hearing about that in Valley Town…[A man] who used to work in coal spoke and said: "… I believe in coal, and we need coal, but they ought to follow the law, and they don't," and so on…When asked to speak, [the company representatives] didn't say anything. So when Alexander was reporting on it for the paper, he just wrote out exactly what happened and put it in the paper. And his own boss—the publisher—said that his account was biased, because he hadn't given the company's side...So to make up for that the next week, the paper ran—against Alexander's wishes—this big headline that said [the company] saves the day, because they had like re-seeded a golf course for free…And they also had apparently said that they were going to withdraw money that they [were] going to give to some crippled children [starts laughing]…because of what [the man] said…It was definitely a David and Goliath thing.

Thus, due to the schizophrenic nature of local news coverage—and due to the absence of coverage vis-à-vis controversy—many people found it difficult to derive accurate information about political and industry activity in the area.

The exclusion of accurate, critical commentary in formal news outlets resulted in its informal emergence as gossip. Because residents rarely possessed the ability to openly speak truth to power, they relied on what Scott (1990) calls "hidden transcripts" in order communicate political information and express grievances. Because politically motivated stories were strategic, however, the facts were often twisted. Sometimes opportunistic individuals capitalized upon the county's history of corruption by spreading “false rumors” about officeholders whom they disliked. Given that corruption had for so long defined the county’s history, residents were relatively credulous when such assertions entered the fray of public discourse. Actual instances of corruption, as such, often went unreported, while fabrications and highly embellished versions of the truth prevailed.

Reliance on “communication interlocks” in order to keep up with local news further worked to establish “gossip” as the defining feature of the county’s civil society. Passing along out-of-date information during fortuitous run-ins while one was in town represented the equivalent of playing telephone. Occurrences and events underwent dramatic mutations as they were communicated among different parties, which created muddy and conflicting accounts of public events.

This situation as a whole resulted in the social construction of ignorance. Civil discourse manifested as a host of unverifiable claims about local power brokers that were difficult if not impossible to substantiate. The reliance of haphazard rendezvouses in order to exchange information converged with schizophrenic news coverage, hidden transcripts and the rumors they

generated in a way that gave rise to stunted public sphere—one marked by a dearth of impartial media outlets, limited civil space, and conflicting, unreliable accounts of events. The structure of Shale's civil society ultimately benefitted elites, who could persuasively dismiss allegations against them as lies "gossip," false rumors" and "lies." Because they accomplished this so effectively, many community members struggled with the "Bayesian updating" that trials necessitated. While talking with Adam about the crimes that the trials brought to light, he repined: "I don't know. I don't know all of it. I don't know all of the stuff that happened." Because the details of the cases contradicted what he wanted to believe about the defendants, I got the sense that he did not want to know everything that happened.

The personalized nature of local politics also shielded elites from popular discontent. When I asked Shale Countians how they felt about the revelations of local corruption and political abuse that were brought to light by the FBI investigations, I expected anger and righteous indignation. Few expressed approbation for the outcomes of the trials, however. The tendency, to the contrary, was to defend convicted officeholders and protest the ostensibly excessive nature of their sentences.

Many Shale Countians expressed identification and solidarity with the elites on the basis of their personal relationships with them. Because they personally knew them—i.e. had grown up with them, played sports with them, attended church with them, been assisted by them, and so on—they found it difficult to engage in critique and criticism. While asking Adam about a "court watch" group that he had founded in 2004 in order to monitor corruption in the courts, he told me that the judges withheld their cooperation and inhibited his efforts at every turn. Yet, when I pressed further about their obstructionism, he became defensive:

> PL: I was going to ask about the court watch—so, the intimidation that you spoke of from the judges and the clerk with regard to the dockets…[interrupts me]

> A: I'm not saying…Now listen: *I knew these people*. I'm not saying they were mean to me, or that they hunted me down…

When I asked Adam about the intimidation that he faced, which from my standpoint was unambiguous, he immediately defended the local officials who interfered with the court watch in order to avoid stirring controversy. He emphasized how *he knew them*. This was the primary source of identification with corrupt officeholders. Knowing a person validated him—often regardless of how he behaved.

Adam's attitude was almost ubiquitous. While chatting with Edith—a retired educator in her 70s—at the Historical Society one day, she explained how she had taught six of the eight major public officials who had recently been sentenced to lengthy terms in federal prison when they were in high school. Laughing—and seeming to not know what to make of the situation—she asserted that she "liked all of them," and that they were "all very likeable people." Tommy, the county coroner who was also chatting with us, agreed. He said: "Sometimes good people get involved in bad things," although he did not elaborate on how or why. A vote-buying case in a nearby county produced similar commentary among residents. An interviewee for a local news story stated: "When I look at someone like [the defendant], I don't see a bad person…[he] is a good person with a good heart, and part of what he did wrong here is part of the culture."

Evelynn, the elderly woman whom I sometimes chatted with at The Lord's Table, made the same point. She told me that she had worked for one of the "Shale Eight" before his conviction. Having cleaned his house for nearly 30 years, she now lacked a job. She said she never knew about the unscrupulous behavior that he was engaged in and never suspected him. "He always treated me right," she related.

Not only did residents maintain personal relationships with the politicians who were indicted, but they had come of age in an area in which corruption and vote-buying had been normalized. As Mike states:

> The point is that even though I might know—I mean I sold my vote to somebody—I might still think they're an okay person because: I know them; they've been nice to me; they tried to help me when they could; and furthermore…after that sort of gets endemic in a culture, a lot of people don't see vote-buying as wrong. They think that it's just part of the process.

Given its tenure and incidence in the region, election fraud had ossified as "part of the [political] process." Those who were convicted in the local FBI investigations, as such, expressed a sense of incredulity during their prosecutions—a sense that they had done nothing more than what everyone does and what had always been done. Few if any exhibited a sense of shame. As Mike went on to tell me:

> I was in [a store in Lexington] buying a present for my wife, and somebody says "hey Mike." I look over, and it's [the assistant police chief who been convicted of numerous crimes several years earlier]. I mean he's finished his term, he's back living in Rock City where his mother lives…Said he's doing fine. I mean he was griping about government regulation and all this stuff. He was very affable—shook my hand, and we chatted for ten minutes about the bad old days.

Bill's interaction with the assistant police chief, I would argue, was indicative of the attitude toward corruption in Shale County. The man's affability and unabashed openness of what many would consider serious crimes depicts the social meaning corruption possessed. Many viewed it as an ordinary part of office-holding, not something that should elicit shame.

Clients did not view actions such as vote buying as transgressive either. Even if they did question the practice, they developed rationalizations. While tailgating at a Shale County High School football game, for example, I listened as Bruce chatted with a man in his mid-50s while eating a copious helping of mac and cheese. Bruce was telling the man about how he wanted to

attend a Kentucky Wildcats basketball game but could not afford tickets. The man then responded: "Well, tell Mitch Parker [the state senator] you'll vote for him, and he'll give you a ticket!" "Will he," Bruce replied. "Yep," the man confirmed. Bruce's face waxed trepidations for a moment. "I don't know if I can do that," he sighed. But his reservations quickly trailed off as his opinion changed course: "Well…I was going to vote for him anyway, so I guess it's okay." "*I knew you were*," the man responded with conviction. Before the conversation changed direction, Bruce asked if the state senator could give him four or five tickets. "Probably—ask him," the man responded.

Personalism and patronage were thus reinforced again. The state senator frequently attended David's church, which Bruce was a key member of, and the football tailgates that it held. Bruce did know Mitch Parker, and he did plan to vote for him. Because his decision was already made, he reasoned, he might as well avail himself of the senator's patronage; neglecting to do so would be foolish. The exchange, of course, would reinforce their personal relationship and mutual affection. Indeed, Bruce had primarily gotten to know Mitch through the assistance that he had lent to the church's drug prevention efforts.

Patronage thus formed the basis of a personal relationship, and personalism became the basis for seeking more patronage. Those who bought votes, as a result, did not face stigmatization. To the contrary, they were simply doing what politicians are expected to do. Moreover, even if they bought their way into office, voters still knew them personally, and they still received their patronage. The latter outweighs the former.

As such, residents often went to great lengths in order to defend the local elites who were charged with crimes. David, the pastor who became my key informant, had spearheaded the wave of citizen activism that emerged to confront the county's drug and corruption problem in

2004. Yet, when the details of official corruption began to surface, he submitted a letter to the local paper, urging the editor to shelter the accused from the lurid dispatches of which they had been a part.

David began his letter by thanking the publisher for his efforts with drug prevention, writing "without your help much of the progress that has been made in our county would have been minimal at best. Thanks to your coverage of this movement things are changing in this county." From there, however, he waxed critical:

> I have one thing against you. Your coverage of the charges against [the] former mayor…were way over the top. I understand your responsibility to cover the news, especially as it pertains to public officials, however going into the lurid details of the court record concerning [the mayor] was unnecessary. There are many innocent victims in this awful mess, and responsible reporting must take into consideration their plight. The release of information relevant to the case is one thing, but including details designed to embarrass and humiliate is another.

Indeed, the former mayor and his family had attended—and financially contributed to—David's church for years. David's activism had thus created a rift in the church, not to mention the community. Although the FBI investigations occurred independently of his work in the community, many personally blamed him for their friends and family members going to jail. After David had given a sermon that chastised corruption in the community, for example, he told me that the mayor's wife had confronted him after the service. In front of all those were still present, she reprimanded him for spreading ostensible lies.

Taylor, the young educator who had established "Shale County Outreach," was an apostate from David's Church. The mayor in question was his grandfather. During the Friday night that I spent riding around the county with him, he groused—though in a reserved fashion—about the imprisonment of his granddad, questioning whether the allegations against him were true. He also criticized David's drug-prevention efforts, asserting that neither the march nor

what followed it had changed anything. His grandfather's fall from grace—not to mention the others who had been convicted—had been for naught, his commentary implied. His response to the situation demonstrates why resisting clientelism and corruption were so difficult in Shale—intimately personal ties foreclose so doing.

8.6 Capitalizing upon Context: Three Other Modes of Legitimation

As the previous section showed, personalism and patronage constituted the primary strategies that local elites used in order to legitimate their dominance and defuse public outrage with regard to corruption. Almost all officeholders could cite myriad instances in which they had "helped people," whether the favors involved delivering a truckload of gravel, installing a waterline, sending a birthday card, arranging for a criminal charge to be reduced, or providing a job. On a more indirect level, they could highlight the grants and pork barrel legislation that they had procured in order to help the county, which they indefatigably highlighted in their ads and speeches. Indeed, elected officials published regular updates in the newspaper, which enumerated point by point every project—and their respective dollar amounts—that they had secured for the county. This was how successful leadership was defined—the ability to provide individual favors, and the ability to secure sizeable largess from the public trough out of which politicians could feed their constituencies (and themselves).[156]

Outside of the favors that they provided and the pork that they secured, they could rely on their family histories and personal relationships with constituents in order to temper ill will toward their misconduct. Personalism, in the last analysis, served to humanize local elites. As Mike asserted in his interview: "It's not about policy; it's about personalities." Voters

[156] This of course brings to light a point of ostensible dissonance in the political rhetoric of local politicians. At the same time that officeholders celebrated the influx of government money that they secured, they often demeaned the prospect of raising taxes. Securing public money for projects and limiting tax collection are of course incompatible positions. The idea seems to be that the city and county should attempt to ward off local taxes increases by pursuing money from state and federal government.

understood critical commentary against elites as a de facto assault against their characters. Since politicians were usually pleasant individuals, this did not sit well with constituents. Mike's own commentary was instructive in this regard. In one of the interview passages that I reproduced, he stated that he did not doubt that Roy Davis, the former school superintendent, was committed to educating children. He went on to characterize him as a "nice man and caring educator."

When Bill began to discuss the county's politicians in *abstract* terms, however—that is to say, when he ceased analyzing *Roy Davis* and began analyzing *superintendents*—he became indignant, asserting that treating local schools as "patronage factories" had ensured that education had remained "rotten" across multiple generations. I observed this discrepancy in several other research participants. Citizens spoke angrily about the *abstract phenomenon* of corruption but refused to criticize actual politicians—the people whom they knew on an *individual level*. Citizens saw corrupt officeholders at church, public events and family get-togethers. They had pleasant interactions with them around town. Perhaps they even benefitted from their patronage. These personal, particularistic ties defused the contempt that they might have felt about corruption and thus mitigated their capacity vocalize discontent.

Of course, officeholders could not ubiquitously rely on personalism and patronage in order to legitimate themselves. Not only was it impossible for them to personally meet and help every resident in the county, but their own interests oftentimes conflicted with providing help—after all, they harbored limited resources. In these situations, officeholders capitalized upon the area's reputation as an economically distressed locality with an inadequate tax base. When angry citizens and honest officeholders demanded improvements vis-à-vis public services, the near ubiquitous refrain of the elite was that they were broke—that they had no discretionary spending money. While this was sometimes the case, it was often an exaggeration.

During a fiscal court meeting several years ago, for example, several "honest" magistrates expressed anger regarding the county road system. One blasted the Judge Executive for several minutes, vociferating:

> My district is destroyed. It's chaos. It hasn't had any work done on it in 12 years. The people in my district aren't the poor white trash of this county, and I'm tired of them being treated like it. I want some work done, some blacktop or whatever.

He went to describe how his phone rang off the hook with disgruntled constituents: "The people of the sixth district have been neglected, and now they've got a man who's trying to do something for them." Another chimed in: "We've got people with roads so bad they can't even get to their houses."

Predictably, the Judge Executive, who was later named as an unindicted co-conspirator in one of the federal racketeering cases that racked the county, argued that the fiscal court did not have enough money to take care of the roads. The angry magistrate retorted that the lack of money resulted from patronage and waste: "We've got double the employees we had ten years ago. Every time we meet, we're adding people and giving raises and buying things." The Judge, in his final rebuke, however, simply stated: "We just don't have enough money, that's our problem. There's no need for us to sit here and fuss amongst ourselves over it." Local officials, as the story demonstrates, thus capitalized upon the county's economic distress in order to account for their unscrupulous allocation of public funding.

Because Shale's residents were acutely aware that they lived in one of the poorest counties in the nation, this formed an effect way to pacify protest. An inadequate tax base and anemic budget were very plausible excuses for the low level of public service that they received—especially since allegations of corruption typically manifested as little more than rumor. Sometimes, though, residents rejected the explanation. Not long after the FBI

investigations began, the local paper began publishing the demands and grievances of citizens in its weekly columns. The writer of the op-ed below, for example, complained about how the roads in her community remained dilapidated, while those in other neighborhoods always received maintenance.

> Oak Hill's road is in bad need of repair work. The blacktop is going back to dirt. We can't understand when we need help we are told there's no money and you can see other roads blacktopped from end to end. We can't understand why…The head of the hollow is terrible and the bushes are growing across the road. Surely the county can afford enough to mow the roads off…

Because angry residents sometimes challenged the limited budget narrative, the elite developed additional methods of legitimation. These usually involved hiding behind their lack of constitutional authority, deflecting blame for problems and capitalizing upon residents' feelings of social exclusion. A debate that broke out during a different fiscal court meeting illustrates all three strategies.

In the meeting, a local businessman confronted magistrates about their paltry efforts to confront local social problems. He began by questioning the court members with regard to their plan for rectifying the county's economic malaise: "We hear so much about our county being a distressed area. Are you working to make an improvement in the welfare of the people of Shale County?" The magistrates responded that it was not within their jurisdiction to provide economic leadership: "What more is there for a fiscal court to do other than provide infrastructure like water and roads," one retorted.

The businessman was not satisfied. "That's pretty elementary," he replied. "What about zoning? Do you have plans to build the tax base, or ideas on how to get rid of substandard housing? What about improving the environment? The county is nasty; it's worse than China was 50 years ago." The court responded with more deflections. First, they denied the scope of

the problem. The Judge repined: "It breaks my heart to think that people would purposely throw out trash. But our waste is at one-tenth what it was 15 ago." Second, they claimed that they had no resources to confront the problems. When the businessman retorted: "If I brought you photos of 200 horrible places in the county, would you do anything about it?" The Judge replied: "We don't have the money to pay someone to do that."

The businessman then challenged the court on its near ubiquitous response to citizen discontent—that it lacked money to address their needs and grievances: "Is it true that you have no discretionary spending capability whatsoever?" "That's about right," the Judge said. "We may not be broke, but we've got just enough money to keep the doors open, and that's it." The Judge then engaged in a final tactic for managing/defusing public discontent—diverting blame. Rather than acknowledging how poor leadership, patronage and corruption had undermined the county's discretionary spending capacity, he blamed the state and federal governments for waging wars on the counties and coal:

> The state's trying to break the counties, trying to force us to merge. They want to go from 120 to 53 [counties], and the feds have it on their minds to do away with the states. No one wants to step up and say what's wrong. Until we're willing to point the finger at what got us in this shape—the government—we're going to be sitting here broke. Everything that Shale County has lived on, like coal and tobacco,[157] has been put out of business by the government.

When interviewed after the meeting, the businessman expressed disappointment and frustration with the court's response to his questions: "I'm looking to this group for leadership, but all I'm getting are excuses."

The exchange as a whole represents the common tactics that local elites drew upon in order to defuse public discontent and scrutiny. They included: Appealing to the county's

[157] A number of Shale Countians had traditionally supplemented their income through tobacco cultivation. Their ability to do was eliminated by the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act in 2004, however, which eliminated price supports.

economic problems ("we are broke and therefore cannot address your concerns"); down-playing or denying local social problems ("things are not as bad as the reports and media make them out to be"); and diverting blame ("we did not create these problems, the federal government did by waging a war on coal"). In pursuing the latter two tactics, elites capitalized upon residents' sense of social exclusion, their awareness of rural inequality and their sensitivity to stigmatization among "outsiders."

Because Shale Countians so resented the way in which the outside world had traditionally represented them—as poor, backwards, ignorant hillbillies—elites construed attempts to raise awareness about local problems as attacks on Appalachians themselves. When individuals like the local businessman blasted elites for failing to devise a competent economic development strategy, they often retorted with responses akin to: "Things are not as bad as the media makes them out to be! There are good things in this county too!" Furthermore, they blamed "the government" for implementing policies that benefitted urban growth areas at the expense of the countryside. These claims were difficult to dispute, because they were true.

Outside critics did sensationalize the problems that plagued Central Appalachia, and they often blamed its residents for creating them. In so doing, they placed Appalachians in a monolithic category comprised of people who were pathologically traditional, familistic, impoverished, and uneducated. Many Shale Countians wanted little more than to be acknowledged as ordinary Americans rather than as "others," to be accorded a measure of honor, dignity and respect, and for outsiders to recognize the diversity that characterized their region. They also wanted a government that would address the inequality that federal and state policy had exacerbated between urban and rural areas. Residents, as such, tended to react with disfavor

when people decried the county's social problems. Such problems functioned as a source of historical shame, and they bound residents to social categories which they sought to transcend.

8.7 Outsiders: The Cultural Politics of Managing Stigma

This sensitivity allowed elites to successful play down local problems—including those that they created. It also enabled them to construe citizen grievances as affronts against the region's culture and people. Bringing awareness to local problems reflexively marked one as an "outsider." This is what outsiders did: They emphasized problems in lieu of achievements; they dramatized problems rather than playing them down; and they meddled in local affairs instead of going along with them.[158] When I asked Sam, one of the pastors who spearheaded the county's 2004 anti-drug march, why so few people cooperated with the FBI's local corruption investigations, he responded:

> They're [the FBI] outsiders. They're foreigners. A guy like you would have to stay here—I told David one time, I said, David, how long have you been in Shale County? And he said, 21 years. I said, "you're almost one of us now." Because people are leery of outsiders…and it goes back to a lot of things. In the 60s…when Lyndon Johnson had the War on Poverty, well, see, they came into our part of the country and just showed horrible things, just exposed us for—just made everybody look like we were just all idiots and stuff. I remember one time on…*60 Minutes*…it showed some people using a toilet up here, and you know, the pee and the poop was running out and then the next house down was using it for drinking water, you know? And they'd just pick out the worst of the worst. People know that, see, and they hate that. So when people come in from the outside, the outsiders, see, they just—people just resent that. That's why nobody would ever talk to them. Not just the fear, but because they're outsiders, and they're going to expose us and all of that stuff…And so that's got a lot to do with [why] people resent the federal—I mean they resent the Kentucky State Police, you know, coming in…That's just a carryover from days gone by.[159]

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[158] This phenomenon is similar to Adam Michnik's (1999) concept of "magical anti-Semitism." Michnik argues that "the logic of normal, correct and healthy anti-Semitism is the following: 'Adam Michnik is a Jew, therefore he is a hooligan, a thief, a traitor, a bandit etc.' Magical anti-Semitism however works this way: 'Adam Michnik is a thief, therefore he is most probably a Jew.'" His analysis captures the way in which outsiders are defined in Appalachia as well. When individuals fail to exhibit attributes and beliefs that cohere with the area's moral order, they are automatically dismissed as outsiders.

[159] Indeed, Linda, a longtime social worker in the county, echoed Sam's commentary regarding residents' resentment of outside policing organizations. When a new state anti-narcotics unit first began carrying out drug enforcement in the community, she described how it faced opposition from local residents. Many residents believed that the organization had no right to infringe upon the ostensible sovereignty of their counties. As Linda states:

Organizations like FBI often made matters worse by employing manipulative tactics in order to achieve their goals. Sam continued:

> The feds—they're bad guys too…They would arrest a guy for selling drugs, and they would arrest his wife too, and then they would say at some point during the process they'd say: "Now listen, if you'll plead guilty, we'll drop charges against your wife and she can stay home with the kids." Well, a lot of times, the wife wasn't even…a part of it.

Sam's commentary speaks to why the FBI's investigation tactics resulted in resentment among residents. Rather than "helping" people, as local patrons did, FBI agents pitted families against one another and levied threats in order to secure cooperation and convictions. Second, regardless of their techniques of investigation, residents were dubious of "the feds." "The feds," as he noted, were viewed as "outsiders;" they were "foreigners."

Distrust toward "outsiders," according to Sam, dated back to the War on Poverty, when media and government agents had begun to caricature the region's problems and paint its people as "idiots." Many believed that representatives of the outside world—like the feds—sought to locate "the worst" families in the county, shine a spotlight on them, and illuminate the county's ostensible poverty, primitiveness and depravity for their own amusement. Shale Countians thus assumed the worst about the FBI—along with other outside reformers—in order to protect themselves. Because they sought to avoid providing yet more fodder for negative press, they remained silent about corruption, poverty, addiction, and other social problems.

Indeed, the distrust that many people exhibited toward outsiders—and the assumption that outsiders sought to harm Appalachians for their own benefit—complicated my own research at times. While watching a Shale County High School football game in early September, Bruce approached the picnic bench that I was sitting at with a man named Michael. Michael, who was

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"They were fearful of it...and wondering what right they had...they didn't want these people coming in here arresting my relatives, you know? I mean, what gives them the right to do this? Where'd they come from?" The organization also faced opposition from local law enforcement, who sometimes resented the organization for encroaching on their jurisdiction.

a few years older than me, was David's son-in-law. Bruce asked Michael if he had met me, and if he had heard about the project that I was conducting in Valley Town. "No, I haven't," Michael replied. Bruce explained that I had come to Kentucky from the University of Georgia, and then turned to me in order to explain the nature of my research. I began to explain how I was interested in community empowerment, but Michael quickly interrupted: "So, have you come up to make fun of us and write bad stories about us?" I started to reply that doing so was not my intent all. Bruce quickly cut me off, however, and spoke to my legitimacy and how he hoped I would eventually move there.[160]

Subsequently, Michael told me to sit back down (I had stood up in order to shake his hand), stating that he would like to talk to me and hear more about my project. After chatting for several minutes, I tried to reassure him that I was aware of the stereotypical writings associated with Appalachia, and that I had no intention to perpetuate them. Michael told me that he "just wanted to get the question out of the way." He explained how that even if people expressed enthusiasm for my project, in the back of their minds they were wondering what I would do with it, and what had motivated it.

He then lamented how a recent *Washington Post* story had stirred controversy in the county. The reporter, Michael claimed, had concealed his intentions when he came into county. He subsequently published a story that, according to Michael, humiliated the individuals on whom it focused. The story (which I had previously read) concerned how Shale was one of the "fattest" counties in the United States. The coverage profiled several overweight young women in the area, analyzing their poor diet and lack of exercise. As Michael spoke, David approached us. David looked almost worried that we were talking—like I had perhaps invaded too far into

[160] As this vignette illustrates, I often had to rely on Bruce and David in order to gain access to research participants. Several participants called David in order to "check up on me" before consenting to interviews.

his personal life. When he reached us, Michel turned to him and asked: "What do you think of this guy?" David put his head down and replied: "Love em'; I love him." Michael laughed, "well, David loves everyone. That doesn't always mean he likes you." The joke, fortunately, eased the tension that had developed, and the conversation moved into safer territory.

While I eventually became friends with Michael, his skepticism never fully abated. The next time that I saw him, for example, was after a service at David's church. He ambled over to my pew with a friend who was visiting from a nearby county. Michael and his friend greeted the man who had sat next to me during the service. Michael then turned to me and introduced his friend. "It's Bill, right?" "Almost," I replied, "it's Phil." "And you're from Auburn?" "Nope—Georgia," I said. "And you're here to write a report on crazy hillbillies?" Everyone laughed except for me. As the laughter died, Michael queried: "Community empowerment... that's what you're interested in?" "There you go," I responded. "I don't know about all of this schooling," he replied. He told me that he had learned how to read, write and do arithmetic, and that was enough for him. He then left to greet other people without saying goodbye.

I spoke with many other people who encountered similar skepticism, which sometimes bordered on hostility, upon relocating to the county. Dawn, for example, told me the following story about her arrival in Shale County 30 years ago:

> My neighbor that lived just down around the corner this way, we used to walk and see each other about every day, and I'd speak to him, and he'd speak to me, but one day I was coming home…and he waved me down…He said, "Dawn, I want to tell you something…when you first come down here, I didn't like you…and you probably didn't like me either…I just thought you were from the North, and you would think you were better than us." That is the attitude of a lot of people in these hills, that they're…I guess [with] the history…they think that northern people think they're better.

Due to years of media stereotyping, state-led experiments in behavioral modification, religious missions, and industrial colonization, Shale Countians had developed the sense that outsiders—

especially "northerners" and "city slickers"—looked down upon them and sought to take advantage of them.

Indeed, the participants in my study—especially those who were poor—exhibited a profound sense of "double consciousness." "Double consciousness," coined by W.E.B. Du Bois (1994), refers to the "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p.9). Research participants were acutely aware of the stereotypes that outsiders levied against them—so much so that they often viewed themselves through the lens of those stereotypes. Participants thus adopted a variety of techniques for managing the stigma that had developed around their "hillbilly" identities. One of the most common, as Michael demonstrated above, was to challenge the outsider's own sense of honor. This involved denying the value of his status characteristics and cultural capital, namely urbanism, education and Yankeeism. This is precisely why Michael impugned "I don't know about all this school." Several other participants questioned the value of my education as well.

As I arrived at The Lord's Table one day, in a similar vein, I stopped to chat with one of the drug court workers, Brenda, who had exited the building in order to take a cigarette break. We exchanged small talk for a few moments before she admonished me to "stop with that city talk!" When I asked what she meant, she informed me that I "talk too fast," and that "hillbillies talk slow." Several other people commented on my way of speaking as well. The first time that I gave Lauren and Amy a ride, Lauren perused the various cassette tapes that were scattered about my car. While doing so, she cracked jokes about how I probably listened to classical music, for which she professed her distaste.[161] Eventually she asked me if I thought she and Amy "talked funny." Although I said "no," they smiled and acknowledged how they "talked

[161] She expressed approbation, however, when she discovered a tape by a punk band called "The Fucking Police."

hillbilly." When I inquired if I talked funny, both vigorously nodded. "You speak all proper," Amy complained. Lauren chimed in that I would have to "stop doing that."

At the same time that participants challenged the axes on which cultural capital was defined and diffused, they worked toward the construction of an alternative status system. Because Central Appalachia was a distinctive region—by way of both organic processes and discursive reification[162]—a distinctive "field" had formed within it for organizing status relations (Bourdieu 1977). Due to its somewhat oppositional relationship to the "town," tastes, preferences, practices, and dispositions that might have conferred status within the dominant culture often reduced status within Shale's cultural field. Similarly, preferences, practices, and dispositions that might have signified a lack of taste in the dominant culture actually enhanced status within the local field. Sarah Thornton (1996) refers such practices and tastes as "subcultural capital."

I identified several types of subcultural capital during my study. They took both embodied (e.g. knowledge and disposition) and objectified (e.g. material artifacts) forms. Among them were religious capital (managed displays of religious reverence, such as speaking in tongues, performing faith healings, exhibiting knowledge of the bible, and memorizing hymns); occupational capital (holding a "real" job that involving manual labor, especially mining); and country capital (knowledge of the regional flora and fauna, prowess as a hunter, knowledge of regional history/lore, and so on). Desmond (2009) has observed a similar phenomenon. His study of wildland firefighters describes how "country competence" enhances the status of working class men who live and work in rural areas.[163]

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[162] In the sense that it has been stereotyped and stigmatized by local elites, urban outsiders and the national media.
[163] Because elite and middle-class residents possessed a degree of cultural capital—and sometimes contributed to cultural stereotyping themselves—it was primarily poor and lumpen individuals who participated in this "field" and used this technique of stigma management.

A second—and contrary—technique of stigma management involved excluding the county from hillbilly stereotypes. This was done by way of a "spatial fix." It involved pointing to places that were "worse" than Shale County, i.e. places where "real hillbillies" lived. Lauren, for example, frequently chastised Amy's home county, Coal County, which was located about an hour east of Shale. While Shale was only "ten years behind Lexington," she claimed that Coal County was "twenty years behind." "It's really bad over there," she insisted, asserting that "80 percent of girls are molested" and "everyone is on SSI." In comparison, she depicted Shale County as comparatively tranquil—a place devoid of the ostensible backwardness that prevailed in other Appalachian localities. As such, she told me that if I wanted to talk to some "real hillbillies," I should conduct my study in Coal County. Indeed, residents have employed this stigma management technique for years. In an 1899 *New York Times* special report regarding Shale, the reporters notes how residents advised him to visit two other cites if he "desired to find a really 'bad' town," noting how their own town was "not 'bad.'"

A variant of this tactic involved appealing to time—that is to say, employing a "temporal fix." In this case, residents managed stigma by conveying the county's problems as things of the past. They accepted stereotypes and stigmas as true, but argued that the county had undergone a transformation. Indeed, the 2004 anti-drug march marked the focal point of this transformation for most individuals who embraced this technique. These participants argued that the march had effected a dramatic transformation in the county's history. Their commentary took the form of a narrative. For generations, they claimed, Shale was a godless and immoral place devoid of hope and opportunity. However, when "God came to town," as Adam and Sam liked to say, innumerable transformations began to occur: The political situation improved, the environment

prospered, drug addiction attenuated, community participation increased, and hope returned. As Adam attests:

> That day we had that march, something really, really happened. And it's kind of hard to grasp if you weren't here, but me being here, and knowing the hopelessness and all the stuff that had gone on before…something did happen that day. And we've been changed. The attitudes of people have been changed. We've been changed from what we used to be into what we're going to be. That's the change. And I've seen literally hundreds of people get free of drugs and alcohol. I've seen families put back together, flowers along the sides of the roads and new signs go up, and a new kind of pride that's undergirding that…I went downtown one day and there was a bunch of people, and they were cleaning other peoples' windows, washing the coal dust off of the buildings. And we weren't that dusty little coal mining town that we used to be, we were brightening up…And everyone was going "wow," something's happening…
>
> Everyone that lives here knows that we lived in dark times. I believe that the march was the focal point of our history. That all our history—all of our history—just came together like in a big long V, and at that moment in time, God changed us forever. And it all cumulated on that day at that moment. You know it was an appointed time in our community's destiny. For God to do something and to change us. And I believe he has.

In his testimony, Adam does not dispute the negative connotations that had become associated with Shale and its residents. Instead, he contended that through the power of God, they had been transcended and redeemed—that the "dark times" depicted by outsiders were done and gone.

A final variant of the exclusion tactic took the form of a "social fix." Clearly aware of the stigma attached to her social position, Lauren not only attempted to exclude Shale County from the hillbilly category but attempted to personally exclude herself from it.[164] She accomplished this by demeaning other people as "hillbillies" while implying that she was different. Nearly every time that we hung out, Lauren told me phantasmal stories about the "crazy hillbillies" who inhabited Shale County.[165] Shortly before heading out to run errands one day, for example, she embarked on a tirade about the mental unsoundness of the county's

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[164] Church goers often embraced this stigma management device as well by way of their missionary work. Traveling to developing nations, their post-mission debriefings, which oftentimes were published in the local paper, frequently attested to the terrible conditions that prevailed in the sites that they visited, noting that they were lucky to live in the United States.

[165] As this demonstrates, stigma management techniques were sometimes contradictory. Despite characterizing Shale as "not that bad," Lauren frequently indicted the Shale Countians with whom we interacted as unworthy.

populace. "If you've seen one hillbilly, you've seen them all" she impugned. As we walked out of her apartment and toward my car, we caught our neighbor urinating in the bushes. Turning to me, she smiled: "You see!" Similarly, when we arrived at the grocery story, we passed a truck that was parked in the lot. It had a larger sticker emblazoned across the windshield that read "heaven or hell." Lauren pointed to it and smiled: "You see, they're all idiots!"

Lauren seemed to intuitively know when her own thoughts and behavior marked her as a "hillbilly." Suspecting that I would look upon those attributes with disdain, she compensated by taking measures to distance herself from them. While driving into town one day, for example, she asked me a questioned about my car. I mentioned that it had low mileage, as I mostly bicycled at home. Lauren looked more than a bit amused. She turned to Amy and asked what she thought would happen if I tried to ride my bike in Shale County. Amy began giggling. "These hillbillies would run you off the road! They'd be wondering what's wrong with this weirdo," Lauren exclaimed. After Amy stopped laughing, Lauren made a serious face. "These hillbillies are stupid though; it's smart to ride a bike!" It was clear that her comments were intended to appease me however—that she was speaking from the standpoint of her double consciousness. Because Lauren knew that her sincere tastes, feelings and thoughts were inappropriate in the eyes of an outsider, she took measures to distance herself from them.

On another occasion, I asked Lauren a question about the police. Her sanitized textbook answer surprised me. She described how we needed police in order to protect people, enforce laws and maintain order. Nonetheless, I took her at her word. About a week later, however, she turned to me and said—ostensibly out of the blue—"You asked me a question a few days ago: Does everyone hate the law?" Chuckling, she nodded, "yeah, everyone around here hates the law." She then described her own antipathy toward the police, noting how they treated "people

like [her]" in a brutal and authoritarian fashion. She discussed how they searched their cars, slammed them up against hoods and spoke to them in a derogatory way.[166]

Lauren's initial response to my question was telling. She knew that "hating the law" was a telltale sign of her hillbilly identity. She thus knew that to answer my question honestly would be to provide more fuel for stereotyping and to sabotage her own identity. Lauren, as such, always tried to meet me on my own terms; she always tried to cover up the collective identity that generations of stereotyping had spoiled. Her impossible attempts to do so, from all that I could tell, proved to be a very painful and self-stultifying process. She knew that people like me viewed almost all that she thought and said as evidence of her inferiority, and she knew that her attempts at compensation forced her to live a lie that no one believed.[167]

Given the tribulations of the "social fix," a final technique of stigma management involved playing into hillbilly stereotypes for one's own amusement. In 1895—nearly 120 years ago—Minister J.T. Wilds' noted how:

> Mountain people used outsiders' expectations of native ignorance for their own ends, for they are '[some] of the keenest minds and sharpest wits…[and] are forever hoodwinking strangers and commenting among themselves upon the ignoramuses who come from the cities ready to believe everything they hear (quoted in Harkin 2004, p.41).

Shale Countians continued to exploit outside expectations of ignorance in the present day. A very funny man who worked at the laundry mat, for instance, told me a story about his experience serving in the Vietnam War (he took an immediate liking to me and enjoyed telling stories whenever I came in to wash my clothes). He groused about how "the northerners" in his unit oftentimes asked ignorant and offensive questions about life in Kentucky. He noted, as

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[166] As we approached our destination (we were in the car), we passed a federal building, which Lauren proposed that we "blow up." Amy weighed in that we would never get away. Lauren, with a confidently defiant on her face, noted how no one would ever catch her.

[167] This very much paralleled the subjects in Fanon's (1967) study of colonial subjugation: "The black man has two dimensions: One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question" (p.17).

such, how he "liked to fuck with them." He explained how he had told his comrades that "*Deliverance* was nothing compared to what I do back home."[168] With a cackle of disdain, he added: "I never bothered to tell them that I'd been all over the world."

Indeed, participants sometimes exploited my own ignorance. While conducting an interview at Shale County's Historical Society, for example, a man interrupted and asked the interviewee what we talking about. I had thought that the interview was going quite well at this point, but the interviewee replied, in a voice dripping with subdued disdain: "He wants to know about hillbillies." She then proceeded to relate what she believed I wanted to hear: All the age-old stereotypes.

These occurrences sometimes made it difficult to ascertain the meaning and intention of participants' rhetoric. While hanging out with Lauren and Amy one afternoon, for example, Lauren got on the topic of Afghanistan. Commencing a short diatribe, she stated that she "hates Afghans…because they want to blow this country up." She then proceeded into a sweeping critique of Islam, asserting that "in their religion they are rewarded for suicide bombing… they think it *pleases* Jesus!" She lamented how Al Qaeda was out to destroy the country and predicted that we would soon enter a war with Pakistan. As a coda, she added that if George Bush was still president "we would have already bombed them two or three years ago…I don't know if *Osama*, I mean *Obama*, will do it….that nigger!"

This incident created a strange dynamic between us—one that made both of us uncomfortable and lengthened the social distance between us. Lauren's racist commentary offended my commitment to tolerance, equality and social justice, both as a person and as a sociologist. But my mortified response aggravated a different line of cleavage. It placed Lauren, a poor, lower class white drug addict, in the condescending gaze of a middle-class, urban

[168] *Deliverance* is a 1972 horror film that depicted the ostensible backwardness of the North Georgia Mountains.

academic, making her acutely aware of the demeaning way in which privileged outsiders view "yesterday's people" (Weller 1965). Indeed, immediately after the comment, Lauren began to explain how she did not mean what she said, and how she was "just joking." She added: "but that's what *these hillbillies* think…I mean, that's how *they* talk, they call Obama a 'nigger.'" As usual, she thus resorted to her "social fix."

Although Lauren attempted to save face, occurrences such as these perhaps brought into the open what I refused to acknowledge: that despite my progressive intentions, I continued to view my subjects, at least on some level, as "ignorant hillbillies"—that my presence in Shale County was in many ways attributable to these subconscious beliefs in the first place. As Macleod (1996) notes:

> The research relationship…is inextricably bound up with the phenomena under analysis: class…education, opportunity, and marginality. In a sense, the subjects are inscribed in the object: The interview itself is a miniature realization of the broader topic under investigation (p.146).[169]

The intolerant remarks that Lauren and a handful of other participants sometimes made usually prompted me to resort to reflexive stereotypes. While not necessarily responding in force, I would become angry about what I believed to be ignorant and offensive viewpoints. But did Lauren and others really *believe* in what they said? Perhaps. But we must also take seriously Fanon's (1963) contention that oppressed populations who are the victims of society-wide prejudices and stereotypes possess a sophisticated understanding of those who exercise power over them.

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[169] Given this reality, I eventually began to alter how I spoke and the things that I said in order to minimize the symbolic violence that existed between certain research participants and me. While hanging out with Cindy one day, for example, I mentioned how I had recently been in Denver for a conference. "Denver, Colorado," she exclaimed. She said related how she had always wanted to go, and asked what it was like. Eventually we began discussing travel, and Cindy, looking down at her feet, confessed that she had never been outside of Shale County. Situations such as these made me reluctant to reveal certain personal information—such as where I had been, where I had worked, and whom I knew. I learned that many of the personal statements that I uttered separated us, cementing poor subjects' statuses as "hillbillies" and mine as an academic. I discovered that all of my own identity work was at their expense—that many of the things that I was cemented what they were not.

While I doubt that Lauren and others viewed me as an "oppressor," I do suspect that they looked upon me as another outsider eager to capitalize upon the defamation of their community.[170] This no doubt influenced how they interacted with me, precipitating forms of symbolic resistance that sought to use subaltern knowledge at my expense. Like Minister Wilds, House (2008) describes how Appalachians oftentimes exploit the prejudices that outsiders harbor in his book about Clay County, Kentucky:

> It's one of the poorest counties in America. Name your category, in most cases we're right up there near the top. You'll find Clay Countians who take a perverse pride in that. Or you think you will. What you're seeing is a sense of irony so fine-tuned you'll be left staring at something some Clay Countian has said that has him and his cronies chuckling inside but looking at you with a gaze as blank as a cow's. While you're thinking they're ignorant hillbillies, they're thinking what a gullible sort you are (p. 20).

It is possible that participants like Lauren, in the offensive remarks that they uttered, said what they meant but did not mean what they said (Hebidge 1979).

This is not to say that the prejudiced commentary of Lauren and others should be condoned or that it was insincere. It is simply to say that given the uneven nature of our relations, it requires careful contextualization in order to determine what was meant. It is possible that Lauren and others made certain remarks because that is what they believed that I expected them to say—or, at an even deeper level, because that is what they wanted me to believe about them for their own entertainment.

8.8 Outsiders, Double-Consciousness and Legitimation

No matter how residents individually managed stigma, their sensitivity with regard to the county's reputation was so pervasive that it was codified into material culture. The local newspaper's motto was "A newspaper for a good community." After providing a history that detailed some of the city's historical problems, Valley Town's official website made the point

[170] Shale County appears in the media often, and it is almost never depicted favorably. Reports focus on the county's drug epidemic, its poor level of public health, and its political corruption.

that the city should "take a back seat to no one in the Commonwealth." Valley Town's strategic plan, codified in December 2013, similarly stated: "It's time to write a different story—a story that is positive and brings people from surrounding areas, maybe even the entire world, to Valley Town to witness the transformation that is taking place." The county website carried the same tone. Enumerating several changes that had occurred over the past decade, it asserted that "Shale County is no longer at the front door knocking; the county has entered the twenty-first century with a new vision forming a new shape." The city website, county website, newspaper, and strategic plan, in short, all featured pre-emptive defenses that responded to a generalized other who looked down upon Shale County. They thus emphasized how the county had changed, how it had moved into the 21st Century, and how "good people" lived there.

Indeed, throughout my fieldwork I encountered the near constant refrain that "good people live here." Almost everyone with whom I spoke made comments like "there are a lot of good people in Shale County," and "there are a lot of good people here too." Participants often remarked on their "goodness." On several occasions, usually after rationalizing her drug use, Lauren, for example, stated: "I do good things too!" This rhetoric was yet another instantiation of her double consciousness—of the fact that residents perceived other people to hold a negative evaluation of them. They thus experienced a need to preemptively redeem their sense of self-worth.

More specifically, people emphasized that "there were good people in Shale County" for two reasons. First, because they experienced poverty as shame (Portelli 2010), they interpreted statements about the area's economic distress as insults. To tell a person that she was poor was not simply to describe her economic standing, it was to demean her social status and integrity. This phenomenon comes across well in a story that Sam told me about a religious organization

that had contacted him in order to provide food relief to poor families. He ultimately rescinded their offer for assistance due to their intention to document local families who were living extreme poverty:

> Our church had a food pantry and a medical clinic…We did a lot of stuff. [The organization] contacted us, and agreed to come and help our people. And we got as far as [the public swimming pool], and they were bringing lots of tractor trailers, but what they really wanted to do is they wanted to pick out 10 of our very, very worst families, and go into their homes and show all of that, and basically it's just exposing them to be able to raise more money later on, and we just said, you know, we appreciate, you know: We know you all help people all over the world, but we've had too much of that, so no thanks. We just don't want that to happen…You know, there's a lot of half-truth that makes us all look like that. And you know there's a lot of poor people that are good people, but it makes them look like the poor people are all just really idiots, you know?

Shale Countians did not want to be known as "poor people." Given the connotations that had become attached to Appalachian poverty during modernization and the War on Poverty—ignorance, backwardness, primitiveness, etc.—they understood poverty to signify "other," perhaps even wickedness. Reactions to a 2005 report regarding the county's economic distress were telling. The report described Shale County as the sixth poorest county in the nation. Many residents reacted to the news coverage with anger, lamenting how the report, according to one magistrate, "give[s] Shale a bad name." Referencing the report as a fiscal court meeting, he groused:

> We have so much more to offer here than other counties that ranked better than us. We have two major car dealerships, two lumber companies, two big banks…if things are that bad here, how can this county support so many businesses? Go to some of these other counties and see how little they have compared to us—it just doesn't add up.

The state senator, who had attended the meeting, also weighed in: "The figures can be really deceiving. They don't take into account the fact that it really doesn't cost all that much to live here compared with places like Louisville and Lexington." The magistrate replied that the media should take that into consideration: "We're getting a bad rap. It makes it really difficult to

promote the county. People read the papers and come away thinking that we've got nothing but major problems." The collective response to the report, as such, speaks to the shame that many felt about the county's poverty, and how that shame encourages citizens to downplay the area's problems.[171]

As opposed to being "poor," they sought recognition as good, ordinary Americans. They wanted to be viewed in the same fashion as any other locality instead of as an impoverished bastion of corruption. As Chester Palmetto, the Judge Executive, attested at the end of his interview:

> I couldn't see why anybody wouldn't want to come to our county and live—the exception being the job situation. Because…we have really good citizens. They're not…People say, "well, down there in Shale County—I don't know, all those people, bad people down there" and all that. I feel like, no, there may be things that happened. Anywhere you go, you're going to find the same way. Any county, I'm not caring where you're at, you're going to find the same situation…They think…in eastern Kentucky all our houses are on stilts…Everybody here draws their check…That's the way they think about us…the media away from here portrays us like that we're not up with everybody else. Now we may not be completely on top of the world there, but I feel like our county here does a pretty good job.

Dawn echoed his thoughts at the end of her own interview:

> PL: What would you say is maybe the most important issue or challenge that people—in other words, what's on their minds and what do they want to improve or address more than anything else?
>
> D: I would say that [they wish outside] people would know—that the world would know—that there are decent, good citizens in this area…I would say that's what hurts people the most, that what people know is only bad, and so they would draw the conclusion that that's all you have in here. I would say that would be the most thing on their mind, that the world would be aware that the community is filled with a lot of really good people.

Benjamin concluded his interview this way as well:

> B: There's a lot more good people out there like me than just me.

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[171] They do not necessarily deny the area's problems. They know that those problems exist. They simply resent the negative attention that media coverage regarding poverty brings.

PL: Oh, yeah, I know. Everybody I've met has been—I've met a lot of good people.

B: Yeah, there really are a lot of good people around here.

This sentiment—and desire for positive recognition—had strong historical roots. The *New York Times* special report published in 1899 commenced: "Shale County knows that it has a bad name. The visitor finds that knowledge affecting people who have never participated in the brutal assassinations that have characterized its two feuds of recent date." Even 115 years ago, ordinary Shale Countians believed that the ill deeds committed by elites negatively reflected onto them. The report, with uncanny similarity, describes how interviewees denied the scope of the county's feuding violence and emphasized how "good people" inhabited the area.

Altogether, the combination of holding personal relationships with corrupt officeholders and resenting sensationalized "outsider" accounts of the region caused many people to internalize descriptions of the county's corruption as personal affronts. The most common response to calls for reform and change, as such, was the argument that local problems existed everywhere—that they were not unique to Shale County or even Eastern Kentucky. Interpreting allegations of corruption, drug addiction and so on as critiques against mountaineers themselves, many residents viewed them as yet one more effort to single out and damn the area. As Maria explains:

> When the sentences for the Shale Eight were announced, a lot of people were mad and thought that those sentences were really tough sentences, and that it was unfair—Shale County was being picked on. So again, they went into that whole kind of thing—Shale County being picked on by the rest of the world…but [it was like] these guys stole your vote! Do you care about that? I heard one guy on the radio—on one of the local talk shows—say: "You know, they shouldn't have to gone to jail. They're good men and women. *I know them*; one of them give me some tomatoes one time." [Trails off into laughter].

Maria illuminates the responses that the prosecution of local officials typically elicited—ambivalence, if not anger, rather than celebration. Beyond "knowing them," which resulted in the belief that they were "good men and women," Maria's commentary reveals how residents interpreted the prosecutions not as an attack on abusive local officials but rather as an indictment against their county—as a case of outsiders "picking on Shale County again."

The inclination to defend local officials paralleled the way in which many Black Americans mobilized around O.J. Simpson during his murder trial. Regardless of the case's facts, many viewed the charges as another instance of a white-dominated legal establishment targeting a Black man and indicting Black culture. As Perry and Delpit (1998) argue:

> At the close of the twentieth century, African Americans have become quite adept at reading the media, its text and subtext. We did not need anybody to tell us what the O.J. Simpson case was really about. We read its coded meanings. In spite of the mainstream media's hegemonic narrative, we knew the narrative surrounding the case and its aftermath was not simply or primarily about O.J. Simpson, a batterer…We didn't even need clarity about the person O.J. Simpson to deconstruct the narrative. We didn't have erase from our consciousness the tenuous relationship to the Black community and to Black women before we would distrust the police and the judicial system (p.6).

In a similar vein, Toni Morrison (1997) remarked of the trial:

> The official story has thrown Mr. Simpson into a representative role. He is not an individual who underwent and was acquitted from a murder trial. He has become the whole race needing correction, incarceration, censoring, silencing: The race that needs its civil rights disassembled; the race that is sign and symbol of domestic violence...This is the consequence and function of official stories: To impose the will of a dominant culture (p. xxviii).

In Shale's case, the local elite became a "sign and symbol" of Appalachian corruption, dysfunction, poverty, backwardness, and social problems. Despite the elite's tenuous relationship to poor and middle-class residents, they became representatives of a whole people on trial by mainstream America. Many people believed that the media coverage surrounding the

trials, which harped on the lurid and spectacular scope of the corruption, served to discredit its inhabitants rather than to achieve justice (they were probably right in many regards).

Despite writing numerous columns over the years that decried Shale's corruption and underdevelopment, as such, a regular contributor to the local paper became defensive when outsiders started to cover the corruption trials:

> What bothers me most is they always bring up Shale County, and it's no worse than anywhere else and not nearly as bad as most. We just always get the nice impartial northern press…why won't the state just leave us to our own destruction? We don't need any help.

In another op-ed written, which was published shortly after the above piece, a different writer responded to federal's judge's claim that a "culture of corruption" existed in Shale County:

> In response to your concern of the culture and corruption in Shale County, I personally think your remarks were most unprofessional. For one thing the word culture indicated every Shale County citizen, and as you well know, any knowledge of any crime warrants conspiracy. Therefore, if you can't prove that all citizens in Shale County had knowledge of a crime of any kind, then sir, you owe an apology to the citizens of Shale County.

The writer, like many residents, took the judge's comments personally. He felt that they indicted him, his loved ones and others who had no involvement in or awareness of illicit dealings in the county. It also shows how sensitivity over the county's negative reputation impaired residents' capacity acknowledge and confront the area's social problems. Elites used this sensitivity in order to organize critical commentary out of public discourse.

At the dedication of an administration building that was erected during my field work, for example, a local magistrate prefaced his dedication remarks by voicing his discontent over a corruption story that had been published in the previous week's paper:

> We all should be proud of Shale County. We have a lot of negative things going on, and sometimes it hurts to pick up the paper and see all those negative things on the front page. We need to change [this]. We need to be positive and look forward to the future. If we

> do that and come together, maybe we'll have more days like today and more events like this.

Another magistrate who was present stated "[he] just used my speech. The occurrence shows how elites and ordinary people worked to organize concern with local problems—especially corruption—out of public discourse. Capitalizing upon residents' sensitivity with regard to their perceived negative reputation in the eyes of outsiders, elites frequently admonished the paper for publishing "negative" stories. They emphasized the need to publish positive stores and to "look forward to the future."

Thus, in sum, those who organized citizen activism in the county often received flack for their efforts. As Sam told me:

> David and I talk a lot about...We were naive enough to think—because we were trying to help Shale County—that everybody would love us. It was just the opposite...we'd have people say you guys have destroyed what little economy we've got...I went to a furniture store in Lexington one time, and I wrote a check [from Shale County]. He said, "so what's going on down there?" And I said, "what do you mean?" He said "we used to have people come in here all the time from Shale County and pay $10,000, $15,000 in cash for furniture. That don't happen no more." I said, well, it's probably because it's drug money and it's kind of drying up now...Things have changed a lot." He said, "well, it's really hurt our business, and this is in Lexington."

Besides disrupting the local economy, those who organized the anti-drug and anti-corruption efforts were accused of bringing more bad press to the county, destroying the families of those involved in the conspiracies that were prosecuted, and facilitating the arrests and prosecutions of numerous local people who were well-liked within the county

8.9 Outsiders: The Unintended Politics of Subalternity

Fifty years ago, in his flagship treatise *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Harry Caudill (1963) wrote: "The American public is prone to think of [Appalachians] as quaint hillbillies, a concept sociologists have neglected to explain or explore." Beyond engendering a painful

double consciousness among those living in the region, the hillbilly concept—and the stigma associated with it—ultimately contributed the reproduction of existing social and political arrangements.

Duncan states that the rural poor "know they are seen as a distinct, inferior group" (p.9). Fitchen (1981) has observed this tendency as well, expounding on the "corrosive stereotypes" that afflict rural populations (p.190). She notes how the rural poor:

> Cry out for individual recognition," how "those who are blanketed by these stereotypes despair of ever being able to convince the outside world that they do not deserve the negative judgment. They feel that every action they take is interpreted through the lens of stigma. They know that the stereotypes precede them and their children in their every foray into the outside world (p.190, 191).

"The most devastating effect of the stereotypes," she however writes, "is the degree to which they may be internalized by their referents" (p.191). She notes how some people "appear to have partially accepted the stereotypes as fact, to have internalized the judgments and turned the condemnation inward. Often the damage is done early in life, during the child's first encounters in the larger world, and affects all his subsequent interactions with it" (p.191). These stereotypes also contribute to the level of suspicion and hostility that the rural sometimes exhibit toward "outsiders."

Political and industry elites incessantly capitalized upon this insider/outsider distinction for their own benefit. Arnett (1978) observed this throughout Shale's War on Poverty. During the 1960s, elites dismissed organizers as trouble-makers and communists from the outside who sought to impose into local life for purposes of exploitation. This strategy worked well. The county's historical relationship with outside reformers, after all, made it easy for elites to discredit them, no matter how well-intentioned they were. This was because bringing attention

to and confronting local problems ran against the grain of constructing a positive subaltern identity in the face of widespread stigma.

In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Frantz Fanon (1967) writes that:

> There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect…However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white (p.12).

Fanon argues that "if there is an inferiority complex [among the colonized], it is the outcome of a double process: Primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority" (p.13). The purpose of his study—and broader scholarly project—was to "try to discover the various attitudes that the Negro adopts in contact with white civilization." He argued that "the juxtaposition of the white and black races ha[d] created a massive psychoexistential complex" which he sought to destroy by analyzing it (p.14).

Although marked by various dissimilarities, the nature of the black/white relation that Fanon analyzed paralleled the rural/urban, Appalachian/American relation that I have examined in this dissertation. Years of economic exploitation and cultural stigmatization had engendered what amounted to a collective inferiority complex among the Shale Countians who participated in my study. Having been othered, denigrated and deprived, they sought recognition as ordinary Americans. This meant denying events and occurrences that set them apart from outsiders—namely, poverty, underdevelopment, and political dysfunction. As Fanon (1961) states:

> When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given…species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich" (p.40).

A similar situation held in Shale County: You are poor because you are a hillbilly, you are a hillbilly because you are poor. Shale Countians contested this double relation. If not denied, occurrences that marked difference were normalized. Shale Countians argued that their problems did not define them as unique—that they in fact existed everywhere.

The desire to confront and resist cultural othering was very valid, and the contentions that many residents made with regard to negative press about local problems were often true. Corruption and poverty did exist everywhere. Media and government representatives did convey them as uniquely Appalachian problems in order to deny their existence elsewhere and to bolster the self-concepts of those living in "mainstream America." Indeed, as Eller (2008) notes, mainstream conceptions of progress depend upon the "othering" of Appalachia and other subordinate groups—that is to say, on Orientalism (Said 1979).

Yet, the dysfunctions that research participants downplayed still existed. And gauging from most objective indicators, they existed on a higher order than many other areas, through no fault of Shale Countians themselves. The desire to deny difference and construct a valued collective identity thus conflicted with efforts to confront and redress local problems. Whether elites consciously capitalized upon residents' sensitivity to negative press and their desire to achieve recognition as ordinary Americans, or whether they too possessed the same goals, remains indeterminable. What is unambiguous, however, is that the desire—perhaps need—for collective affirmation served the interests of local elites. It resulted in ill-will toward well-intentioned reformers, stunted the public sphere by eliminating debate around social problems, defined harmful deviance down, and created shared interests between groups whose class and party interests were opposed. Moreover, it resulted in painful and ineffective identity work.

As the existence of a multiplicity of stigma management techniques reveals, Shale Countians had not determined how to successfully combat the Orientalism with which outsiders assailed them. Their techniques typically involved self-denial, self-censoring and an effort to reconcile with a mainstream culture marked by hateful disposition toward cultural difference. As Fanon (1967) writes:

> Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (p.18).

The cultural recognition that Shale Countians sought depended not just on the denial of undesirable forms of difference, such as poverty and corruption, but on all that they were—that is to say their religious practices, modes of speech, local mores, and so on.

Indeed, some research participants, as I noted, felt that they could not tell me how they really felt about the topics that I raised. Lauren, for instance, believed that her positive appraisal required that she suppress her thoughts and experiences vis-à-vis the police. As Haley (1966) writes in the introduction to Malcom X's autobiography:

> The Negro had been trained to dissemble and conceal his real thoughts, as a matter of survival. …The Negro only tells the white man what he believes the white man wishes to hear…[Malcom X believed] that the art of dissembling reached a point where even Negroes cannot truthfully say they understand what their fellow Negroes believe (p.xi).

A situation in which open discussion—and the free-expression of one's thoughts and beliefs regarding progress—became impossible was indeed a poor situation in which to be. My study thus suggests that denial of difference—especially as it compromised the ability to confront local problems—exacerbated the double consciousness that many residents experienced. This is not to say that essential differences divided Shale Countians—nor any Appalachians—from

"mainstream America." It is to say that difference has been reified through processes of colonialism and Orientalism.

Malcolm X (1965) believed that "freedom, independence and self-respect could never be achieved by the Negro in America" (p.2). Post-colonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon (1961, 1967) made a similar argument, contending that the colonized cannot integrate into colonial society. Their freedom and self-worth, to the contrary, required the destruction of the colonial relation. Du Bois' (1994) writing on racial identity underscored this point as well. Collectively, the point is that a stigmatized and subjugated group will never achieve a measure of happiness and freedom so long as they remain in the purview of the dominant gaze and the repressive institutions that accompany it.

In the economic and cultural context of modernization, we can thus think of Appalachia and America—perhaps even rural and urban—as "opposed, but not in the service of a higher unity." As Fanon (1963) argues: "They both follow the principal of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible" (p.38-9). This is because rich urban areas depend—both materially and culturally—on the economic exploitation and cultural "othering" of places like Appalachia. The exploitation, degradation and stereotyping of Appalachia is a necessary condition for the material abundance and apparent cultural sophistication of the outside world. It must be pitted against "rural underdevelopment" and the ostensible "idiocy of rural life" that prevails among "hillbillies" (Marx 1990).

As Fanon (1963) writes:

> The settler's town is a strongly built town…It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt, and the garbage cans swallow all the leavings, unseen, unknown and hardly thought about…The settler's town is a well-fed town, an easygoing town; it's belly is always full of good things. The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners (p.39).

To the contrary,

> The town belonging to the colonized people…is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how…The native town is a hungry town…a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire…The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession-all manner of possession: To sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place." It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place (p.39).

Fanon's contrasting descriptions of the appearance and mood of settler/native towns could not more accurately describe the differences between rich urban areas and poor rural areas. Mountain people also expressed the cultural attitude described by Fanon. As this chapter and the previous chapter reveal, outrage and envy vis-à-vis rural inequality abounded. Shale Countians bemoaned how other areas—particularly northern and urban areas—received positive press coverage and preferential government treatment. They articulated a definite sense of conflict and opposition.

In a famous letter that he wrote to his nephew, James Baldwin (1963) said:

> The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority, but to their inhumanity and fear.

Other writers who have explored the psychology of racial and colonial domination—such as Du Bois, Fanon, Memmi, and Malcolm X—argue that the oppressed cannot integrate into or live up to dominant expectations. They thus advocated either separatism or abolition of unequal relation.

In a sense, this suggests that, unfortunately, one the most effective means for confronting the psycho-social consequences of internal colonialism and rural inequality—and the processes

of local political reproduction that result from them—rests somewhat outside the control of Shale Countians. The key, it seems to me, is not to deny difference nor to downplay social problems, but to employ education in order to eradicate the urban/rural, Appalachian/American binary that operates in dominant discourse. The key, in other words, is render "hillbilly stereotypes" and rural exoticism culturally and politically incorrect. As an interviewee in Eastman and Schrock's (2008) study of southern rock musicians asserted: "The southern white man is the only person that you can lampoon in the mainstream media and still be politically correct in doing so" (p.207).

The following individual's efforts are instructive for what needs to happen. While conducting my fieldwork, CBS announced its plans to film a new reality television series poking fun at Appalachians. A local writer published an op-ed lambasting its offensive and insensitive nature:

> Find a poor, uneducated, naïve Appalachian family, put them under camera surveillance in a mansion in Beverly Hills, and call it "The Real Beverly Hillbillies...It's not that we can't take a joke. In fact, we've lived on these rocky, mined-out, farmed-out hillsides a long time now. If it hadn't been for a good sense of humor, we probably wouldn't have made it this long. We laugh at ourselves all the time, for our human frailties, for our idiosyncrasies, both individual and cultural, and for our lack of sophistication in certain situations. But that's different. Making fun of yourself and the group you are a part of is different from somebody else doing it, somebody from the outside looking in—and down. Taking a joke is one thing. Being a joke on national television so a big corporation can make money off of it is something else."

Expounding upon the many Appalachians had expressed about the idea for the show, she closed by state that she hoped that "some people might start to think twice before telling one more tired hillbilly, redneck, or briar joke."

8.10 The 2004 March: Fear, Coercion and Political Participation

The sections above describe the production of consent in relation to local political malfeasance. They describe, in other words, the factors that encouraged ordinary Shale

Countians to identity with local elites, withhold cooperation from reformers and investigators, and defend corrupt officeholders against allegations of wrongdoing. All of these factors—personalism, patronage, a stunted public sphere, and distrust of outsiders—facilitated the social and cultural reproduction of existing political arrangements. While consent played the primary role in maintaining existing arrangements, however, not all citizens consented to the structure of the local political system. Indeed, many people—like Maria, Alexander, Benjamin, Mike, Wade, Cheryl, and Tara, and David, Sam and Adam in a different vein—expressed discontent, even outrage, against the corrupt nature of local politics. All engaged in political activity in order confront it. Coercion and fear, however, often kept them in check. If it did not, it certainly threatened to so, thereby forming a sizeable barrier that had to be overcome on the road to political participation.

In Shale County, 2004 was a big year. Feeling that the county had reached a low point in terms of drug-related crime and political corruption, several local pastors began to organize a wave of citizen activism. These efforts began with biweekly concerned citizens' meetings and a weekly prayer group. Anyone seeking comfort, the desire to vent their political frustrations, and, more importantly, a desire to discuss ideas for rectifying longstanding social problems was encouraged to attend. The meetings grew in size, eventually generating standing room only assemblies of citizens who were enthusiastically speaking their minds about problems in the community and their eagerness to confront them.

As the concerned citizens' meetings continued to grow in attendance and vigor, anti-narcotics organizations—perhaps responding to mounting public pressure—began to make progress in terms of arresting small time drug dealers. More importantly, the concerned citizens' groups began to plan for a sizeable march against drug abuse and the political corruption that

protected and profited from it. The idea was to mobilize the whole county to stand in solidarity in order to express the desire for change. Despite nay saying, violent threats, and inclement weather, more than 3,500 residents from the community turned out on the day of the march in order to confront local problems. While the collective memory of the march's efficacy and grander are sometimes exaggerated, it doubltless communicated a powerful message of refusal to the local power structure and the criminals associated with it.

The energy and empowerment that the march generated, more importantly, led to a host of community initiatives, all of which sought to get drug pushers off of the street and to make local institutions accountable to the public will. A court watch to track and monitor drug cases was established; neighborhood watches were created to enhance perceptions of citizen security; drug prevention groups in the local schools were formed in order to intervene into the lives of youth; a successful effort to fund and build a multi-million dollar rehab center was carried out; heightened participation in the political process ensued; a local group began recording and broadcasting all public meetings in order to democratize the proceedings of local government; a citizens' for a fair election group was initiated; and a slate of new candidates with no history in local politics challenged powerful incumbents in subsequent elections. While all of these initiatives had limitations, and while they did not fully dismantle the prevailing power structure nor redress longstanding patterns of injustice and abuse, they gave many Shale residents, for the first time in years, a sense of hope and a feeling of inclusion. In other words, they gave the community a sense of optimism and made many people feel like they were part of something important.

These sentiments, I would argue, resulted in part from how the citizen groups organized social space in a way that engendered a thriving civil society. Before the pastors who initiated

the groups opened up their churches as meeting places for community discussion, there were few places in the county where citizens could congregate in order to air their political grievances. Many of the public spaces in Shale County had eroded during the previous decade. Several community stores that were once vibrant meeting places, as discussed in the previous chapter, had closed. The closings were exacerbated by the dearth of waged employment, which left many without regular political exchanges outside of the home. This was all significant, because when the social ties facilitated by regular work, union membership, and voluntary associations erode, so too does the capacity to mobilize in pursuit of public interests (Bell 2009).

Thus, creating public space for citizen discussion and debate was very important. Especially because elites, unlike many citizen, had always had the necessary resources to organize for their own ends. They had money, reliable transportation and officially sanctioned meeting places where they set the agenda, exerted control over participants, decided which issues were permissible and impermissible to address, and invoked supporting norms and rituals that lent an air of legitimacy to the process (Gaventa 1982). Even in informal arenas—high school sporting events, summer festivals and so on—local elites mobilized bias in a way that prevented genuinely open political discussion from occurring (for example, one could hardly discuss coal openly at public events, given that the industry gave token sponsorship to almost every pubic activity in the county). This allowed them to organize their efforts to maintain county control. The citizens groups were thus important steps in laying the foundations for progressive mobilization.

Yet, in spite of the optimism, social connections and bold civic participation that erupted in 2004, within a year most of the passion had begun to dwindle. While an FBI probe continued

the war against drug trafficking and corruption that citizens had begun, activism fell somewhat to the wayside. What happened? Why did the movement fizzle out?

When elites failed to cultivate the perception that their interests coincided with those of their constituents, they used intimidation in order to secure their will. This involved threatening violence upon those who defied them, ensnaring them in the legal apparatus, blacklisting them from local jobs, interfering with their government assistance benefits, and withholding municipal services. The threat of violence was very real and thus served as the primary coercive (that is to say, non-hegemonic) deterrent to activism. While most participants told me that intimations of violence typically remained at the level of threat, the county and region's legacy of political and drug-related violence usually served to enforce them.

As Billings and Blee's (2000) work illuminates, Shale County was home to one of the longest and most violent feuds in Central Appalachia's history. From the late 19th Century until the early 1930s, factionalism among the county's elite produced dramatic violence. As the "History" section of Valley Town's city website notes:

> By the end of the century Valley Town was the unchallenged capitol of violence in America, or at least it seemed that way as the little town became famous—or infamous—far beyond the borders of Shale County for the gun-play that seemed to be an everyday thing around town. Scores of newspaper articles in papers such as the *New York Times* created an image of runaway lawlessness in the town.

In all, between 100 and 150 individuals were estimated to have died in the feud-related violence. These figures—along with the body count that the region's violent labor movement produced—weighed heavily on collective memory, reminding residents of the consequences that dissent might bring.

They were reinforced by a renewal of violence during the 1990s and early 2000s. During this period, several high-profile political assassinations racked Eastern Kentucky. The following newspaper story, for example, describes Shale's 2002 election:

> Two candidates for sheriff were shot dead, a county clerk narrowly escaped a barrage of gunfire and absentee voting…had to be suspended after the crowds became rowdy and the sheriff suspected vote-buying. It has been a bloody campaign season in the hills of eastern Kentucky—one that has voters wondering whether it's safe to go to the polls on Tuesday…

The reporter went on to describe the specific incidents that played out in Shale, as well as two other counties in the area:

> [The] Shale County Clerk…was on the campaign trail on Sunday when a barrage of bullets hit his van. He leapt out and over a 15-metre embankment, then crawled into thick brush and trees to escape uninjured…"I counted 33 bullet holes in his vehicle," [the sheriff] said. "It was politically motivated. Someone was trying to kill the clerk." The same night, a private investigator working for [the clerk's] only opponent survived being shot six times as he drove on a highway. No one has been arrested in either attack.
>
> Harlan County sheriff's candidate Paul Browning was also out campaigning when he disappeared in March. Several days later, his body was found inside his burned-out pickup truck on a mountain road. Mr. Browning, a former sheriff who had spent three years in prison for conspiring to kill two local public officials in the early 1980s, had been shot in the head. In Pulaski County the following month, a sniper shot and killed Sheriff Sam Catron as he walked away from a political rally and fish fry attended by hundreds of people.

Political violence, as these vignettes demonstrate, was both real and routine. Not only political players but quotidian participants in the political process faced sanctions for failing to support the right candidates, express the right opinions and vote for the right policies.

Fear, as such, continued to curtail participation in the political process. As Dawn told me, many people felt that going to the polls on Election Day put one in harm's way:

> I talked to a man who said he carried a gun to election, because there have been people shot at Election Day. Election time around here is… violent, and it's corrupt. So you could see why a lot of the people simply don't go out to vote, because they just…they just figure you can't fight City Hall.

Knowledge of widespread vote-buying and election fraud reinforced the desire to withhold participation. Why risk one's life and livelihood, many thought, to vote in an election that was rigged?[172]

Proliferating drug violence, moreover, reinforced the culture of fear that had evolved around social and political resistance. Open drug dealing, widespread addiction and escalating overdose-related deaths constituted the most pressing local political issue for many residents. When residents voiced their concerns or cooperated with the police, they faced retaliation not just by elites,[173] but by local drug pushers. Indeed, drug dealers often employed brutal methods of retaliation against dissidents in order to deter cooperation with authorities.

Several years ago, as an example, a series of articles in the local paper covered the assault of three women in the county who were targeted for agreeing to give testimony in a criminal

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[172] Intimidation occurred even at ostensibly low-level meetings. For example, a local newspaper report detailed the results of a Water Association meeting that occurred in the county a few years ago. The Headline read: "Water Talks Boil Over: Clear Springs Men Say their Lives were Threatened in Wake of Water Association Meeting." The report notes how approximately 50 people turned out to the local elementary school for the annual Water Association meeting. The meeting featured "heated debate, impassioned pleas and a hotly contested election, and left two residents seeking criminal charges against individuals who allegedly issued death threats against them…Two men who raised several issues related to the operation of the water company, said they were accosted after the meeting and threatened with death." One of the men said: "This fellow said if we didn't hush up that we'd be killed and buried with that backhoe we were so worried about [an alleged reference to complaints that a water company backhoe was being used for private projects]." The men said that they would seek charges from the county attorney. Thus, as with ostensibly loftier political events—such as elections for local mayor, judge executive, etc.—residents who contested even low-level forms of corruption were intimidated—some even with death.

[173] Local elites often had a hand in the drug trade. The Assistant Police Chief, 911 Director and Mayor, for example, were indicted for conspiring to traffic approximately $1 million worth of illegal drugs. They also used their positions in order to protect local drug dealers. The former County Clerk, similarly, trafficked large quantities of marijuana, laundered money for a major regional drug dealer through a company that he owned, and used his resources and position in order to instruct FBI investigations of that dealer. Numerous local politicians illegally took money from local dealers, which they used to buy votes and corrupt elections. As the federal prosecutor for most of the local corruption cases stated in an interview: "Major cocaine and marijuana dealers admitted to buying votes to steal elections," with the result being "the corruption of American democracy." He states that "we believe that drug money did buy votes," asserting that the scheme involved "very extensive, organized criminal activity, involving hundreds of thousands of dollars, and in many cases that involve[d] drug money."

indictment. The women had witnessed a drug-related murder earlier that year. Fearing retaliatory consequences, none contacted the police. Eventually, prosecutors convinced two of them to testify. Thereafter, one was shot in the head and thrown in a creek by family members of the murderer. The other was severely assaulted. All six of her ribs were broken, and her throat was cut so deeply that her windpipe was visible when paramedics arrived. In short, she was left for dead. When she recovered, she told investigators that "she was [never] threatened to keep her mouth shut about the crime, but it was 'understood' she was not to talk to the authorities." The fear was implicit, and as the story exhibits, very merited.

Similar stories appeared local paper with regular frequency. They also surfaced as urban legends. David and Bruce, for example, told me a story about a man they knew who had had battery acid dumped into his ears for informing on drug dealer. A young man named Casey, who I met at the local park and became friends with, told me a story about a woman who, after informing on a dealer, was bound in barbed wire, stuffed into a filing cabinet and thrown into lake in order to drown. Although the veracity of such stories was usually difficult to verify, they had the definite effect of engendering fear.

Indeed, almost all of the individuals who spearheaded the 2004 anti-drug march told me that they had received threats by local power brokers. Shortly after commencing their efforts, the deputy director for Eastern Kentucky's regional anti-narcotics organization met with David, Sam and Adam in order to inform them that they were in danger. Noting how they had stirred controversy in the community, he advised them to remain vigilant against threats. As Adam told me:

> A: It brought a lot of heat. So much so that one of the deputy directors [of the anti-narcotics organization] came to see me and Sam and said: "Listen, I need to tell you some things." He said "things are really heated up here. People are losing their livelihood over drugs…And lives are being interrupted, and people; they don't care about

> you. So I've come to tell you that when you leave the church, you need to look out the door before you go out. When you get ready to get in your car, you better make sure that your door that you locked when you got out is still locked." He said "you need to walk all the way around your car to make sure that you don't see anything hanging down or loose or that's dragging under the car," and you know just precautionary things…He said "if you leave the church, and you go through a roadblock, the best thing you can do is turn around and go a different direction." Even though they may come and arrest you, he said you don't need to go through a roadblock. He said when you go through a roadblock they're looking under your car, looking in your windows, and they find stuff.
>
> PL: So he thought that somebody would plant something?
>
> A: [Nods]…Listen, that's scary. And when you [ask] "were you intimidated;" yes, we were intimidated.

As Adam's commentary suggests, powerful community members employed numerous coercive tactics in order to block the march from occurring, fearing that it, along with the initiatives that followed it, would undermine their power in and control of the area.[174] David, for instance, told me that a local policeman had called him shortly before the march. The officer advised him that holding the march was bad idea. When David inquired as to why, he replied that, because the police would have to provide security for it, he they would be unable to respond if someone were to burn down his church. David interested this as a threat.

Thus, because many police officers were in cahoots with criminals, activists rarely felt as though they could rely on them for protection. This made them feel all the more vulnerable. As Sam states:

> D: There were some good times in it, but it was a scary time for a while, buddy…

[174] In addition to oppositional and critical behavior, elites sometimes employed violence simply when residents refused to comply with their desires. As described earlier in the chapter, when a local man refused to sell his house to the police department (the department had procured funding to build a new 911 center—to be named after the mayor—and wanted to build it on his property), the Mayor, Assistant Police Chief and 911 Director retaliated against him. First, they threatened the man with several fabricated police charges. When that did not work, they hired a local drug dealer to burn his house down. In return, the dealer received immunity—and eventually what amounted to assistance—from police investigators.

PL: And you couldn't really depend on the local law enforcement for protection?

D: No, I mean… a lot of people…just said, you know, "if we die, we die"…

PL: And people literally thought they might die or have their house burned down?

D: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure, yeah. You know, we had people drive by our house. We'd get anonymous phone calls…it was real tense during the time.

Although David, Sam and Adam's determination, grit and sense of desperation helped them to persevere through the intimidation that they experienced, fear doubtless deterred others from engaging in political action.

Even after the FBI investigations crippled much of the county's power structure, violent intimidation continued. When Wade, a local MTR activist whom I interviewed ran for a position on the board of the local energy co-op, the incumbent candidate informed him that his "friends weren't afraid to break legs if they need to" after a campaign event. The candidate, in the end however, resorted to more subtle tactics to secure his victory. According to Wade and two of his campaign volunteers, the incumbent candidate implemented a proxy voting scheme allowing him to steal the election.

Outside of physical violence, officials also used their government resources and positions of authority to punish political dissidents. Like many things, this had a historical basis. During the 1960s and 1970s, Arnett (1978) found that if one challenged local officials, they could retaliate by firing the insubordinate individual from her county job, banishing her to an inferior position, and/or blacklisting her from county employment. This continued in present day. Maria, for instance, told me that a course that she taught for years at a satellite college campus located in Valley Town was mysteriously discontinued after she published an article in the local paper that criticized the state senator. I heard several similar stories. Officials also held up

entitlement and assistance benefits for those who were uncooperative with authority. An article in the paper, for example, reported on how scores of discontented residents abstained from participating in an important Water Board vote, fearing that board members would cut off their service if they challenged a disliked incumbent.

Authorities also capitalized upon their "on the run" of many residents (Goffman 2009), using the threat of legal sanction in order secure quiescence. In others, judges and prosecutors sometimes inflated criminal charges, imposed excessive sentences and denied bond vis-à-vis political opponents. A prominent local drug dealer, for example, whom many people referred to as "Robin Hood" due to the charitable ways in which he used his proceeds, published the followed plea in the local paper from jail:

> I, Calvin Roberts, would like to ask Circuit Judge Patrick O'Connor why my son, Kevin Roberts and his girlfriend Rebecca Hall are being denied bond? If it is something personal with me, please do not make these kids suffer. Take it out on me. These kids have never been charged with any serious charges. I know of numerous people who have been arrested on these same charges and have been given bond. Some have been caught two or three times, one was even under house arrest and given a $10,000 bond. If I have did anything or said anything about you, I am sorry, or did anything wrong I am sorry. If any of your friends said I have did or said anything about me then you don't have any friends, they've lied. I would appreciate anything Judge O'Connor you would do to help these kids. Thank you.

As Calvin's open letter demonstrates, residents believed that judges, prosecutors, utility workers, magistrates, and so on would not hesitate to abuse their authority in order to punish them for political transgressions. This functioned as a powerful deterrent to political participation.

Cheryl, a local farmer and anti-coal activist, thus told me that given how unresponsive the local government was, and given the power that local officials have at their disposal, she had decided to withdraw from public and political life. Because of the environment in which she lived—one in which fear prevailed, and where few public spheres existed wherein people could

express alternative viewpoints—she refrained from speaking out and engaging in politics. She stated, in fact, that she dreaded doing so. To her, it felt both pointless and dangerous:

> As far as our government here…I know where they stand on the coal issue, and I know how they deal with that…[So] I try to have as little dealings with anything inside those buildings. I'm scared when I have to go get my license renewed, you know. I'm like oh God, I just don't even want to go in there. I just don't have much to do with it, and I don't talk to people about it, because it's not something I really…unless they're like me, and I know that we probably agree a little bit, then I can talk. But otherwise…just let it be…I go dig some carrots or something [laughs].

8.11 Monitoring Local Institutions: Clandestine Kicks and Invisible Elbows

If local elites did not employ threats of bodily violence, legal sanction or blacklisting, they undermined oppositional political behavior by withholding their cooperation from citizen initiatives. They did, in short, everything that they could do in order to render political participation slow, frustrating and unrewarding. Oftentimes, this involved mobilizing their authority and cultural capital in order to humiliate and chastise those who intervened into the ostensibly private domain of local government. Adam's experiences in this regard are instructive. Shortly after the 2004 march, he established and oversaw a local "court watch" program. From the outset, judges, attorneys, clerks, and police officers undermined his efforts. Although the initiative was ultimately successful, it required perseverance over multiple forms of obstructionism.

The court watch sought to end corruption and particularism in the courts (or at least instances of it that group members opposed) in order to keep repeat drug offenders behind bars. Judges, attorneys, police officers, and court clerks, however, undermined the group's efforts at every turn. Adam told me that District Judge (who was later convicted of numerous corruption charges) began intimidating court watch members as soon as they entered the courtroom:

> [The first day that] we went to court…the judge…said "when you come into the district court, we want all your members to sit on this side of the court behind the defendants." Well that removed us from everyone behind the prosecution's seating. He said "sit over here behind the defendants, and we don't want you to talk to nobody."…The Circuit Judge, however, said that when you appear in his court, he wants you to sit on that side. What differences does it make?!...The first time or two…people got kind of mixed up. And if people came in late and sat over there, he's say "you with court watch? You need to sit over here!" That's intimidation, okay.

When a court reporter showed up to take photographs of the group monitoring the court proceedings, moreover, the Judge told her that he would put her in jail if she took her camera into his courtroom.

Court officials also obstructed the group's efforts to obtain information about court proceedings. Although the state constitution requires judicial authorities to provide court dockets to the public at cost, Shale's Circuit Court Clerk refused to do so:

> I would notice that the judge's clerk…had a big stack of dockets that she carried…She would [give one to everyone involved in the court proceedings]…I said we need one of these dockets [in order to keep track of the cases before the court]. When I asked the…the Circuit Court Clerk…he said, "those are only for the lawyers and for the court." I said, "well, aren't those public documents?" He said: "No; they're internal documents. You're not allowed to have one."

After Adam learned that the clerk was providing the local newspaper with dockets free of charge, he approached him again:

> I said, "listen, we really need those dockets…it ain't hardly right here. The newspaper has got them." He said, "I'll tell you what, I'll make an exception. I'll let you have dockets, but that'll cost you a dollar per page to print it."…So it would take us fifty and sixty dollars a week to get a docket—one docket!... I said, "man, this is breaking us up." So I went and pulled out the Kentucky Revised Statutes…I found out that the court system…[is] not allowed to charge you anything except the exact cost of the document, not even including labor…So when I told him that, he said: "Heck, go ahead…everybody else gets one, you might as well have one too."

Adam described the Circuit Clerk's behavior as "intimidation." Such intimidation continued to occur throughout the group's tenure.

After obtaining dockets, group members began to notice that an abundance of drug-related charges were being dismissed due to arresting officers failing to appear in court. This struck Adam as suspicious, given that many of the officers who failed to appear as witnesses were in fact present in the building—they just never made their way into the courtroom:

> As I was coming in, I would see all of these police cars out in the back. Then one morning I went around to the back of the building…and there was 10 or 12 [officers] there…They were just like sitting in this garage bay area shooting the bull, talking, smoking, drinking coffee. But when I went [back into the courtroom] there weren't any officers that showed up for the cases!...And I thought, dag gone, these are officers that are sitting back here waiting for their cases to be called, and they're not being called, or the court is not calling the cases that these officers are waiting for. I said, I wonder what the deal is.

Adam then decided to take measures into his own hands by investigating:

> I decided on my own that I wanted to know who the players were in the court system. I wanted to get a program…you know, when you go to a ball game, you get a program… So I knew the bailiff…we were very casual acquaintances… I asked him would it be possible if I gave you a notebook if you could go back and ask all of those [police officers] to sign in, so that I would know who's here in court today. He said, "well yeah!" So he goes back and stays gone about thirty minutes, and he comes back and gives me the notebook. And he says, "umm, this is the best I could do." And I look at the notebook…What was on it was Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, and Robin, and just all the super heroes. I got furious. I mean I thought who do these public officials who are hired to protect and serve—who do they think they are making fun of people who are here to help them.

As these vignettes describe, Adam and other members of his court watch experienced extreme frustration when then they attempted to participate in the civic process. Officials drew attention to their presence in public forums, imposed arbitrary rules upon them, refused to provide information and documents to which they were legally entitled, and poked fun at them.

This obstructionism and noncooperation was ubiquitous across multiple citizen initiatives. When a group that was connected to Adam and Sam's church began to monitor, record and broadcast public meetings (of the city council, fiscal court and school board), officials took measures to foil their efforts. On the first occasion that Adam and his group attempted to record a city council meeting, the mayor moved the meeting to a different building. When the group showed up with its recording equipment nonetheless, the mayor called the meeting to order and adjourned in 7.5 minutes—it was the shortest meeting that the council, to everyone's knowledge, had ever conducted.

During the first Fiscal Court meeting that the group record, the magistrates voted to go into a closed, executive session soon after it began. Adam and his cameraman waited for a very long time, but the court never reconvened. Eventually he saw magistrates walking out of the building. When he asked when they planned to reconvene, the magistrate told him that they had they had adjourned in the judge's office—a procedure that is blatantly illegal. When Adam broadcasted that they fiscal court had violated state law by adjourning in closed session, the Judge Executive became angry and instructed his secretary to withhold sending notifications about county meetings. Because the court the state constitution requires the fiscal court to notify media outlets of public meetings, this was also illegal. When Adam confronted the Judge about the situation, he feigned ignorance. His administrative assistant, however, later confessed to Adam that he had instructed her to intentionally with notifications.

Finally, when several individuals who helped to organize the 2004 anti-drug march attempted to organize a "Citizens for a Fair Election" group in 2006, they received an icy response from local politicians. In an attempt to increase political participation and enhance government accountability, their first initiative took the form of a "Meet the Candidates event,"

which they attempted to organize over the course of several weeks. However, the group was ultimately forced to cancel the event because so few candidates agreed to participate. According to a report in the local paper: "The boosters officially canceled the "meet the candidates" event, as only eight out of 120 candidates signed up to participate. The boosters stated that not one incumbent planned to attend the event."

These stories illustrate how local officials purposefully took measures to exclude citizens from the political process by undermining their attempts to monitor and make transparent the actions of local officials. They also further highlight the erroneous nature of the pluralist model of governance that was critiqued earlier in the dissertation. Many people—both scholars and pundits—view political participation as an agentic act—as something that citizens choose or choose not to do. These observations, however, show that public participation requires the simultaneous participation of elites and elected officials. If officials refuse to meaningfully interface with the public, and if they refuse the public access to debate and conversation, participation and democracy die by default.[175]

8.12 Conclusions: The Political Construction of Consent

In an article that Maria published in the local newspaper, she writes: "We have known about the vote buying, the cronyism, the nepotism, the sweet deals political officials arrange for themselves, and about their general disregard for the public good for a long time." While residents never "got used to this kind of corruption," she argues that they became habituated to it:

[175] When elites did engage with activist groups, it was almost always because they sensed benefit—that is to say, they perceived an opportunity to secure money, win political support and expand their patronage networks. Indeed, after David, Sam and Adam secured grant funding in order to build a local rehab center, a variety of local power brokers swooped into their meetings. Endeavoring to co-opt their activism, they made efforts to secure leadership positions within the concerned citizens' groups that had formed. This, presumably, would have enabled them to set the agendas at meetings, limit the potential for contentious politics, embezzle funding for social programs and community initiatives, and paint themselves as concerned citizens who were "helping the people." David, Sam and Adam sensed this and thus took measures to keep them at bay.

"We have lived with it for so long that we have come to expect it and to believe there is nothing we can do about it." She goes on to assert that:

> This kind of resignation came, not so much out of the cultural fatalism sometimes attributed to Appalachia, but out of a not unrealistic fear of going up against the local power structure, the people with the money, the jobs, and the influence over almost everything in the county. In such a lopsided contest, all one seemed likely to win was a night in jail or the emergency room, or perhaps star billing at the funeral home. At best, one would be ensuring that no one in his or her family would ever get a job in the county again.

The cultural adaptation to this state of affairs, Maria argues, involved dismissing politics as "dirty:"

> We heard our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents say the same things, and we repeated them: 'There's no law in Shale County.' 'Better not stir up a hornet's nest.' 'Politics is a dirty business. Good people stay out of it.

He commentary speaks to how apart from working to achieve hegemony, local power brokers applied coercion along with a variety of more subtle tactics in order to discourage civic involvement, government monitoring and political participation.

The interviews, newspaper stories and ethnographic vignettes that I analyzed above are all representative of the "visible fists, clandestine kicks and invisible elbows" that the state inflicts on citizens who attempt to participate in the democratic process (Auyero 2010). Officeholders mock, condescend, disrespect, and refuse to cooperate with concerned citizens. Rather than facilitating participation, they do all that is in their power to contain and discourage it. While some of the more spectacular forms of state sponsored violence have perhaps declined in recent years—i.e. the visible fists of assassinations, beating and shootings—the invisible forms of state power have perhaps grown stronger.

Rather than facing physical or material retaliation (though this sometimes still occurs), concerned citizens more often face uncooperative officeholders who view government and

politics as a private domain to which ordinary citizens are not privy—as a realm in which specialists and important persons can and should be able to operate without scrutiny or public oversight. This appears to be a gradual trend that has played out over the past 100 years. The feuding and killings of the early part of the century transitioned into the de facto economic sanctions that Arnett (1978) analyzed (e.g. banishing troublesome teachers to "Siberia" or eliminating their WPA jobs), which in turn have transitioned into even more subtle displays of power that construct the political sphere as too impenetrable and frustrating to merit the investment of time and effort. We should not necessarily view this as an attenuation of elite power, but rather as a change in the morphology of power—it is perhaps equally, if not more sinister, than violence, as Foucault (1977) has so adeptly showed.

Moreover, the absence of violence, as Salamon and Van Evera (1973) have shown, does imply a deficit of fear. In fact, a lack of violence might very well demonstrate the presence and effectiveness of fear. David, Sam, Adam, Wade, Benjamin, and Cheryl all discussed how various individuals threatened them for the political activities, essentially telling them that they "would be sorry." It seems that in each instance, the intimidators defaulted on their threats. Yet, that does not suggest that such threats do not discourage others from acting.

8.13 Conclusions: Why Citizen Activism Fades

Many of the people involved in the various citizen groups were convicted themselves of drug and corruption-related offenses. Such individuals had participated in the meetings in order to keep their fingers on the pulse of local resistance, forge a positive community image for themselves, and—most importantly—to ensure that they would receive the spoils of grant monies that resulted from emerging activist initiatives. The desire to co-opt activist lines of funding was especially discouraging to those involved in the impressive efforts to procure grant

funding for the local rehab center. While movement participants suspected their complicity from the beginning, their betrayal nonetheless renewed certain feelings of cynicism, doubt and mistrust, helping to cement the prevalent notion that all politicians—and all engagements with politics—are crooked.

Second, citizen activism was difficult to sustain under the threat of violence. While the citizens' groups at first charged ahead with their initiatives, they acknowledged receiving a plethora of threats during the process. One participant told me, for example, that the Sheriff had warned him that carrying out the march might put his church in jeopardy of being burned down. Others received frightening and harassing phone calls at their homes. Several organizers of the march were even advised by state police to avoid county roadblocks, as they could be dangerous traps set by local officers that would result in physical harm.

Other Shale Countians who, during the wave of activism, ran for positions like the water board and electric co-op, received flat out death threats.[176] Nobody knew if they would actually happen, but the fear precluded people from acting in any case—especially because Shale had been a violent place in the 90s—a time when opposition political candidates faced assassination attempts, and several incidents occurred in which locals who had informed on drug dealers were brutally tortured and murdered. Thus, even though no one's house was burned down while I was in Shale, the threats, and historical lineage from which they issued forth, very understandably discouraged activism over a period of time. As the political scientists Salamon and Van Evera (1973) have shown, the absence of concrete violence does not imply a deficit of fear. In fact, a lack of violence often demonstrates the presence and effectiveness of fear.

[176] The use of fear to discourse activism was, in fact, a common theme in Shale County among all stripes of activists. An anti-MTR activist who I became friends with often discussed, for example, how she was terrified to speak out, how she feared for her life, and how the threat of having one's home burned discouraged many in her community from political action. Another environmental advocate often found himself being intentionally run off the road by huge, overloaded coal trucks.

A third reason activism waned was because the personal ties that local elites maintained to community organizers made serious challenges to their unscrupulous behavior both personally difficult and economically and politically unviable. Local elites belonged to almost every important community organization. For example, they belonged to the churches of several of the pastors who spearheaded the community empowerment initiatives mentioned earlier. After giving a fiery sermon against corruption on Sunday in church, one of those pastors was confronted by the wife of a prominent local politician, who ridiculed and humiliated him in front of his entire congregation.

Such instances put a great amount of pressure on community activists to reign in their activism—or at least to pitch it at a vague level that did not actually direct criticism against specific targets. To call out local power brokers would put one at odds with people who—while disliked politically—were nonetheless social acquaintances, and would result in social and economic consequences—for example, an affluent elite withdrawing his much needed contributions from the community plate at church on Sunday.[177] Mostly saliently though, when politicians started getting convicted and removed from power, other elites in the community worked to convey the convictions as unfair attacks on mountaineers and mountain culture by outsiders—a frame that resonated with many due to the resentment rooted in the colonial discourse that has long been used to stigmatize Appalachians and justify economic and environmental exploitation therein.

[177] The personalized nature of politics in Shale County had long served as an impediment to unsettling local elites from power. It meant that anger was more likely to be triggered when one was personally slighted—especially from patronage opportunities—rather than when institutional resources were misused and abused. When several notable local officials received lengthy federal prison sentences a few years ago, many Shale Countians thus felt that they had been unfairly targeted. These people had been friends to them in the community; they had occasional doled out patronage when they could; and perhaps most of all, they were engaging in something that seemed almost natural—the enactment of a winner takes all spoils mentality with regard to the public troth.

Fourth, and last, several people with whom I spoke mentioned the unresponsiveness of the local government to community empowerment initiatives—local representatives often behaved in condescending ways that made citizen participation feel unnecessarily difficult. The leader of the court watch, for example, explained to me how the judges in the courts that he observed attempted to intimidate the other court watch members and him. He also discussed how the circuit court clerk would not cooperate with their requests—how he refused to provide them with the dockets to which they were legally entitled so that they could carry out their monitoring. He mentioned how the police officers who attended court refused to answer his questions and poked fun at him and the other court watch members for trying to get involved in the community.

Another individual, who attempted to provide broadcast access to local meetings, explained how the County Judge refused to provide him with legally required media notifications for public meetings, and how they impinged upon his efforts to record therein (for example, by truncating the first planned recoding to a meager eight minute meeting after explaining that they had already covered most of the agenda in private). And beyond uncooperation, a number of local critics suddenly found their county jobs in peril, feared that their public benefits would be revoked, and found that their communities were no longer being considered for water line projects, road maintenance, and so on. These are just a few examples of how elites made life exceptionally hard for activists.

This type of treatment refers to what sociologist Charles Tilly calls "invisible kicks and clandestine elbows." Officeholders mock, condescend, disrespect, and refuse to cooperate with concerned citizens. Rather than facilitating participation, they do all that is in their power to contain and discourage it. While some of the more spectacular forms of state sponsored violence

have perhaps declined—i.e. the "visible fists" of assassinations, beating and shootings—the invisible forms of elite power, which are mediated through local institutions, have perhaps grown stronger. While some citizens faced physical or material retaliation, they more often faced uncooperative officeholders who viewed government and politics as a private domain to which ordinary citizens were not privy—as a realm in which specialists and important persons can and should be able to operate without scrutiny or public oversight.

This seems to be a gradual trend that has played out over the past 100 years—the feuding and killings in the early part of Shale's history has transitioned into even more subtle displays of power that construct the political sphere as too impenetrable and frustrating to merit the investment of time and effort.[178] We should not necessarily view this as an attenuation of elite power, but rather, to paraphrase John Gaventa, as a change in the morphology of power—it is perhaps equally, if not more sinister, than violence, as Foucault so adeptly showed.

To wrap up, I would like to emphasize two take away points. The first is that concerned citizens groups did on a number of occasions did attempt to intervene in the political process and resist local corruption, but each time their efforts proved more or less futile in light of the resources that powerful members of the community commanded. 20 years ago Steve Fischer, in the excellent anthology that he edited, critiqued the false idea that Appalachians are quiescent people who are complicit in their own oppression. The numerous contributors to that anthology documented the rich tradition of social protest that exists in mountain communities—resistance against everything from environmental degradation, to labor exploitation, to racism. I would like to add to that lineage by documenting the myriad ways in which concerned citizens in Shale

[178] In essence, from the open violence of "gun thugs," to the de facto economic sanctions that occurred during the War on Poverty years—in other words, banishing troublesome county employees to remote parts of the county or eliminating their WPA jobs—to the present scene.

County confronted economic and political domination and organized to rectify social problems. The issue was not that people did not care or did not act, it was that action was difficult to sustain in light of the muscular response of local elites.

The second point is that the prevailing pattern throughout the county's history—non-resistance—does not indicate consent. It indicates a politically constructed quiescence based on community members' awareness of the consequences associated with speaking out. John Gaventa's (1982) excellent book, which critiques the assumptions of liberal democracy—the notion that citizens are free to express their grievances and openly participate in the political process—well documents this phenomenon. I firmly believe that researchers should continue in the spirit of his work by deepening our understanding of the social, economic and political barriers to citizen action in many Appalachian communities.

CHAPTER 9

"COAL IS NOT JUST A JOB, IT'S A WAY OF LIFE:"

THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF COAL PRODUCTION IN SHALE COUNTY

> *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 Caudill, 1963

9.1 Introduction

This chapter analyzes Shale Countians' relations with the coal industry in order to examine the processes through which people come to identify with individuals and institutions that impose economic, ecological and political harms upon their communities and why people sometimes remain quiescent in situations of economic exploitation, political abuse and environmental onslaught. Since beginning operations in Shale County in the early 20th Century, the coal industry has damaged the community in numerous ways, including economically exploiting workers, subjecting miners to dangerous working conditions, scarring the landscape with invasive mining techniques, polluting aquifers and streams, displacing wildlife, damaging material infrastructure (especially roads), blanketing the built environment with coal dust, subjecting those living close to mountaintop removal (MTR) sites to frequent blasting, and exposing community residents to health risks associated with pollution. Despite causing these problems, Shale Countians tend to exhibit overwhelming support for the coal industry.[179]

[179] This also generally translates into support for the Republican Party given its ostensibly pro-coal, anti-regulatory politics.

In the sections that follow, I examine why Shale Countians tend to endorse the coal industry in spite of its many negative externalities. While existing research suggests that those living in extractive communities support mining because they overvalue its economic benefits (Blaacker, Woods and Oliver 2012) and because they fear the ramifications of protest (Gaventa 1982; Cabrejas 2012), I argue that by focusing on the economics of mining, scholars have neglected to focus on the cultural dimensions of coal production. Similarly, in focusing on violence and intimidation, they have examined processes of repression to the detriment of processes of consent. By taking stock of the symbolic benefits associated with coal production in Shale County, I show that support for the industry primarily derives from the industry's efforts to exert moral, cultural and philosophical leadership in the region. I thus construe pro-coal sentiment as a manifestation of the industry's cultural hegemony rather than residents' "false consciousness" (Gramsci 1990). Although I find that people do tend to overestimate the economic benefits of coal production, and that many do indeed fear the consequences of protesting, I show that most residents "consent" to the industry's dominant position in community life because it provides a host of symbolic benefits to those who live there.

Specifically, I will contend that Shale Countians identify with and express support for the coal industry as a result of the industry's efforts to represents their economic needs as the interests of ordinary Shale Countians; the industry's efforts to capitalize upon the rural poor's feelings of social exclusion by conveying attempts to tax industry profits, regulate mining practices and promote alternative forms of development as attacks on Appalachian culture (thereby converting mining into a question of cultural validation); the industry's material and cultural efforts to conceal the negative externalities of coal production; and the industry's efforts to threaten and intimidate opponents into silence.

As a whole, I reveal how the industry has mobilized its superior resources in order to engender a definition of the situation vis-à-vis mining that resonates with the experiences and values of those living in close proximity to coal camps (Glaeser 2010). In the chapter's conclusion, I thus argue that my findings and analysis move beyond existing work, which implicitly operates according to the assumptions of rational actor theory and misses the cultural politics associated with coal production.

9.2 Understanding Public Support for Coal in Shale County

Although there were a few notable exceptions, Shale Countians—lower class, middle class and elite—tended to express overwhelming support for the coal industry. Shale Countians' support manifested in their accounts of Appalachian social problems, which blamed poverty and joblessness on an ostensible "war on coal" waged by environmentalists, the EPA and Barack Obama;[180] their everyday commentary regarding coal's munificent role in and impact on the region; their support for political candidates espousing pro-coal agendas; their opposition to candidates with "environmentalist" and hence ostensibly anti-coal agendas; their adornment of pro-coal paraphernalia, such as t-shirts reading "Coal Keeps the Lights on" and bumper stickers proclaiming "If You Don't like Coal, Don't Use Electricity;" their valuation of mining as an esteemed occupation within the regional moral order; and their participation in coal-related festivals.

In this section of the chapter, I will draw on my field experiences in order to show how Shale Countians' positive appraisal of the coal industry was rooted in four sources: the belief that the region depended on the jobs provided by the industry; the belief that mining provided

[180] During the 2012 campaign season, for example, the mayor of a West Virginia coal community who was interviewed for a news article described how "the region feels under siege and at war" by heightened environmental regulations. He noted how he personally blames Obama for the region's hardships (Shear 2012).

affordable energy to the poor; the belief that the industry served as a guardian of community interest and values; and the belief that the industry upheld the dignity of rural life in the face of urban onslaught. As the subsequent sections will elaborate, these beliefs emerged in conjunction with the industry's sophisticated and protracted efforts to achieve hegemony, i.e. mobilize economic and political resources in order to exert moral and intellectual leadership within the region (Gramsci 2000). This leadership produced cultural understandings that defined life in the county from the standpoint of the interests of coal operators.

9.3 The Coal Industry as Job Creator

Most residents believed that the industry offered one of the few opportunities for gainful employment in the region, and that families and community institutions within the area depended on the jobs, charitable donations and tax revenues that coal companies provided.[181] Many also believed the populist notion that stringent environmental regulation, spearheaded by the Obama-led EPA, was rapidly eliminating those jobs, donations and tax revenues. In August of 2009, for example, a local man crafted an online petition "in favor of coal mining." The petition generated an outpouring of support on the local internet discussion forum that I monitored, with the vast majority of signatories emphasizing mining's economic importance to region. One signer, for instance, wrote:

> Without the coal mining jobs we have here…so many of us that live here would never be able to make a living. It's basically the only way a lot of us have to support our families.

Another wrote:

> If you know a coal miner, please sign or pass [this petition] on to their family. Let's keep the miners working. There is not much left for the poor. [Signed,] A Proud Coal Miner's Daughter.

[181] Contrary to the popular literature, the number one priority of poor Shale Countians involved securing stable and gainful employment—not waging a "culture war" that ultimately came at the expense of their economic interests. Indeed, the most frequently occurring code in my dataset was "political interests – jobs/employment," which referred to instances in which subjects made statements suggesting that the political issue to which they assigned the highest priority was finding a good job.

Yet another, whose commentary blasted the EPA for holding up new mining permits, expressed how he would

> like to see smokestacks and factories every mile in Shale County putting out smog and big fat pay checks to the impoverished people. Did you know Shale County USED TO Have a Greyhound bus station and a train station…[and] used to be the biggest town in Southeastern Kentucky and the most prosperous.....

Their narratives, like those with whom I interacted in face-to-face conversation, suggested that prosperity would be restored if oppressive regulators would grant new permits and cease meddling in the region's affairs. Lisa Preston, a 34 year-old MTR-activist and community organizer whom I interviewed, explained how as coal jobs had become scarcer, anger at environmentalists had grown more fervent than ever before:

> I remember going to the Wal-Mart and seeing for the first time the bumper sticker on a car that said "Save a Coal Miner, Shoot a Tree Hugger"…I think people know and realize that things are very complex and shaded and complicated. But the rhetoric is so stark…My sense has been that folks feel that they have to keep their job…you know, the fewer and fewer jobs there are, the more it seems that folks speak out and support the industry that provides those few jobs.

As I will discuss in the following sections, the coal industry's public relations campaigns and lobbying efforts structured these perceptions—e.g. that mining constituted the region's lifeblood, and that one could "save a coal miner" by "shooting a tree hugger"—by engendering the perception that urban environmentalists and Washington Democrats were waging a "War on Coal," if not a war on Appalachia more generally.

9.4 The Coal Industry as Affordable Energy Provider

The second reason that Shale Countians supported mining stemmed from the belief that replacing coal with alternative energy would result in unaffordable increases to their electricity bills. Given the financial hardship that many already endured, the prospect of higher power bills was indeed frightening. As one commenter on the pro-coal mining petition warned:

> Just wait until all these green freaks start building their gazillon dollar wind mills. You better bet your electric bill will skyrocket, you will be begging for the coal fired plants then. Once we convert to wind energy, [funds from a local community action agency that subsidized many residents' utility payments] will only pay the taxes on your electric bill. Makes me…sick.

The threat of unaffordable electricity loomed especially high for residents who already struggled to pay their bills—a struggle that reflected not merely their low income, but their artificially high usage given the substandard housing in which they lived.

Because of the near-ubiquitous belief in coal's affordability relative to renewable energy, nearly all of the local activists with whom I spoke reported that they had reframed their advocacy campaigns in order to reflect the economic as opposed to environmental virtues of sustainable development. Rather than attacking the environmental negative externalities of mining, they conveyed renewable energy as an affordable and cost-effective alternative to coal that held the capacity to create new jobs. Cheryl Adams, a 35 year old farmer and MTR activist in the community, explained to me how:

> If you tell people they can save money [through renewable energy], they are very into the idea….I have a friend down the road, and she lives in an old trailer. She's got two kids, she works 40 hours a week—great lady. Her electricity bills are 300, 400, 500 dollars for this two bedroom single-wide every month in the winter. And it becomes: Do I eat, or do I pay my electric bill, you know? And that's real. And her electric bills are about what she makes a month, you know?

Throughout the interview, Cheryl told me how reframing sustainability as a matter of affordability and job creation had improved people like her neighbor's receptivity to the idea of scaling back coal production. With a sign of resignation, however, she admitted that despite rebranding clean energy as an economic rather than environmental issue, she had experienced little success in terms of generating opposition to MTR within the county.

9.5 The Coal Industry as Guardian and Harbinger of Community Values

The third reason that residents tended to support the coal industry derived from the way in which community members had infused the occupation of mining with heroic if not sacred meaning. Mining's sacred status derived from three sources. First, given the patriarchal moral order that enveloped the region (Billings and Blee 2000), blue collar occupations like mining conferred status. When distinguishing between "good jobs" and "bad jobs," almost all of my subjects expressed a preference for "hands-on work" that involved manual labor while spurning occupations that involved service provision and knowledge production. Indeed, this was part of the alternative status system that I elaborated in the previous chapter

For many, holding down a manual occupation—especially underground mining—established hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This observation is consistent with existing research, which has found that masculinity is often equated with the willingness to work in dangerous conditions (Maggard 1994). More specifically, Yarrow (1991) has observed that coal mining has been "socially constructed as the epitome of men's work" (p.286). Beckwith (2001) similarly argues that in Central Appalachia "'miner' and 'male' [have] become conflated, a conflation that is so deeply ingrained that it is virtually undetectable" (p.310).

Holding down a manual occupation like mining thus validated one among his peers. When campaigning for office, for example, local candidates often legitimated themselves by appealing to their blue collar occupations, emphasizing their experience working in manual trades rather than their professional credentials, platforms and policy experience. With its

associations of toil, danger and high pay, mining was by far the most esteemed occupation within this system of occupational prestige and thus generated the most legitimacy.[182]

Bell and Braun (2010) reached similar conclusions in their study of environmental justice activism in the Appalachian coalfields. They found that many men feared speaking out against coal for fear of losing status in the community. They argue that because coal mining was central to their identities as men, protesting against coal was far more difficult than it was for women. Almost all of the men in their sample who had become environmental activists, in fact, had lived outside of the region for anywhere from five to 30 years, which altered the way in which they defined masculinity, diminishing its connection to working in and/or supporting coal mining.

Second, given the moral order's emphasis on respecting one's elders and dead, fallen miners occupied an honored status within collective memory. Many Shale Countians believed that preserving mining as a viable occupation would honor forbearers who had mangled their bodies in the mines in order to provide for them as children. Not long before the pro-coal petition was drafted, a local columnist paid homage to his late father and uncles by publishing the following message of appreciation in the county newspaper:

> I would like to honor and pay tribute to some of Shale County's finest citizens. They helped to shape and mold this county. They made us want more out of life. With ten years in the mines from my dad and most of my uncles…I feel I am qualified for this task. This is to show our respect for them…Muscle and Blood,' as the song goes, was a coal miner, but they were so much more than this…They were our heroes. They went where no man had went before and faced death each day. This was what makes the bond between coal miners that could only be broken by death. Their backs were arched from crawling or bending over walking in coal…Their hands were calloused, but the love for us kids…took away any roughness…Poor pay and terrible working conditions…they had to face each day of their life…Some people ask why did they put themselves through this. The biggest reason was for the love of their families, and the second reason was for a love for Shale County. They didn't want to live anywhere else. They were honest,

[182] Thus, during the 2012 election season, the candidates for magistrate, school board and state senator all noted their experience working in the mines as a means of establishing their character. Although the opposition candidate for state senator possessed a great deal of relevant experience as an educational administrator, he chose to emphasize his mining experience, which had been accrued decades early, when promoting himself in campaign ads.

> hardworking men that made us want more for the county. They sweated for their food. They didn't want a handout… Most of the old miners are gone now but their memories will never die…This is one Shale Countian that is proud to be a coal miner's son…"

A signatory on the pro-coal petition expressed a similar disposition, concluding his comments by imploring readers to

> think of all of our dads and grandfathers and great grandfathers who have work[ed] themselves to death to keep a good living here, and THE ONES…who have died in the mines. Was that all for nothing?

Many Shale Countians thus signed the petition in memory of loved ones who had perished in the mines. Their commentary exemplifies the connection that they drew between "supporting coal" and honoring family members who had fallen in the line of duty. Much like soldiers, expired miners were viewed as heroes whose legacies needed to be protected and preserved in the face of defamation waged by out-of-touch environmentalists—especially in the context of familism.

The third source of the miners' heroic image stemmed from the cherished values that they represented. Not long after the pro-coal petition was published, I asked Wade McGuiness, a 50 year-old educator and sustainable development activist from the community, how young Shale Countians looked upon miners. He replied:

> They think of their people as heroes, and they tell their stories about them, you know, how they got hurt. They're proud of it, you know? Yeah, I don't know if it's a perverse way, but they're proud of their people and what they go through. I did a whole [oral history project] on "Children of the Coal, Children of the Sun," where I interviewed these kids. I just said, just tell me anything about your people's work in the mine. What's the first things that come to you? All of the kids told these heartbreaking stories of injuries, black lung, roof fall, broken arms, broken backs. Then I went up to…a school that was urban, and they didn't have any of these stories. They didn't have any stories hardly at all. Their people were doctors and lawyers. So as far as drama, they didn't have the drama. We're the drama kings and queens right here (laughs). But it's not a very—not a happy ending for people.

While nearly everyone in the county lamented the terrible working conditions that miners faced, they embraced the coal industry out of reverence for what the miner stood for. The miner—and

the coal industry through him—represented a totem that symbolized all of the sacred values within the regional moral order: masculinity, hard work, self-sufficiency, devotion to family, and dedication to community. The columnist whom I quoted earlier attached all of these meanings to his father and uncles in the appreciation message that he published, noting how they had sacrificed their own well-being for love of family and county, and how they had made him "want more out of life" by choosing to work in lieu of taking a "handout."

His remark about working in lieu of taking a "handout" is particularly important, as it is a product of the structural context in which he and other Shale Countians lived. The "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977) that defined life in the county was characterized by widespread unemployment, poverty, government dependence, addiction, and labor market feminization. In other words, due to the dearth of employment opportunities in the region, many community members relied on government assistance in order to make ends meet. The few lines of employment that were available rested in traditionally feminine occupations like nursing and teaching rather than in conventionally masculine ones like mining. Even breadwinning opportunities through government assistance, for example WIC and TANF, were tied to parenting and thus feminized.[183]

This structural context is paramount for understanding why those living in the region tended to extol miners. The miner stood in stark opposition to the ostensibly emasculating and undignified attributes of the contemporary rural individual. Through his masculine labor, breadwinning capacity and independence from the state, he represented a heroic alternative to the un/underemployed man who lacked the ability to support his family—and who perhaps lacked

[183] As discussed in the previous sections, many mining jobs have been replaced with service-sector jobs, which have become the leading source of employment in the region. Within this context, women have become the primary breadwinners in many families (Maggard 1994; Miewald and McCann 2004; Legerski and Cornwall 2010). Like my work, Bell and York (2010) have also found that changes have undermined many men's abilities to achieve hegemonic masculinity in the region.

socio-economic purpose altogether.[184] He was, in other words, everything that the social and economic structure of the county precluded most residents from attaining.

Given mining's potential to deliver the region's "redundant populations" from this alienating and anomic situation (Marx 1990), and given its quite literal embodiment of the community's foremost values, most residents interpreted efforts to reign in coal production as assaults on their moral ideals rather than as instantiations of environmental concern. They wondered why the state would want to punish the "good people" who stood in contrast to the larger lumpen class—i.e. the undignifieds who secured their livings through a combination of government assistance, hustling and drug dealing.

One petition signer thus wrote:

> When my husband goes underground 2.5 miles daily to work a job that the majority is too weak or scared to do and puts in 10 to 12 hours of labor each day, he receives a check issued to his name. Sorry that my family doesn't fit the description of a typical family…We weren't raised to be lazy and look for a handout…[we] have contributed to society…[and] we help to provide for vagrants that are either too lazy to work, get political jobs or [defraud] the government…

Another signatory asserted how

> It takes a strong, hardworking man to go under the ground and mine coal…[and] they don't get all of the damn benefits that the [recipients of government assistance] get, and they are the ones paying all the damn taxes for you all. Man up and get your miners card and work your ass for your pay.

The heroic coal miner thus stood for an idealized past and auspicious future—a deux ex machina to structural unemployment and persistent poverty. He represented the ideal of dignified and honored work for those who wanted it—work that the community respected and that permitted a middle class lifestyle.

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[184] I am writing in a purely emic sense here. My intention is not to essentialize "masculine" and "feminine" work nor to rank conventionally masculine occupations over feminine ones, but rather to convey the economic and cultural realities of living in rural poverty from the standpoint of subjects themselves—especially, in this case, male subjects who subscribed to a hegemonic model of masculinity.

9.6 The Coal Industry as Meditator of Geographic Conflict

The fourth and final reason that residents expressed pro-coal sentiment derived from the belief that mining reflected and preserved the value of rural life in the face of urban onslaught. Almost all residents within the region felt that they were the objects of urban scorn—a finding that is well documented in the existing literature (Eastman 2012; Harkins 2004; Wray 2006; Hartigan 2006; Newitz and Wray 1996; Caudill 1963; Eller 1982). More specifically, they believed that the urban world viewed them as ignorant, backwards and unsophisticated, and that its denizens sought to stamp out their way of life and replace it with their own.[185] Support for the coal industry—and, at the other end of the spectrum, bourgeois environmentalism—I would thus argue, reflects the enduring conflict between town and country in the United States.

Because of the colonial relations that bind rural Appalachia to the urban metropolis (Arnett 1978; Lewis 1978; Eller 2009), this geographic conflict had an especially acute weight in Shale County. Community members resented how the rhetoric of environmental groups depicted their most prized occupation, which for many represented not just a job but a way of life, as antiquated and "dirty." They also resented being condemned by the same urbanites who lived off of the electricity that their coal generated each day—especially in light of the view that miners heroically risk their lives in order to power the nation.

This theme weighed heavily on the pro-coal petition. Environmentalists were viewed as hypocrites. Numerous signatories remarked how if people "didn't support coal," they should be disconnected from the power grid. One poster admonished clean energy activists with the remark "if you preach it, live it," noting how they power their homes with coal and utilize any

[185] As elaborated upon elsewhere, the War on Poverty, the Appalachian Regional Commission's development strategy and any number of accounts of Appalachian poverty have indeed done this.

number goods that fail to meet their own "green" standards. Another offered an even longer missive, which decried the hypocrisy of "big city" environmentalists:

> Okay. Where do I begin? For all you people sitting behind your fancy little desks in your comfy little chairs and doing your meaningless paperwork, it's easy for you to be opposed to coal. However, your lights aren't going to work themselves and you'll be shredding your papers with old fashioned scissors without coal. Yes, maybe there are cleaner ways to do things, but what about the working men here? Do you big city people plan on supporting them and their families? I didn't think so. You all give us such a bad reputation, when in all honesty we are busting our asses trying to provide for our families and yet again, it's being taken away. I'm sure you've seen the commercials about the children overseas and their poverty, right? Well, when the government decides to take away half the nation's jobs, poverty will become our future. Coal is not just something we can throw away, it's thousands of people's way of life. Think about it, can you afford to feed the nation? You can't do what coal does, so quit trying.

As these comments suggest, many community members viewed the coal miner as someone who was being incomprehensibly attacked by effete environmentalists living in urban areas and disconnected Washington bureaucrats.[186] They believed that miners, who carried out some of the hardest and most dangerous work in the country, paid a penalty for their labor in taxes while those who "refused to work" received government help. More prominently, they resented how those who carried out "meaningless paperwork" bastardized those who toiled to mine the coal that powered the air conditioning units in their offices.

In sum, Shale Countians took criticisms of the coal industry personally. The situation resembles the way in which pleas for peace are interpreted during times of war, when some soldiers view anti-war protests as affronts against their own value and dignity. The coal industry, as I will discuss in the coming sections, is aware of these trends and capitalizes upon them in order to construe attempts to regulate coal as attacks on the miner himself and the social

[186] Advocates of environmental preservation and conservation do not, of course, exclusively hail from urban locations. Most Shale Countians, however, made associations between environmentalist and urban life. Previous work in extractive communities has yielded similar findings (Cabrejas 2012; Desmond 2006). I will discuss how the industry structures these perceptions further into the chapter.

values that he represents.[187] Without the industry's hegemonic cultural work, in fact, it is likely that Shale Countians—and Appalachia as a whole—would maintain a fundamentally different image of coal and coal operators. In the following sections, I explain how the industry achieves this hegemony. As I note below, the industry's cultural work begins with camouflage.

9.7 Damage, Conciliating Protest and Counting on the State

One of the first steps that the industry takes in order to prevent public outcry over unscrupulous behavior involves concealing the damage that mining and processing coal causes to the natural and built environment. In other words, operators rely on the ability to cultivate ignorance vis-à-vis the social, infrastructural and environmental negative externalities of coal production in order to maintain favorable appraisals. While it is impossible to fully conceal the presence of active coal mines and coal processing plants, operators keep the most visible forms of degradation out of sight by employing deflection tactics.

When possible, companies purchase the land surrounding mountaintop removal sites, often requiring sellers to sign paperwork forbidding them to sue, testify against, seek inspection of, or make adverse comments against mining operations in the vicinity (Barry 2011). Because buying out communities requires extensive capital, however, this strategy is usually only available to major operators (such as Massey Energy, which is now part of Alpha Natural Resources). Nonetheless, the industry is often able to take advantage of the remoteness of mountain communities in order to cover up the pollution that coal mining and processing generates. This tactic was employed widely in Shale County.

Maria, a 64 year year-old writer and activist whom I interviewed, testified to the lack of visibility surrounding MTR in an op-ed that she submitted to the local newspaper:

[187] I use the pronoun "he" because, although women have a history in mining, the miner represents the ideals of masculinity to many county residents.

> Most mountaintop removal sites tend to be off the beaten path. To get there, you have to turn off the main road, onto gravel and then dirt, then you can take some kind of ATV, but finally you have to get out and walk. Even when you get there, standing at the edge, you can see only a little of what's going on. To really see, you have to go up in the air.

After taking an airplane tour of Shale and the two counties adjacent to it, which revealed the MTR-related destruction that was imperceptible from ground-level, she lamented: "What I saw…has saddened me beyond the telling of it. Everywhere, in every direction, the earth has been laid bare, stripped of vegetation, the creeks and precious topsoil buried under tons of rock and clay." The scenes that she depicts can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below:

Figure 1

Because the degradation associated with MTR is often noticeable only to those living very close to blasting sites, the activists with whom I spoke stated that they found it difficult to convince community members that mining harmed the environment. Cheryl Adams told me, for instance, that there was little evidence of the large surface mine located in her community save for the truck traffic that it generated:

> [The mine] runs the entire highway, you know, and they're covering thousands of acres and taking it way back up hollers. But most of it you cannot see. You can see it from the highway, but the majority—like 98 percent—you can't see.

Because Cheryl's organizing efforts were framed around global warming and protecting the community's water supply—negative externalities that most residents could not directly experience—she was unable to accumulate many signatures on the anti-mining petition that she, Maria and a few others had drafted during the mine's permitting hearings.

Figure 2

Cheryl and Maria's organizing frustrations were typical. Residents of the area had little incentive to become upset about what they did not witness—especially when Baker Energy, the local coal company, engaged in continuous public relations work. In fact, despite explicitly setting out to study mining in Shale County, I remained ignorant about many of the industry's activities there for several months. Not only was I unaware of the surface mine that Cheryl mentioned, which was located about 20 minutes from my apartment, but I was unaware of the

massive slurry impoundment that was located just miles from my house. It was not until I interviewed Benjamin, a 42 year-old mechanic and anti-coal activist who lived next to it, that I learned of its existence.

My lack of knowledge about the massive impoundment speaks to the industry's success in concealing the toxic negative externalities of coal production. Baker Energy was able to hide the toxic sludge that its processing plant generated by planting a thick row of trees around the impoundment area. I was shocked to learn of the impoundment's size and scope upon generating aerial images of the operation using Google Earth, which Benjamin had instructed me to do after our interview (see Figures 3 and 4 on the following pages). Although the impoundment contained millions of gallons of toxic slurry and was located adjacent to a pond that fed into the county's water supply, its presence remained unnoticed to most county residents.

Efforts to conceal the environmental eyesores depicted in Figures 1-4 helped the industry limit protest. While plainly visible from the air and to those living in close proximity to them, most people were unable to appreciate the scars that MTR and surface extraction had carved into the landscape. As Benjamin stated, most people also did not have to deal with having a processing plant behind their house that emitted copious amounts coal dust, nor a slurry impoundment that threatened to leak onto their land and into their water supply. Becoming emotive during our interview, he stated:

> Baker Energy is one of the biggest [coal companies] that's here in Shale County, probably one of the only [ones] now…the processing plant around here is the only one here. Like I said, the coal is trucked in from…all these other places to be busted up behind my house. If that stuff was in somebody else's yard, they'd be saying the same thing too, but it's not, so they don't have to look at that every day. They don't have to look at a child being sick every day, so they don't have to deal with it, and they don't care. You know? It's my…it's up to Benjamin to do something about it. It's nobody else's problem. It's my problem. I mean, that's the way they look at it.

As Benjamin notes, due to the seemingly isolated negative externalities of coal production, many residents viewed situations such as his as an *individual* problem—not as a *social* problem that affected the community as a whole and required collective action to redress. The industry relied on its capacity to accomplish this, that is to say, frame such situations as individual as opposed to social in nature. When the negative externalities of coal production do become visible and evenly distributed, i.e. when they take on a social character—such as in the Coal River Valley (CRV), which has been much studied (e.g. Barry 2011; Wishart 2012)—protest occurs often and with vigor.[188]

Yet, while coal production perhaps appeared to be a personal problem for people like Benjamin, in reality it put almost all Shale Countians at risk. For one, several people with whom I spoke noted how Baker's regulatory noncompliance had polluted the tributaries that fed into the local water supply. According to their accounts, the company occasionally drained (very illegally) overflow slurry waste into nearby creeks—a practice that they claimed was common when impoundments began to reach their load capacities. Others told me that they had regularly observed orange waste building up in the creeks near the processing site—a consequence of water absorbing the sulfur contained within the coal (see Figure 5). At the end of our interview, Benjamin thus admonished me for drinking the water from the tap in my apartment:

> PL: Is it safe to drink that water?
>
> B: I wouldn't touch that tap water! I wouldn't—No, it's not safe to drink that tap water. I mean, could you imagine?
>
> PL: That's scary. I've been drinking it since I got here [laughs].

[188] A notable point about the CRV is that the slurry impoundment puts an elementary school at risk, which also violates the value that the regional moral order assigns to the young. As discussed in Chapter Eight regarding Shale's activist against drugs and corruption, addition-related death among youth was the primary impetus that sparked protest.

B: There you go. I wouldn't. There's no way that my child would drink that; I won't even drink that tap water, you know, no way.

Figure 3

Cheryl Adams and Rebecca Smith provided similar warning at the end of their respective interviews, noting how although many did not realize it, drinking municipal water in the coalfields was a treacherous gamble.

These water problems were exacerbated by the company's routine failure to spray down the coal that its tipple processed, which resulted in massive amounts of coal dust being spewed into the adjacent environment—including into water sources. Figures 6 and 7 clearly illustrate the swarm of dust that enveloped the area surrounding the processing plant. Benjamin's daughter, as noted in an earlier chapter, had developed severe respiratory problems from routinely breathing in the dust. Others in the area were doubtless at risk for developing ailments

as well. Thus, even if they did not immediately realize it, county residents were likely being affected by coal-related pollution.[189]

Figure 4

While the industry successfully concealed many of these negative externalities—e.g. the air and water pollution it generated—it could not cover up everything. When hiding negative externalities was not possible, the industry attempted to deflect and if possible redirect blame. For example, while it was not always possible to see the defaced landscapes that MTR mining left in its stead, the aftermath of coal-related truck traffic was less viable to conceal.

[189] The health-related externalities that I have noted, of course, are layered on top of the negative social, economic and political effects of Baker's presence in the area, which included undermining alternative economic development and controlling local politics.

Figure 5

Figure 6

This is because the industry had successfully lobbied for weight limit exemptions for coal trucks. Sometimes weighed down by nearly 200,000 pounds of coal, overloaded trucks took an enormous toll on the roads that they traversed, riveting them with divots and potholes. Drivers also frequently lost control of the overloaded vehicles, resulting in scores of accidents—sometimes lethal—every year.

Shale Countians were loath to stand for inadequate roads. As commentary from the previous chapter exhibits, it was a very frequent point of frustration and contention with local government and one of the most prominent political priorities of residents. Road-related discontent was rarely directed at the industry, however. Cheryl expressed confusion at this situation when I interviewed her. When I asked about how the surface mining site that she protest against had affected life in her community, she replied:

> C: Well immediately our whole highway…was completely destroyed. And I'm talking, you know, potholes as wide as the road and, you know, three foot deep.
>
> PL: From the trucks?
>
> C: Yeah. And this went on and stayed that way and got progressively worse for a year and a half. And it turned from a 55mph road into don't go over ten or you will destroy your vehicle. And it was just left that way. And you know [incredulous laughing] everybody's thinking why is this allowed? Well, it turns out the trucks were running four times over their weight limit.

Although public outcry arose over the conditions that Cheryl depicts, those living in the area directed their anger against the state as opposed to Baker Energy. The industry was thus able to deflect responsibility for the deteriorating driving conditions onto a third party. Further into her interview, Cheryl described how this situation played out:

> It was interesting because a lot of the [disgruntled residents were]…pro-coal…But they saw the injustice of the road. They were not willing to admit why it was like that though. Instead of being angry—some people were angry at the coal company—but mostly they

> were angry at the State Highway Department for not fixing it, you know. So it was very tricky…everybody was like: WE WANT IT, WE WANT IT, WE WANT COAL, WE WANT IT! And at the exact same time…the highway…was just annihilated. And it was like: this is coal. This is the reality of coal.

In the end, the damage that the mining operation caused to the roads actually strengthened the position of the company and the local powers brokers who facilitated its economic activity. As Cheryl notes, the state senator capitalized upon the situation in order to secure re-election:

> And now it's election time, and [he] is, you know, 100 percent pro-coal *and* pro-coal community [sarcastic voice], and he's happy to see the coal companies and the community working together, and we're going to fix your road. So they fixed the road; they did. They fixed it finally after two years. And so now the trucks are going out the other direction [sarcastic laugh] on [a different road] and destroying that.

Such outcomes—having the roads repaired during election time and redirecting truck traffic thereafter—were typical of how the coal industry responded to citizen discontent regarding pollution, community disruption and other grievances. When the industry could not conceal the problems it caused, it punted. When it could not punt, it conciliated individual grievances without addressing the root cause of the problems, and usually only after protracted complaining and petitioning.[190] The redress that industry offered was thus partial and paltry in almost every case.

[190] Local politicians had a similar relationship with the timber industry, whose trucks and equipment severely damaged roads within the county as well. For example, after a logging operation within the county destroyed the roads in a local neighborhood, several residents attended a Fiscal Court meeting in order to complain. Although county officials considered creating bond requirements for loggers doing business in the county, they decided to elide the stipulation after a number of industry officials attended the following month's meeting. As a solution, the loggers collectively agreed to pay for some gravel to spread over roads after use, and to work with the court to keep the roads drivable. The Judge Executive stated: "we wanted to see what the loggers could do for us before we passed any new ordinances. We don't want to hurt our local workers." Thus, rather than assuming any real liability by putting up bonds in the event that they caused damage, the industry got off by simply agreeing to purchase and spread gravel. In the event that they cause significant destruction in the community, they would not be held accountable. This was done under the guise of preserving jobs.

Figure 7

For example, when Benjamin first approached the processing plant near his home about controlling the air pollution that it was emitting, they set up a few sprinklers in order to dampen the coal moving through the tipple. As Benjamin explained in his interview, these measures were wholly inadequate for preventing the dust emissions that were blanketing his property and home.[191] After years of personally battling with the plant, meeting with the state EPA office, filing innumerous complaints, and working with activist organizations to bring awareness to his situation, he told me that he had made little progress in resolving his grievances:

> The most that I've got out of the coal company…is…they've redirected their traffic. Now the coal trucks go in the other side of [the road], and they exit on [the other side of the neighborhood]. But anybody can drive through there and see that it's filthy. Yes, they're keeping the dust off of us a little bit better—somewhat. We're still getting the dust—the fine micro particles that leave that plant is [what] kills you. That's the stuff that really embeds in your lungs, gets in your blood system and causes sickness. We're still getting that fine particular matter from the processing plant, but all they've done…as

[191] Benjamin had petitioned Baker Energy to pay for relocating his family to a healthy environment away from the processing plant and slurry impoundment. When he had originally purchased the property on which he lived, the tipple had been inactive.

> far as their coal trucks…[is] moved the problem to somebody else. The problem…is still here…It's just a little bit further from my house now. So, you know, they're not going to do anything until the state makes them do it, and the state is not going to make them do it because…they're so corrupted. They're paid off.

As Benjamin describes, the industry conciliates vocal protestors by simply shifting the burdens of environmental degradation onto others who, hopefully, will be less vocal. In this case, rather than changing their processing and transport procedures, the owners of the plant simply redirected their trucks. The properties onto which the pollution had be redirected, as I described in my fieldnotes, were indeed filthy.

As Benjamin also mentions, he received little help from the local and state governments in redressing his grievances with Baker Energy. Even the state EPA proved to be "corrupt" and ostensibly owned by the industry.[192] Rather than protecting citizens and acting upon their grievances, my interviews, archival research and field experiences in Shale County suggested that state institutions catered to and protected big business. In Benjamin's case, the state EPA refused to enforce violations committed by coal operators—violations that inspectors had witnessed in person, and that he had documented in photographs and in video footage.

They also made it extremely difficult—through the use of "invisible kicks" and "invisible elbows" (Auyero 2010)—to lodge complaints and take action against the industry. Throwing these kicks and elbows involved making the process of resolving grievances unnecessarily cumbersome and subjecting the aggrieved to innumerous acts of waiting. As Auyero (2010) states:

[192] This problem, i.e. environment watchdogs being defanged via industry pressure and pro-industry politicians, has been discussed in conjunction with the recent coal slurry disaster in North Carolina. Gabriel (2014) describes how the state's Department of Environmental and Natural Resources was stripped of its power to regulate, enforce law and made subservient to industry needs.

> In…recurrent encounters with state agents, poor people learn through endless delays and arbitrary changes that they have to comply with the requirements of unpredictable agents. In short, they learn to be patients of the state (p.21).

The state also relied on its capacity to enact symbolic violence in order to contain the grievances of frustrated citizens (Bourdieu 1977). This involved "intimidating" the aggrieved by exploiting their insecurities and vulnerabilities vis-à-vis being poor, rural and Appalachian while simultaneously deploying cultural capital and affluence in order to intensify those insecurities. As many were already insecure about their social value and citizenship rights, the rural poor sometimes became paralyzed in the face of institutional power and cultural capital. Although he triumphs over it in the following story, the tactic is well depicted in the following account that Benjamin offered regarding his dealings with the state EPA:

> I got to where I started setting up the inspectors…and would get them on video overlooking violations…I complained for so long, that they actually set me up a meeting in the state capitol with Air Quality. They called and said "you've been complaining for so long." I said, "look, I've got all this video; I've got all this proof, but you guys won't even consider anything I've got." They said, "well, we're going to set you up an appointment in the capitol"…so they set up an appointment about two weeks from that phone call. And they asked me: "what all do we need to view your evidence when you get down there?" I said "all I need is DVD…and a TV"…They said "we'll have it."
>
> So two weeks later…I make my way to the capitol…I get into this big building, and, you know, they're real nice to me…And we get in this big conference room, big nice cherry table and all this stuff, you know, big projector. And they sat me down, and Jack Roberts…he's over air quality control and is the complaints coordinator…he said, "Benjamin, I hate to tell you this…[but] we can't find a DVD player." Before I left that morning, I knew that something was going to go wrong. I knew how they had given me the run around for so long. So…I [took my] DVD player with me…I said they're going to look at what I've got to show them. So I said: "You mean to tell me after two weeks planning—and you even asked me what you needed to have for me when I got here—…you can't provide me a $25 DVD to look at my video?"…I said "this table we're sitting in front of is probably a fifty, seventy-five thousand dollar table. I said I'm probably sitting in a five thousand dollar chair." He said "I'm sorry; we don't have it."

> I said "I tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna reach in my little black bag, and I'm going to pull out a DVD player for you…because you're going to look at what I've got, brother"…And he said…"I don't have anything to hook it up with." I said "I've got you covered there too, brother, because I brought the hookups with me." So I…jumped up on that cherry table with my feet, and I plugged it into that projector. I said "now, close yo eyes, and reach in that bag, and pull out a DVD and stick it in there…don't let me pick one out…because anyone you pull out you're going to see violations on it, brother.

This passage depicts the unwillingness—and perhaps inability due to political pressure—of mine inspectors and environmental officials to cite coal companies for violating environmental standards. Although he produced copious photo and video evidence of coal dust leaving the Baker plant—and although mine inspectors witnessed dust leaving the permitted area with their own eyes—they never flagged the company with a violation. Even after Benjamin showed the officials in the conference room his evidence—which they all agreed constituted breaches of regulation—they took no action against the company. Some activists thus believed that coal industry was not necessarily even responsible for its noncompliance with environmental regulations. Rather, they felt that the state was responsible, because it refused to enforce regulations.

The passage also exhibits the "invisible elbows" and symbolic violence that state officials used against Benjamin. Perhaps more importantly, however, in the passage Benjamin exhibits awareness of vast differential between he and the state officials listening to his grievances in the capitol. He notes how they work in a fancy building, and describes with a degree of contempt the prodigious furniture decorating the room—the $75k table and $5k chairs. The group's inability to produce a TV and DVD player in such a lavish environment—appliances that cost essentially nothing nowadays—only intensifies his rage. Their lack of preparation for the meaning represented a common tactic that local power brokers and state officials used in order to discourage civic involvement, government monitoring and political participation. It was an

expressions of power that did not involve direct threats or violence but rather humiliation, non-cooperation and the promotion of ignorance.

This form of power was repeatedly used in order to contain protest and discontent, as I discuss in previous chapter. Local political elites and industry elites took advantage of the area's poverty in order to quell dissent. Many locals felt a deep seated sense of shame about their poverty. Often, they lacked certain forms of cultural capital as well (i.e. they did not have experience in the civil and political spheres; their manner of speech was stigmatized; and they lacked the formal attire expected for participating in certain social and political forums). Elites capitalize upon their prosperity—their cultural capital, their prodigious buildings and meeting halls, their refinement—in order to intimidate poor protesters, exploiting their shame and inexperience in the civil and political realms. The status differentials that divided the aggrieved from those in power, in short, made it all the more easy to withhold cooperation, compensation, action, and public responsibility.

9.8 Shaping Public Opinion

While the industry strove to materially conceal and deflect blame for the damage that it caused and counted on the state's apathy in terms of enforcing regulatory laws, the primary way that it shored up public support involved representing its interests—arguably falsely—as those of ordinary Shale Countians. This involved capitalizing upon Shale Countians' concerns regarding unemployment and poverty by framing environmental regulation and taxation as "job killers." Contrary to the popular literature on rural conservatism, the number one priority of poor Shale Countians involved securing stable and gainful employment—not waging a "culture war" that ultimately came at the expense of their economic interests. Indeed, the most frequently occurring code in my dataset was "political interests – jobs/employment," which referred to

instances in which subjects made statements suggesting that the political issue to which they assigned the highest priority was finding a good job. Using a sophisticated public relations campaign that blocked critical claims against the industry while linking environmental regulation with unemployment, the industry took great strides in order to capitalize upon the poor's employment concerns.

In theoretical terms, coal operators were able to achieve *hegemony* in the region, that is to say, they were able to exert moral and intellectual leadership in Shale County, thereby defining social life from the standpoint of their political-economic interests and needs (Gramsci 1991). Below, I discuss the processes through which they achieved hegemony while noting failed instances to achieve hegemony by other individuals and organizations. The vignettes that I provide illustrate the nature of coal-related conservatism in the county.

Although Shale Countians opposed the "red tape" that the Obama-led EPA had ostensibly imposed upon coal companies, they did not oppose all government regulation and taxation. In fact, they did not have a strong aversion to regulation and taxation at all. The Republican partisanship of the rural poor, I will argue, was thus distinctive from Republican partisanship of the urban and suburban middle-class, many of whom sympathize with the Tea Party's anti-statist ideology. Shale Countians reacted strongly against EPA efforts to monitor mining only because the industry had successfully linked those efforts to joblessness and poverty through decades of cultural engineering. Interestingly, Tea Party efforts to engender resistance to social welfarism and small business taxation in Shale County were unsuccessful. Because few entrepreneurs, small business owners and executives lived in Shale County (the middle-class, as described in other chapters, was predominantly comprised of educators, civil servants, healthcare

professionals, and attorneys who either worked for or closely with the state), they could not exert moral and philosophical leadership within the area.

While attending a city council meeting during which the council was debating whether to pass a new restaurant tax, for example, a local business owner whom I had gotten to know, Dominique, interjected into the meeting with several long and angry diatribes.[193] As the clerk read, he and a friend whom he had brought for support exchanged several incredulous scowls. At one point, his friend, who later told me that he was a Tea Party organizer, whispered to me about how he "wouldn't open up a business in this town." Dominque overheard and told him to keep that point in mind, as he was going to bring it up to the council.

When the time arose for input from the public, Dominque stood up and vociferated a long missive regarding how low prices attracted customers and tourism, and how the city was only going to turn away potential customers by imposing new taxes that raised prices. He mentioned how he often drove to Rock City in order to buy gas, as it was several cents cheaper there. He also asserted that the tax would "squeeze" businesses and make it even harder for them to stay open. He concluded his statement by criticizing the Affordable Care Act, arguing it was already going to raise the price of doing business, and that businesspeople like himself could afford nothing more.

I mention this occurrence for two reasons: First, because it represents a failed attempt to achieve hegemony by a relatively affluent local business owner; and second, because in so doing, it helps establish how the pro-coal sentiment of Shale Countians was rooted in the industry's cultural work, not abstract ideology. During this council meeting, Dominque attempted to represent his interests—minimal taxation and regulation for the purpose of maximizing profits

[193] Dominique had moved to the county from Chicago in order to open a package store several years earlier. The proceeds from the tax were to be used for promoting tourism within the county.

and minimizing oversight—as the concomitant interests of ordinary Shale Countians. During his exchanges with the council and other attendees, which became quite heated, he asserted that with all of the city's problems, he believed that providing people with jobs by lowering the cost of doing business would better serve the county. He claimed that raising the price of doing business would only drive people away from tourism and coming to city.

The mayor, Dom Johnson, was able to counter the spurious link that Dominque attempted to establish between taxation and employment, however. Dom remarked that Shale was one of the cheapest places to do business in the country, and that its negligible tax base had actually hindered rather than helped economic development. He stated that all of the surrounding counties levied taxes on restaurants and hotels, including nearby Rock City. He also noted that the city had some of the lowest water rates in the state, and how the city had not raised them despite having recently undertaken a multi-million dollar project to overhaul the water treatment system. Dom thus attributed the city's problems to its exceptionally low rate of taxation, not the presence of taxes.

Dominique, however, went on. He remarked—in a sarcastic way—that there was simply nothing to attract tourists to Shale County. He mentioned one of the city's "splash parks," but noted how he did not consider it a tourist attraction, and that the city could not compete with other proximate cities that have much more to offer. He said, for example, that he traveled to Rock City in order to get dinner and a movie, which he could not get in Shale County.

Dom responded by saying that this was exactly the point—that Dominque paid the same exact restaurant tax when he went to Rock City, and that he would thus lose nothing if he paid it in Shale County. He also said that Shale had no tourist industry and few attractions because the city did not have enough money to promote development opportunities. Another council

member chimed in throughout, noting how he did not understand why the tax was such a big deal, given that all of the other county's paid it. He said that by refusing to levy the tax, Shale was giving away free revenue. Dominque then began to discuss how he would have to start cooking hamburgers at home because he would no longer be able to afford them. One of the council members pointedly remarked that she wished that he stay at home to eat them, to which the rest of the members laughed.

The whole exchange illuminated the way in which individuals attempt to manipulate the social problems that the poor face, in this case poverty and joblessness, in order to build support for their own initiatives. In this situation, however, the council was able to refute Dominque's agenda point by point, discrediting the definition of the situation that he attempted to pitch. First, they noted how counties with higher tax burdens had fared much better than Shale County. Second, when Dominque altered his argument, asserting that the city would never be able to lure tourism, and that he went to another city for entertainment, they turned his argument against him, noting that he regularly patronized counties with restaurant taxes, and that, as such, they must not deter consumerism. When Dominque turned to hyperbole at the end, stating that he would have to begin cooking hamburgers at home, they laughed his contention off as absurd and reminded him that he did not even live in the county (he lived on a large property in the adjacent county, only owning a business in Shale).

The last part of the passage, in which Dominque asserted that the tax would force him to begin cooking hamburgers at home and cease dining out, demonstrates a laughable effort at achieving hegemony. As Gramsci notes, however, hegemonic ideology cannot be farcical—it must represent a "compromise equilibrium." Hegemonic ideas, in other words, cannot be

unbelievable, impressed upon hapless and idle populations or comprised of outright fabrications; they must rather be won through convincing leadership and spontaneous consent (Storey 2008).

Throughout my research, I observed a spectrum of ideological claims. Some were robust for exploitation while others had limited potential for achieving consent among the disenfranchised. Dominque's claim regarding how a restaurant tax would cripple the economy and undermine Shale Countians' ability to eat out, for example, was weak. For one, Dominique was disliked throughout the community for his abrasive "Northern" attitude, demeaning commentary toward the poor and association with alcohol. He was thus not well positioned to provide leadership. Moreover, the issues that he pushed were usually not very important to those living in the area. Dominque's primary political interests rested in personal taxation and government policy toward small business (e.g. licensing, permitting, taxation, and regulation).[194]

Poor Shale Countians, however, exhibited negligible concern with taxation and small business. For one, few were small business owners. In fact few even possessed the means to patronize the few businesses that were located in the area. Second, most Shale Countians had small tax burdens. According to data collected by the Brookings Institute, 6,233 total tax returns were submitted to the federal government in 2011 from Shale County. 2,534 received the Earned Income Tax Credit (approximately 41 percent). Many low income individuals were thus subsidized rather than penalized through income taxation. They thus lacked an experiential core that would make taxation and regulation salient, stirring opposition against them. This largely explains why county residents tolerated small business regulation and neglected to support the

[194] Dominique had encountered problems in obtaining a liquor license and believed that the building that he owned was already overtaxed. He complained about these issues to me—typically with vitriolic flair—nearly every time we met.

Tea Party, but opposed regulation of the coal industry while supporting Republican efforts to water down labor and environmental regulations.[195]

While taxation and the principles of small government mattered little if at all to most within the area, almost all displayed concern with employment. The coal industry's ideological work, which linked EPA regulation to unemployment and poverty, was thus robust. Because the industry had provided some employment over the years, the linkages that it drew between coal and economic opportunity were not only believable but personal. Moreover, the industry carried out "leadership" in the community by frequently making donations to local institutions and sponsoring local events, even if the financial offerings were trivial. This had the double effect of cultivating perceptions of ubiquity and dependence. And perhaps most importantly, as described in early sections, the industry was believed to provide access to status and a moral identity via mining jobs. The industry was thus well positioned to offer hegemonic leadership and possessed an abundance of social, economic and political resources with which to provide it.

This had not always been the case. The gradual decline of the UMWA's role and presence in the region largely enabled the leadership position into which the industry ascended. While the union once represented close to 800,000 miners throughout the nation, it today counts only about 35,000 active members among its ranks (Maher 2014). As a result, it commands far few social, economic and political resources. Due to the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, the 1950 BCOA agreement, increased mechanization, and declining share of the energy market, moreover, the organization had been defanged. Its activities have largely transitioned from organizing and agitation to administering pensions and benefits. Indeed, there are currently no active UMWA mining sites in Eastern Kentucky (Shafer 2007). In an attempt to preserve the

[195]The example also illustrates the differences in Dominque's middle-class Tea Party conservatism relative to the lower class conservatism of most county residents.

few coal jobs that remain, the organization (while calling for stronger regulation) has refused to condemn MTR-mining.

Although the UMWA had never established a strong presence in Shale County, its hegemonic position throughout the region profoundly influenced how residents thought about coal, mining and one's relationship to "the company." The community organizers and anti-MTR activists with whom I spoke—including Tara, Cheryl, Fred, Jessica, Maria, and Wade—for example, all asserted that when organized labor maintained a presence in Kentucky, union members were able to construct workers and community residents into a unified class that opposed "the company." They accomplished this by recognizing the concerns of ordinary residents (e.g. unsafe working conditions, low pay, lack of job security, poor housing, and compensation by way of scrip), taking measures to address those concerns, and forging identifications with them (Caudill 1963; Eller 1982, 2009; Fisher 1993; Scott 1995). Now, however, the organizers with whom I spoke claimed that the situation had been inverted. The industry, that is to say, had successfully merged workers, their loved ones and companies into a common class grouping—a grouping that stood in stark opposition to the state, environmentalists and urban outsiders. Although the industry once represented the enemy, it had reframed itself as a friend—if not the ultimate guardian of community interests. Indeed, the dramatic change illustrates how human beings *make* as opposed to *realize* social class (Thompson 1963).

By providing a cultural framework that recognized local grievances and validated collective identity, the industry exerted authentic "leadership" in the region. While its leadership was real, meaningful and by no means "false," it did allow the industry make pronouncements and articulations that were false.[196] By propagating misleading information about its economic

[196] For example, the coal industry regularly propagated misinformation in Shale County regarding mining's effects on regional ecosystems, which were construed as benign, if not beneficial.

impact on the area, coal operators were able to convert executive and stockholder concerns with taxation and regulation, which affect profit margins, into employment issues for the rural poor. Their contentions, however, were misleading, given that mining no longer employed many residents within the county, and that regulation exerted only a minimal effect on employment. This is precisely what Marx calls "ideology," and what Gramsci calls "hegemony," in the sense that by capitalizing upon their control of media and local institutions, coal operators were able to represent their interests—reducing government oversight and taxation on mining activity—as the concomitant interests of Shale's rural poor, which involved job creation and poverty reduction.

During a Fourth of July cookout at my neighbor's trailer, for example, I struck up a conversation with a man named James, who told me he was "pushing 40," after his wife and son headed home. James was a construction worker who had previously had employment fabricating supports for mine shafts. He was wearing boots, light blue jeans and, notably, a black t-shirt, which was emblazoned with the message "Coal Keeps the Electricity On." After some small talk about UGA football, we began discussing the poor state of the economy. Referring to an op-ed that had been published in the local paper a few days earlier, James began lamenting how the EPA was attempting to shut down coal operators in the area by imposing new regulations. He added, disdainfully, that Obama seemed to be spearheading the effort. He went on to talk about how the entire area depended on coal, and that coal was one of the few sources of stable, good employment—that lots of people he knew worked on deep mine operations and strip jobs. He discussed how EPA regulations would eliminate these jobs, which was problematic, as little else was left in the area. He also added that the new coal regulations would raise the price of electricity by 35%, which would place a further burden on cash-strapped families.

In this story, James explicitly linked the Obama administration and EPA to mass unemployment in his area and rising energy costs. He derived this view point based on the information that industry operatives—in conjunction with local elites—propagated through the local civil society. James' commentary mirrored the claims made in the local paper just days before. The column, which was penned by Shale's state senator and state representative, chastised the Obama administration for waging a "war on coal." This suggests that hegemony is forged by establishing a local system of institutional support that buffers against contradictory information from the outside. While ideological state apparatuses like the federal government and national news media play a limited role in shaping political ideology, my data suggest that hegemony is best mediated through primary groups that one directly interacts with on a daily basis and thus respects and trusts.

As a whole, the story exemplifies how the coal industry, by publishing op-eds in local papers, buying advertising space on television, and working to prevent and discredit all rhetoric that challenged the industry within civil society, had succeeded in representing its interests—minimizing regulatory oversight, lowering its tax burden and reducing government promotion of alternative energy sources—as parallel to struggling working class individuals like James. They had accomplished this by linking the Obama administration, which has championed redistributive economic policies, increased environmental regulation and alternative sources of energy, to Central Appalachia's problems structural unemployment and rising energy costs.

The industry relentlessly worked to cultivate the perception that the region's economy and survival depended upon coal production, i.e. that mining supplied almost all of the region's jobs, and that charitable donations from mining companies kept most local institutions running in

the face of the region's economic duress. In his 2011 annual address to the state, for instance, the governor exclaimed:

> Our coal industry is in jeopardy because Washington bureaucrats continue to try to impose arbitrary and unreasonable regulations on the mining of coal. To them I say "Get off our backs!" I will fight you for the right to cleanly and safely mine coal. I will fight you on behalf of 18,000…coal miners [in the state] who are working to feed their families. And I will fight you to keep this nation strong by supplying it with the energy it needs to remain the beacon of democracy in a troubled world.

Similarly, in 2013, Shale County's congressional representative had these remarks published in the local newspaper: "The Obama Administration hasn't been shy about its desire to wipe out our nations use of fossil energy resources…The results will be spiking energy costs, greater reliance on foreign energy, and lost jobs." The article went on to claim that Shale's congressman "continues to push for thoughtful investments in emerging technologies that will allow our country to more efficiently utilize its abundant natural resources, including coal, natural gas and oil," adding that he has focused on economic development, job creation, fighting illegal drugs, preserving the region's "natural treasures" since getting elected several decades ago. Not long after making the above comments, the state's federal senator exclaimed "the war on coal waged by this administration is costing [the state] our jobs, our livelihoods and indeed, our future" at a well-attended political rally. The notion that the local economy—or at least what was left of it—depended on coal production, and that the Obama administration was attempting to undermine the industry, was thus ubiquitously reinforced.

Figure 8

9.9 "Coal is not just a Job, It's a Way of Life:" Community Identity and Hegemony

Although the industry worked relentlessly to cultivate the perception that the regional economy relied on its jobs, donations and tax proceeds, the primary way in which it maintained public support was by encouraging those living in the county to personally and culturally identify with the occupation of mining. The industry's public relations and lobbying work, that is to say, attempted to cultivate the perception that mining anchored the community's collective identity—that coal was not just a job, but a way of life.

Support for the industry, as such, did not arise merely from economic self-interest; it expressed a collective demand for cultural recognition and dignity. Shale Countians interpreted criticisms against the coal industry not as instantiations of environmental concern, but as assaults on their culture, identity and moral ideals. The outside world, they felt, had historically deprived them of everything that they held near and dear. Now—with the advent of environmentalism—city folks—the very people whose lives were powered by their hard work—sought to deprive them of one of the few points of pride that they retained—an occupation that provided access to a middle-class lifestyle, expressed collective memory and embodied the regional moral order.

To many, coal mining represented a final outpost of dignity whose fate hung in a delicate balance.

The industry manipulated and exploited this situation, capitalizing upon residents' feelings of deprivation, exclusion and inferiority. When progressives called for pursuing renewable energy, the industry reframed their messages as attacks on miners themselves. When they pressed for environmental preservation, the industry pitched their advocacy as assault on the Appalachian region and the values that endured there. Many of these messages, moreover, came from local officeholders/patrons whom residents personally knew and trusted.

As numerous scholars have observed in other contexts (e.g. Arnett 1978; Caudill 1963, 1976; Gaventa 1982; Eller 1982, 2009), a tight nexus had developed between local elites and coal operators. Caudill (1976), for example, who attempted to pass restrictions on strip mining while serving in the Kentucky House, wrote in *Watches of the Night* that*:*

> Of all American politicians, the small-bore officials who run the states are the most greedy and least scrupulous, and the coal royalists learned early…how relatively paltry sums, if well placed, could bring the passage of helpful laws, the veto of harmful ones and, in a pinch, the nullification of judicial opinions (p.18).

This situation continued to hold in present day. When I asked Alexander about the extent to which local government depended on coal operators—for both public and campaign financing—he replied: "A lot. A great deal." "Do they have to be pretty beholden to industry," I followed up. "Well they are anyway," Alexander asserted: "There are a lot of connections between the coal industry and politicians in eastern Kentucky. And anywhere there's coal mining, there are those connections." In return for their financial assistance, as Caudill indicated, local politicians facilitated projects and legislation that the industry desired. This included securing low tax assessments on land holdings, exempting the industry from undesirable regulations (such as weight limits on coal trucks), obstructing the passage of new regulations, insulating companies

from legal complaints (such as Benjamin described), facilitating permitting and contracting, and absorbing negative externalities (such as Cheryl described). Equally important, however, was that they made copious public pronouncements of support for the industry, sponsored industry events and defended the industry by way of their media connections.

Thus, during a public a speech Shale's state senator impugned:

> I am tired of coal-producing states being treated as second-class citizens. Our people work hard, long hours to make sure that our electrical costs stay low, which is critical to growing jobs; coal is a home-grown resource, and I am proud to defend it.

Remarks such as these were powerful. For one, they came from trust, primary ties. Shale's state senator, for example, had lived in Shale County for his entire life, procured copious pork for Valley Town, and personally assisted myriad residents—giving Bruce tickets to a UK basketball game, for instance, and facilitating David's drug prevention efforts. Second, such rhetoric capitalized upon Appalachians' feelings of unjust deprivation. Because residents already felt like the outside world treated them as "second class citizens," local elites were able to frame regulatory initiatives as yet more attempts to deprive the rural poor of their livelihoods. As Maria noted:

> One of the first thing that you and I talked about was the stereotypes and how sensitive we are about them, but that really gets used against us…Because then coal corporations and politicians or whoever is trying to control us can always cast that as the other side…That kind of us and them thing is real, real strong, because we have been put down so much. And that's always been a real big deal to me, but I'm caring less and less about that—about the stereotypes—because I think being defensive about them causes us to not be realistic sometimes about the poverty and the corruption and all the negative things, you know, that we need to be working on, instead [we say], "oh, well, they're talking bad about us again." Or saying "well we're not all poor; look at me, I'm not poor," you know. You know, a lot of people always say that. Because one thing we always talk about is whenever people come here they just take pictures of the poorest places. Well, that's true, but it makes us mad because they're not seeing how diverse and complicated it is…So, I use to write a lot about the stereotypes, but I've kind of changed that, because our resentment of that, I think, gets used against us and to our disadvantage very effectively.

Beyond enlisting the support of local elites, the industry relied heavily on its public relations firm, *Friends of Coal* (FOC), in order exert cultural leadership throughout the county and region. FOC, which was established in 2002, was a political advocacy group that employed public relations and marketing specialists in order to promote support for the industry. Much of the organization's work took the form of "bridging" (Snow et. al 1986). In other words, FOC attempted to channel the region's "unmobilized sentiment pool," which was comprised predominantly of discontent in relation to poverty, inequality and social exclusion, into support for the industry and hostility toward outside regulation. It accomplished this by saturating the lived environment with pro-coal paraphernalia, including bumper stickers, t-shirts, public relations advertisements, sponsorships, festivals, memorials, etc. Operators, moreover, often pressured, if not required, employees and their families to adorn this paraphernalia.

Figure 9

Figure 10

The PR and cultural engineering efforts that the industry carried out began during youth and never ceased. As Wade, a 50 year-old educator and anti-MTR activist , told me:

> We had the coal people coming to the grade school, us 8th graders. They'd say, "well, you just take this training for two weeks and then you get X amount of money to work underground."

Not only did these efforts shape the occupational aspirations of youth by conveying mining as a prudent career option, but they cemented the industry's presence into the collective habitus. As Wade continued:

> It's entrenched, you know? It's a part of the culture. My daddy was a miner, you know, I think his daddy was a miner, and his daddy before him was a minor, even though they have people that were hurt, black lung, whatever, it's still part of their culture, so our people won't let go…

Given that the industry occupied a prominent place in the community, sponsored numerous local organizations, encouraged youth to pursue careers in mining, and employed family members, how could residents interpret attempts to reign in the industry as anything other than attacks on themselves?

Outside of the schoolhouse, FOC operatives reinforced these feelings through a variety of other marketing techniques, all of which attempted to cultivate the perception that the coal industry was ubiquitous—that it not only employed people in the community, but formed the community's center. Indeed, in Shale County, one would be hard pressed to escape evidence of the industry's presence. FOC bumper stickers adorned most vehicles; FOC t-shirts and hats clothed a sizeable proportion of residents; FOC billboards lined the streets; FOC advertisements filled the airwaves and newspaper pages; and acknowledgements of FOC sponsorships permeated public events.

The depth of the industry's penetration into the county's cultural fabric first began to occur to me at a Fourth of July parade that I attended in Valley Town. The theme of the parade, predictably, was "Friends of Coal." My fieldnotes describe the event:

> I attended the Shale County Fourth of July parade, which was essentially a parade of ideology. The parade lasted about half an hour and consisted of a large motorcade. Almost all of the cars and trucks that passed through featured pro-coal messages: "Coal Keeps the Lights On;" "We Support Coal;" "Coal is not just a job, it is a way of life," and messages about how "coal pays my bills/provides my job." On two of the trailer trucks, the owners had created scenic displays of mines. Those who sat/stood in the bed were dressed like miners, with black make-up smeared on their faces to resemble coal dust and hard hats. One featured a makeshift log cabin, which burned smoke, while a man dressed as a miner sat in a rocking chair. Most of the cars/trucks were filled with children, who threw candy to onlookers. The parade also featured shiny coal trucks, and cars/trucks with paraphernalia for local politicians…The pro-coal messages were just about everywhere (for example, a truck drove a little league team around, but had a huge pro-coal sticker).

During a public festival that the county held several weeks later, a large Friends of Coal banner hung behind the podium from which community members spoke, including officeholders, pastors and inductees into the local hall of fame. During a different community event that was held in the fall, the County's Chamber of Commerce hosted its annual mining competition, wherein residents within one another to haul the greatest amount of coal within a time limit. At Shale County High School football games, which constituted major events in the community, during almost every timeout, the stadium's loudspeakers blared the message: "This game was brought to you by coal and the hardworking miners and coal companies who work to keep the lights on." FOC also funded an annual symposium that David organized, which was intended to recognize the achievements of local residents—or as he put it, "the good things that they did." And nearly every week, the local paper reported instances of Baker Energy making token donations to local institutions, such as the school board.

These efforts served multiple functions. For one, they cultivated the perception that the "coal industry [was] a good neighbor," as the Judge Executive put it. They also aligned coal with regional traditions and cultural understandings; aligned coal with sports and leisure activities; and aligned youth with the industry. Even if one rejected FOC's advocacy and refused to internalize the content of its messages, the organization nonetheless exerted a powerful effect. By colonizing the county's civil society, the industry engendered a form of panoptic control (Foucault 1977). In other words, because the industry had largely succeeded in cultivating the perception of omnipresence, those who opposed coal mining were afraid to express their views; they felt as if they existed within the unblinking gaze of industry supporters. Given the industry's ubiquitous marketing efforts, one developed the perception that the industry and its supporters were everywhere. Cheryl, Tara, Benjamin, Maria, Alexander, and Wade—and

presumably others like them—felt as if the "friends of coal" relentelessly monitored social life, anxiously waiting in order to discipline and punish those who held a negative (and perhaps even ambivalent) evaluation of the industry. As Benjamin told me: "Around here where we live, if you just mention…If you just say a negative word about the coal industry, you're putting yourself in danger, because that's all people's known around here all their life."

Throughout his interview, Benjamin thus complained about how no space existed in Shale County within which to talk about and critique the coal industry.[197] As the previous chapter discussed, few public spaces existed in general, and those that did bore the black imprint of coal dust. Indeed, every anti-coal activist whom I interviewed insisted on meeting in private for fear that others would overhear their grievances against the industry. Two insisted upon verifying my background before agreeing to meet with me, suspecting that I might have a hidden agenda. When I encountered them thereafter in public areas, they refused to talk about coal-related issues.

They did so for good reason. Wade, for example, was nearly fired from his job for his activism, because Baker Energy was a major donor at the school in which he worked. Maria, Cheryl and Tara told me that they had more or less become estranged within their communities for making negative statements about the industry. Alexander, as the previous chapter noted, was reprimanded at his job for simply for publishing the critical comments that others had made during a public meeting. One thus had much to lose and little to gain by speaking out against the industry's hegemonic dominance.

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[197] This could be said about many "progressive" ideas in general. Dominant actors in the community—whether associated with coal, local politics or religion—engaged in what Gaventa (1982) calls the "mobilization of bias." That is to say, they sought to organize contrarian political opinions outside of civil and political discourse. Almost every civic institution in the county that I observed maintained a conservative bias. There were few if any forums in which to explore or advocate alternative viewpoints. Most churches propagated conservative ideology; most local politicians propagated conservative ideology; and most missions and schools propagated conservative ideology. Moreover, the local television station and newspaper gave the county's economic, political and religious leaders regular space in which to cement their positions.

When activists did muster the boldness to critique the industry on their own turf—i.e. everywhere except one's private home—the industry flexed its muscles in a way that immediately subdued dissent. When Maria, Cheryl, Alexander, and a few of their neighbors attempt to mobilize support in order to block a site in their community for which Baker Energy had a sought a MTR permit, for example, the industry brought out the "big guns." As Maria recollects:

> Even though our efforts seem so meager compared to what was going on, they always respond with such big guns. You know we were just a few writers with guitars [laughing] who started making up these folk songs about mountaintop removal, going around singing them in colleges and universities and stuff and makings speeches and stuff, and…and you know we certainly seemed harmless enough…And then they—some coal companies—organized…they bought their own band! They bought a country band and sent them around singing pro-mountaintop removal songs…And anytime anyone writes a letter to the editor in the Lexington Herald complaining or even questioning at whatever level something about coal, they come back, you know, with a huge op-ed of their own. It's always the same stuff, you know. They don't let anything go by unchecked.

Even when autonomous space appeared to emerge, wherein residents could ostensibly speak openly about their feelings and political opinions, the industry co-opted them. In the summer of 2012, the Dionysus Project—a collective of actors who, by offering a dramatic reading of Greek myth, attempt to create an open and emotional environment in which audience members can discuss problems in their communities—visited Valley Town. Maria recounts the occasion:

> Have you heard of [the Dionysus Project]? It's a theatre project, and they do things all over the country using productions from Greek theatre to promote community discussions about contemporary issues…So [they] came to Valley Town…and the place was full. And it was just wonderful. They asked the audience—and you know, there was a facilitator—but he went around with a mic and asked us, you know: "What do we think in terms of drugs in Shale County," and in terms of this thing and that thing." It was a really interesting discussion…People really got it, and it really came out how much people were really concerned about it and wanting things to be done, but yet didn't know what to do themselves…It was a really good, interesting, open discussion.
>
> *And then*, at the end, they turned it over to someone from Baker Energy. They got up there—in my view ruining the whole thing—and made this huge deal out of giving 17

> thousand dollars to [a drug prevention organization]…They had this big check—and they did this period of self-promotion at the end. And you could just feel the whole atmosphere in the room went "pfffff" [makes sinking motion with her hands]! …Here we had this wonderful reading of the Greek drama by these wonderful actors, and then we had this lively discussion about something really important, and then we had an ad from a coal company, and it was just like a reminder that we're everywhere, and we're really in charge here.

As these stories indicate, the industry not only worked to cultivate the perception that it was everywhere, but took actives measures to exclude critical commentary from public discourse.

9.10 Interpellating Loyalty: Pro-Coal Propaganda as a Material Force

Beyond simply colonizing Shale's stunted civil sphere in a way that made it exceedingly difficult to express oppositional viewpoints, FOC's marketing efforts established culture as a material force (Williams 1973). Many people adorned FOC bumper stickers and wore FOC t-shirt regardless of their opinion of the industry. As Tara, an organizer for an organization that engaged in environmental activism throughout the region, told me:

> [The industry's influence] is pervasive, but it's also meaningless to so many people…We have members [of our organization] who have Friends of Coal stickers on the backs of their cars. I've seen hybrids—Priuses—with Friends of Coal bumper stickers…For a lot of people it's just like a cultural identification as much as like, "I truly support Baker Energy" or whatever.

As Tara states, the industry's slogans were meaningless to many people. Lack of belief in the content of messages, however, did not nullify their efficacy. Indeed, the practice of participating in the industry's "supporting norms and rituals" (Gaventa 1982) contributed to the narrowing of civil society regardless of sincerity of belief. At an even deeper level, such rituals "interpellated" many people into a pro-coal attitude.

Althusser's (1971) interpellation refers to the processes through which individuals are "hailed" into a subject-position and/or ideology. It captures the way in which social actors become effects of the discourses and practices to which they are subjected. Drawing from

Marx's (1990) philosophy of historical materialism, Althusser asserted that material practices shaped belief rather than belief shaping practice (the interpelleation concept is thus diametrically opposed to Weber's (1968) methodological individualism). He used a popular Pasalian dictum as a metaphor for how political ideology operated: "Kneel down, fold your hands, and you will believe."

In the case at hand, interpellation describes how the act and practice of continuously—even if superficially—adorning pro-coal paraphernalia and participating in coal related/sponsored events worked to shore up support even among those who held no strong feelings toward the industry. If the industry could not convince residents of its virtue, as Coriolanus stated in the Shakespearian tragedy that bore his namesake, its operatives knew that: "By my body's action [I can] teach my mind a most inherent baseness."

Those working for the FOC campaign thus shaped the consent by hailing Shale Countians into a multitude of social and material practices that expressed support for coal. Against their will, subjects were often pressured to enact cultural practices that did not necessarily reflect or conform to their beliefs. As Benjamin told me:

> …Let me tell you this, a lot of people that work for the coal company, you know, they will give them stickers, you know, these Friends of Coal, they'll give them stickers to them and say, now you put that on your vehicle, and don't you come back to this job without it on there…You give [them] to your family, to your cousins, your aunts, your uncles, and you have them put it on there, you know? If you come back to this job without that sticker on your truck or your car, you go back home…There is no Friends of Coal. That's a damn sticker that they created, and that's it, you know? I don't even get it: How can you be friends with a rock?

Tara and Cheryl also told me that companies typically require their employees and family members to adorn FOC paraphernalia. Because there were few opportunities for leisure in the area, moreover, residents often attended events like "coal festivals," in which they participated in

competitions like the "Coal Miner Olympics," which would test their prowess in various mining-related skills.[198]

As Benjamin continued:

> …They've got everybody brainwashed, man…They got people thinking that coal is our only way of life. As it is right now, it is, because we're not given any other opportunities. You know, it is our only way of life, but it shouldn't be that way…We ought to have other ways to make a living. We shouldn't have to be suck with the option of either you work at McDonald's or the coal mines. You know, we ought to have more options than that, but we don't.

As a whole, Benjamin's commentary suggests that the omnipresence of FOC stickers and events—and the industry's historical domination of the labor market—literally did establish coal as a "way of life" (Bell and York 2010 have observed this phenomenon as well). Even if displays of allegiance were inauthentic, they had the effect of subduing dissent. As Lisa Wedeen's (2009) work in Yemen has showed, staged displays of loyalty and allegiance to economic and political regimes ultimately constitute citizens as obedient and supportive subjects of authority.

9.11 Fear and Coercion: Shoring up Support through Repression

Like local political elites, industry agents often resorted to coercion and repression when they failed to secure consent. Although it no longer employed the "gun thugs" and spectacular forms of violence that defined much of the region's history during the 20th Century, industry operatives continued to inspire fear. I spoke with several individuals who indicated that, despite disapproving of the industry's presence and action in the county, they were afraid to "speak out." Sometimes they even expressed articulated support for the industry in order to conform to normative expectations. The activists with whom I spoke, moreover, confessed that they knew

[198] I observed that religious leaders, as an aside, made similar demands during church services. Attendees were often called upon to testify, make public professions of faith and/or participate in faith healings. These occurrences, as Pascal contended, shored up religious faith.

people who publically affirmed coal while privately expressed misgivings about the industry. Thus, as both Salamon and Van Evera (1973) and Gaventa (1982) have shown, quiescence often reflects fear, not necessarily approval of a dominant group or industry's activities. This suggests that barriers and reprisals—in addition to consent—contained industry critique.

The various "friends of coal" sanctioned opponents by spreading rumors about them, socially alienating them, blacklisting them from employment opportunities, and occasionally levying threats of violence. As Benjamin told me:

> You know, they tried to intimidate me. They've threatened me. There was even one coal truck driver…who I'm pretty positive [is the brother of Shale's state representative]. He used to run a truck for Baker Energy. You know, so…here's our state representative backing Baker Energy, knowing they run stuff illegal. Well his brother…had the nerve to send me an e-mail, and I still have the e-mail, I saved it in a file. He told me the reason my child couldn't ride a bicycle was because she lived too close to the road, and [he] asked me did I want my child run over by a car. Now that's a threat! …
>
> PL: Do you think there are a lot of people who are afraid to—who maybe feel similar, but feel intimidated or afraid to…
>
> B: Absolutely, absolutely. A lot of people around here know they're getting run over, done wrong and stuff, but they're afraid to speak up…There's a lot of people around here that would love to sit down and tell you the same thing I'm saying right now, but they're scared to.

As Benjamin describes, coal truck drivers often ran opponents off the road, which put them at risk for serious accidents. Sometimes industry supports even threatened to burn down the houses of those who criticized coal mining.

These threats were particularly acute for those working in the industry. Miners, truck drivers and processing plant workers often feared reporting labor, safety and environmental regulations. An op-ed from a former coal trucker, which was published in the local paper, attest to this fear:

> As a former truck driver for 14 years, I know that Kentucky roads would be safer and coal truck drivers better off if the legislature passes HB 560 [a bill that would impose weigh limits on coal trucks]. There is a system in place where truckers are financially

> rewarded for hauling unsafe loads. A trucker will transport an unsafe load if it is to their economic advantage, such as when she is getting paid by the weight, and for protection from being dismissed from her job if she refuses to do so…I was asked to cross 30-ton load limit bridges that sat right outside of quarries that were loading me more than 30 tons on a daily basis. It was my responsibility as the driver of that truck to choose whether to cross that bridge or not. If I didn't, I could park the truck and not get paid, and probably get fired.
>
> I remember my fear while driving down a narrow road where I was asked to run too fast and overweight and knowing that my truck was not even in good shape, and knowing that if I'm going to take home a paycheck at the end of the week that this is what I had to do. And I had no protection. If I got caught I was the one would have my license in jeopardy, my employment in jeopardy and not get a paycheck. In the transportation of coal some of this responsibility needs to be spread out amongst the other stakeholders…Right now, the driver takes all the risk (and his family and loved ones).

As the driver notes, reporting or refusing to carry out illegal activity put one at risk for termination. Thus, another story featured in the local paper reported on an underground miner who reported violations to the Kentucky Office of Mine Safety and Licensing regarding having to "tak[e] part in...dangerous activities." As opposed to rewarding the man for his courage, the state *punished him* for rule breaking by putting his underground miner certificate on probation for a year. The reporter concluded the piece by emphasizing how state law favors the industry over miners, citizens and environmentalists, and how protecting those parties often requires federal intervention.

9.12 Accounting for Opposition to Coal

The industry, as the preceding sections show, capitalized upon the feeling of reverence that county residents had for the heroism, dedication and selflessness of their forbearers (and, when not possible, employed intimidation). Developing counter-hegemonic viewpoints, as such, was a difficult process. Because the industry had articulated mining with the region's overall way of life, "penetrations" (Willis 1977) required either threats of existential magnitude—such

as what Benjamin experienced[199]—or cultural and material separation from the influence of mining.

Independence from the weight of coal's legacy increased one's receptivity to environmentalism and alternative development. Maria's biography is instructive in this regard. In a column that she penned for the local paper, she wrote:

> People from other states might not think so, but it is possible to group up in…Appalachia and still know almost nothing about coal…the people I knew taught school, kept store, grew tobacco or raised cattle. They worked at factories in Ohio and drove home on the weekends. I did not know any coal miners. The world of coal and mining existed in the same pace and time as my world, but like energy escaping from a different dimension, it intersected with my world only in odd moments. We had electric heat at our house, so the coal that warmed us was far away, and we did not see it.

The fact that Maria's family members never worked in the mines—that is to say, the fact that her life experiences remained at a tangent to the industry's legacy and influence—doubtless influenced her receptivity to environmental messages.

Three other factors did as well. First, because Maria was a woman, she experienced less pressure to express support for coal in order to actualize her normative gender expectations (Bell and Braun 2010). Second, Maria had lived outside of Shale County for several years during and after she went to college. This was significant, as Bell and Braun (2010) found that leaving the region increased one's exposure to critical information and diminished mining's centrality to identity. And third, because Maria was middle-class, the industry's health did not govern her employment prospects. She also had greater capacity to absorb the rising energy costs associated with renewable energy sources.

[199] Many people developed oppositional attitudes toward coal through a process that Auyero and Swistun (2009) refer to as "popular epidemiology." This refers to the processes through which ordinary people/residents begin to detect disease patterns. It is usually residents, such as in Benjamin and Tina's case (another anti-coal activist whom I interviewed) who discover danger and thereafter become activists to put an end to it.

Much to the chagrin of activists, however, people like Maria were the exception. Few residents had lived outside of the county for long periods of time; few were middle-class; and few grew up in households that had remained untouched by the industry. Indeed, nearly everyone with whom I spoke had personal connection to mining. Bruce, Russell, James, and Sean had all worked in various mining jobs. Chester Palmetto, David, Bruce, Wade, Lauren, Amy, and Benjamin all had fathers whom had worked as miners.

Thus, when I asked Wade, the local educator and anti-MTR activist, about the biggest challenges that he had encountered in terms of mobilizing support for his initiatives, he responded:

> Just finding people other kinds of work. It's entrenched, you know? It's a part of the culture. My daddy [was a miner], you know, I think his daddy was a miner, and his daddy before him was a minor. Even though they have people that were hurt, black lung, whatever, it's still part of their culture.

Beyond the propaganda that formalizes coal's cultural importance into civil society (PR messages, festivals, paraphernalia, etc.), the industry socializes young people into the cultural legacy. Wade went on to state:

> We had the coal people coming to the grade school, us 8th graders, they'd say, well, you just take this training for two weeks and then you get X amount of money to work underground. One 8th grader raised her hand and said where do I sign up? They said "no, no, you need to go get all the education you can get." So that's the double message, you know? We need mining, but we know that education and other opportunities are better to people, but it's tough to sell many alternatives here for work.

Representatives of the industry, as Wade notes, contact young people early on, telling them that by completing only a few weeks of training, they can forge a lucrative career in the industry.

Youth, as such, grow up with family members who worked in the industry for multiple generations; play on sports teams sponsored by local operators; have representatives speak to them about career in the industry; participate in festivals, parades and competitions that revolve

around mining; and come of age in an area where coal's imprint—through t-shirts, bumper stickers, newspaper and radio advertisements, etc.—is omnipresent. Because coal mining becomes so thoroughly woven into the local culture and impressed into the habitus, most residents resist efforts to promote alternative development. Such efforts, as detailed throughout the chapter, become attacks on miners and Appalachains themselves. As Cheryl and Tara note:

> C: If you attack coal, you want coal miners' children to starve to death on the side of the road…
>
> SP: It used to be-the companies, the workers, and the communities, and of course some of these…for labor it was communities and workers against the company, and now it's company and worker have been merged against community…is the dynamic-so trying to shift that dynamic…

More generally, because of coal's prominence in local history—and because the industry continuously pumps out propaganda asserting that the region's future depends on coal—most residents have difficulty in terms of conceptualizing alternative development in the first place.

The industry's ancillary public relations work—for example, making co-optive donations—amplifies the power of their message for adults. Benjamin spoke to this continually throughout his interview, as the following passage illustrates:

> Listen, Baker Energy, they'll give a few thousand dollars to the Bio Club down here. You know…our city, our county gets a few coal severance dollars. Listen, these people are making millions. The people that own Baker Energy are making millions, and they're throwing a few thousand dollars to the county that they're devastating…All the money and fossil fuels that's left here, from natural gas to coal…we ought to have streets of gold instead of coal, but we're left with nothing. Sickness and poverty, that's all we've got. We ought to be one of the richest counties in the state, but we're not. We're the poorest. That's the way they want to keep it. They want to keep you uneducated. They don't want you to know nothing about what's going on, you know, that way they can continue making their money illegally.

In this eloquent passage, Benjamin makes a connection between quiescence, identification with coal and poverty and lack of education. He suggests that the industry and elites who support it purposefully block anti-poverty and economic development initiatives in order to keep the

population poor and dependent. The best way to ensure allegiance to the coal industry, he claims, is to render it the only available opportunity for gainful employment and to conceal the negative externalities of mining by establishing hegemony—co-opting local institutions, controlling the local civil society and keeping educational attainment lower and biased in favor of the industry. I take up his observations further in the following sections.

The coal industry also actively took measures to block the alternative development that people like Benjamin attempted to promote. Because its profitability depended on preserving the viability and dominance of mining, operators blocked efforts at alternative development through their lobbying power;[200] by spreading misinformation about the unviability of alternative development; and by containing alternative development through incorporation (Hebidge 1979). When residents became interested in alternative development, conservation and preservation, pro-coal politicians worked to channel their sentiment and energy into official channels that lacked the ability to unseat coal's domination. Examples of political incorporation include a small environmental cleanup program initiated by the district's congressperson and the state representative's work with the state outdoorsman's caucus, etc. These initiatives involved efforts to exhibit sensitivity to environmental problems without taking substantive efforts to redress them.

9.13 Conclusions

While Shale Countians often did overstate coal's economic import to the region, culture played an equally important—if not more important—role in shoring up industry support. As the industry slogan stated, many Shale Countians had come to view coal not just as a job, but as total way of life. The industry accomplished this perception through two primary means. First, it

[200] This was often codified into state law. For instance, as Rachel Adams explained to me in her interview, the state's energy policy almost wholly precluded her renewable energy activism. Because energy co-ops must offer the cheapest sources of energy by law, explorations in renewable energy are often prohibited by default.

established its presence as a material force. By creating a nexus with local officeholders that ultimately served to undermine alternative forms of development, it built up an undiversified mono-economy in which it existed as the only player. At the same time, it co-opted the civil sphere by imprinting its presence in every nook and cranny in which residents subsisted. Apart from saturating the county with marketing, paraphernalia and propaganda, the FOC campaign sponsored nearly every organization in the area and often hosted the county's few recreational opportunities. Combined, these efforts resulted in a closed society in which residents were interpellated into the industry's supporting norms and rituals and deprived of the capacity to express contrarian viewpoints. Because the industry held sway with agents of the local government and media, moreover, it possessed the capacity to mobilize bias, control information and set agendas when critical discourse surfaced (Gaventa 1982). Thus, by colonizing collective memory, the political domain, the civil sphere, and the labor market, the industry had indeed—as Benjamin stated—formed coal into a way of life.

More so than narrowing the parameters of civil society and employing fear in order to subdue dissent, however, industry operatives capitalized upon their personal knowledge of and relationship to the Appalachian region in order to exert moral and philosophical leadership. By acknowledging residents' feelings of sensitivity, social exclusion and economic hardship, industry representatives provided a cultural framework that recognized, implicated and offered a solution to social problems within the local structure of feeling. In the wake of the UMWA's demise, the FOC campaign framed the industry in a way that validated collective identity in the face of external stigma; honored values within the local moral order; and capitalized upon geographical tension. Often, this involved appropriating music, traditions, and conventions. In

this sense, FOC functioned as an "organic intellectual." Rather than advancing the economics of the poor, however, it served the interests of industry of executives and stockholders.

This is not to say, however, that the industry had engendered "false consciousness." As Gramsci's work illuminates, dominant classes, groups and institutions must achieve consent from the governed. The hegemony that they win represents a "compromise equilibrium." Thus, while the industry's presence undermined alternative development, local democracy and the environment, it offered a host of cultural and symbolic benefits. Moreover, rather than representing "false consciousness," the hegemonic ideas that the industry propagated were true. And truth, of course, is decidedly more difficult to debunk than fiction.

As a whole, this chapter suggests that rather than examining the negative externalities of hegemonic leadership, political sociologists must also probe what hegemonic ideologies do for those who embrace them. Because a fundamental objective of human existence involves the creation of meaning, scholars must seek out the symbolic benefits that hegemons provide and take seriously the functions that they serve. In this case, although the industry provided few jobs, it offered a sense of dignity, identification and cultural recognition. Hegemony, in short, must thus be approached and thought of as a dynamic and contradictory phenomenon—not as a monolithic and one-side one.

Indeed, as the previous chapter adumbrated, the lines of class and interest that divided Shale County were complicated, dynamic and contradictory in general. As Tara noted, she knew stainable development activists who adorned Friends of Coal bumper stickers as identity markers. Cheryl told me that she knew coal miners who identified with industry but attended water testing training due to their concerns with mining-related water contamination. Throughout my fieldwork, I personally encountered community members who made pro-

industry statements at the same time that they made pro-union statements. Even Alexander and Benjamin—some of the most vociferous critics of the coal industry whom I met in Shale County—told me that they did not wholly oppose mining. Alexander, who had protested against mountaintop removal mining in his community, told me that he believed coal should continue to play a role in the regional economy—so long as "it was done right." Benjamin, similarly, stated that so long as coal operators abided by regulations, he did oppose their presence.

As Tara told me, the situation is "complicated" given the region's tangled history. The coal industry had brought jobs and development while simultaneously destroying traditional ways of life through the processes of modernization and economic exploitation; the industry had brought the promise of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle at the same time that it had contaminated the communities in which residents lived; the industry had given way to an occupational subculture that generated pride at the same time that it stirred fear of death, injury and illness; the industry's presence had produced a state that occasionally offered protection but mostly protected companies at the expense of citizens; and the industry had engendered a region that was torn between its past affiliation with coal and labor and its future, in which those entities would surely decline.

While environmental activists had begun to make limited inroads into the region by reframing sustainable development initiatives around job creation and affordability, their efforts to provide moral and philosophical leadership paled in comparison to those of the industry. Ultimately, the industry did a better job of recognizing and expressing residents' feelings, problems and aspirations. For one, it demonstrated greater sensitivity to the economic hardship that residents faced by emphasizing employment and economic development in lieu of ostensibly abstract threats like global warming. Additionally the FOC campaign celebrated regional

culture, while environmentalists sometimes inadvertently demeaned it. Indeed, coal was often conveyed as "dirty" and "destructive," and some critics even resorted to hillbilly stereotypes in order to account for those who supported the industry "against their interests." Moreover, because activists typically appealed to figures, statistics and studies in order to make their cases, moreover, they functioned as "traditional intellectuals." As Gramsci asserts, it is almost always "organic intellectuals," i.e. individuals who speak in a language that resonates with the everyday experiences of their audience, who mobilize protest. While some had begun to do this by appealing to the need to preserve the land on which residents had grown up and the natural beauty that defined their area, more effort in this area was needed in order to achieve results.

As Gaventa (1982) notes, social protest often turns on the extent to which change and/or policy undermines a "way of life." In *Power and Powerlessness*, he writes: "Strip mining in the Central Appalachian Valley is more than an act of environmental demise. The loss of jobs and the destruction of the land mean the demise of a culture, a way of life" (p.134). He found that people tended to protest in the Appalachian valley that he studied when surface operations directly infringed upon their land, livelihoods and cultural traditions, a finding noted by others as well (e.g. Eller 2009; Bell 2010). I observed this in my own work. Benjamin protested against coal because the processing plant near his home polluted the air that his daughter breathed. Maria, Alexander, Cheryl, and Tara protested because operators sought to mine in areas that would affect their waterways and land. Wade became an activist because surface operations had destroyed much of the natural beauty in which he had grown up. Direct hardship, in fact, nearly always seemed to precipitate resistance.

Because many did not experience direct coal-related blight, however, the coal companies and the local elites that facilitated their operations had mostly appropriated Gaventa's

observation to their own benefit. Throughout my time in the county, they depicted "liberals," environmentalists, and the EPA as outsiders who sought to undermine traditional ways of life in order to protect the environment. The aforementioned parties were also conveyed as people who prioritized the esoteric environmental concerns—e.g. saving endangered snails—over the actual human beings who were suffering through joblessness and poverty in the county (which was a false dichotomy.

Although the social problems cause by coal were numerous, the industry had experienced more success in terms of promoting environmentalists and clean energy as a threat to traditional ways of life than the other way around. First, they commanded greater resources and had more power and influence in relevant areas. They not only carried out prolific public relations campaigns via paraphernalia, sponsorship of organizations and events, parades, and festivals, but threatened and suffocated those who expressed critical messages. Second, they took measures to conceal the damage that mining generated by buying out property, targeting inconspicuous areas, and hiring workers who must make significant commutes. Third, they had incorporated mining into regional lore and tradition, in essence rendering coal synonymous with Appalachia.
This in the local elite/coal alliance were able to mobilize bias in their favor, control information and set agendas (Gaventa 1982).

This was mostly accomplished by gaining leverage on influential organizations and agencies, achieving hegemony in local news outlets, especially the newspaper, controlling the pulpits, etc. Much of the industry's support thus developed as a result of their control over civil society—especially its ability to co-opt local institutions and forge a presence within the educational sector. Specifically, powerful locals officials were able to organize ordinary peoples' coal-related concerns, preferences and grievances out of the political process and in make cases

out of political discourses altogether. Additionally, the alliance between local elites and coal interests had left the local civil society crippled, i.e. there was a lack of community space and a shriveling of public space/institutions that undermined political/community opposition against coal in Shale County.

In conclusion, like local and national political issues, views about coal were not cognitive perspectives that could be readily modified. They were deeply ingrained in the habitus—in lived experience. When company bumper stickers proclaimed that coal was a way of life, they were literally true in the sense the presence of coal and of mining were woven into the fabric of mountain life through and through. This is perhaps where mountaintop removal activists have gone wrong—one cannot necessarily convince others of the detrimental qualities of mining. Contrary to what Habermas (1984) theorizes, we formulate our political views—and our political subjectivities—through emotions and even embodied experiences, not simply cognitive information that we pass through a process and scientifically/rationally analyze. The next chapter picks up on this theme.

CHAPTER 10

THE POLITICAL EPISTEMICS OF CONSERVATISM

10.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the underpinnings of conservative partisanship in Shale County. As the earlier chapters adumbrate, I will show that neither the "misinformation" nor "stupidity" model discussed explains the Republican partisanship of the voters whom I studied in Shale County. Both accounts convey political knowledge as an isolated, independent object, exaggerate the role that the media plays in political socialization and presume a rational political decision-making process among social actors. As opposed to being an isolated independent object, I will show that the political understandings held by Shale Countians were embedded in personal experiences and local social relations, which shaped the meaning that national political events and media messages took.

By the section's conclusion, I will show that media programming played only a minor role in Shale Countians' political socialization. Primary groups, local institutions, significant others, and personal experiences, I will argue, played a far more important role in establishing their Republican partisanship. When interests groups and mass media did influence their political views, I will show that they did so only because primary socialization and local institutions had created an underlying receptivity to them, serving as a filter through which national political events and media information passed. Moreover, as opposed to carrying out an abstract, rational political-decision making process, I will demonstrate how subjects came to political decisions through an emotional, if not embodied, process. My analysis, as such, will

work toward the construction of a relational-pragmatist model of political decision-making (Smilde 2007) and a political epistemology of emotiveness and experience.

More specifically, I will show that Republican partisanship was located in five sources: First, opposition to the perceived environmentalism of the Democratic Party, which was viewed as antithetical to the coal industry's well-being; second, ostensible social distance and dissimilarity between residents and liberal politicians, which undermined the formation of cultural identification and trust; third, opposition to government assistance programs that offered direct cash assistance to the poor, which ran against the grain of the local moral and religious order; fourth, a tendency to conflate "lumpenization" and the emergence of a "gray zone" with "welfare dependence," which precipitated symbolic violence and antipathy toward the poor; and fifth, the generalization of negative experiences with local government to the national political sphere. In general, my findings will emphasize how personal experiences with the local political structure, which was marked by personalism, patronage relations and corruption, shaped how Shale Countians interpreted national political events and personas, even when those events and personas bore little relation to events and personas operating at the local level.

10.2 Republican Partisanship and the Coal Industry

Because poverty and unemployment represented Shale Countians' primary political interests, fear and anger with regard to the Democratic Party's ostensible environmentalism constituted the foremost reason that residents tended to vote Republican. In the context of the 2012 presidential election, a vote for Barack Obama was understood as a vote against the coal industry. At the level of myth (Barthes 1972), a vote for Obama was thus viewed as a vote against jobs, economic development and the dignity of the Appalachian region. The tendency of

county residents to conflate EPA restrictions with Obama's will—another instantiation of myth—made matters worse for the President.

Rather than viewing the EPA as a watchdog organization that promoted the public good, Shale Countians viewed "Obama's EPA" as an intrusive and alien regulatory agent that destroyed coal mining jobs without offering recompense. For example, while sitting next to Paul at church one day (an elder in David's church), he began speaking to me about Shale County's economic problems, which he attributed to a lack of mining jobs. Paul made several hostile remarks about EPA regulations, asserting that they had made it impossible to mine in the area, and that they had eliminated well-paying coal jobs as a result. In Paul's view, such regulations had little to do with protecting county residents: "They seem more concerned with the ecology of it than the miners," he lamented. Paul described coal mining as very dangerous work, and accused the government of failing to promote mine safety. Instead, he believed that the federal government promoted the environmental agenda of outsiders at the expense of Appalachians.

These views, no doubt, derived at least in part from the aggressive leadership that the coal industry exerted in the area. Indeed, the moral and philosophical leadership that Friends of Coal provided, as last chapter showed, had successfully depicted Democratic politicians—especially Barack Obama—as "outsiders" who, in their "war on coal," sought to insult if not destroy the Appalachian region. Shale Countians thus held the president personally responsible for nearly every instance in which coal companies shuttered their mines or shed jobs, and nearly every instance in which the EPA delayed or refused to permit new mining sites. In most cases, as the early chapters of the dissertation show, market forces rather than government red tape had undermined the industry's economic prospects.

10.3 The Moral Order of the Mountains: Opposition to Government Handouts

Apart from discontent with the Democratic Party's energy and environmental policies, opposition to programs like SSI, DI, TANF, and, to a lesser extent, SNAP constituted the foremost reason that Shale Countians preferred Republican candidates over Democratic ones. While concern with the Democratic Party's relationship to the coal industry shaped Republican partisanship among nearly all local voters, opposition to exisiting welfare policy was a decidedly middle-class concern. Indeed, middle-class Shale Countians vehemently opposed social welfare programs that provided direct cash assistance to the poor. Such programs were viewed as "handouts" that undermined the collective work ethic and eroded the county's moral fiber. These understandings possessed a double origin. First, they evolved from the county's historical legacy. As Brown (1988) showed, the moral economy that developed around subsistence agriculture, and the Protestant values that inflected that moral economy, established hard work and self-reliance as fundamental values early in the county's history. During the days of farming, these values reflected material reality in the sense that residents literally reaped what they sewed, thereby facilitating collective survival.

Although farming had mostly withered away as the county's dominant mode of economic production, the moral ideals that had evolved from it—self-reliance and hard work—continued to weigh heavily on residents, which generated strong opposition to government "handouts." Critics of government welfare policy traced the origin of such handouts to Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. While speaking with Paul on a different occasion, he began to elaborate the nature of Shale's social problems to me. Apart from stringent EPA regulations, he argued the county's problems originated from "dependence on the government," asserting that the county was now in its "fifth or sixth generation of welfare dependency." Many people, he

claimed, no longer desired help; instead, they felt entitled to a living at the expense of others via government. When I asked if he had a sense of how this ostensible welfare dependence had begun, he replied, almost shouting: "Oh yeah! With Lyndon Johnson!"

Countless other participants echoed Paul's commentary. They described Johnson's War on Poverty as "well-intentioned" but ultimately harmful. Christian participants—especially those who belonged to Baptist congregations—expressed the most vigorous opposition. David, for example, described "getting something for nothing" as "evil," an understanding that was rooted in his conception of the Fall. Because he heeded the idea of intrinsic, inescapable sin, he believed that it was incumbent upon government officials to assume the worst about the citizens whom they served, such as welfare recipients. He dismissed the "humanist" impulse to presume—or at least hope—that people would utilize government benefits in an honest and responsible fashion as foolish. Given the looming nature of evil, he did not trust recipients of government assistance to "do the right thing." To the contrary, he expected misuse and manipulation. The "liberal" understanding that recipients would use government assistance programs as intended struck him as absurd.

Middle-class residents like David and Paul did not oppose all forms of government assistance, however. They only opposed those that involved direct material assistance—that is to say, those in which, to use David's words, individuals received "something for nothing." Many of the same people who blasted LBJ's War on Poverty lavished praise upon FDR's New Deal—especially the implementation of the Works Progress Administration. On one of the first occasions that I spent time with Bruce, for example, he related his personal "theory of Appalachian poverty" to me. He noted five factors: Isolation, culture, drugs, "inbreeding," and

the federal government.[201] The latter, Bruce claimed, was the most important. Indeed, he impugned the federal government "as the biggest force of oppression" in the area.

Bruce asserted that the federal government sought to make people dependent on its programs, which in his view, perpetuated disempowerment. He construed the programs that emerged from LBJ's War on Poverty as a matrix of clientelist exploitation that ultimately kept recipients dependent on government. When I asked if government assistance programs ever helped people, he angrily explained that they did not. He affixed a caveat to his indictment, however: "It wasn't always that way," he repined. Bruce claimed that while the government possessed the capacity to "help people," it no longer did so. One needed only to look at FDR's programs during the 1930s, he claimed, in order to see how government could be employed in order to benefit the public good. Bruce then praised the WPA for "put[ing] people back to work." Now, he however argued, government programs ensnared recipients in dependence and addiction (the latter being a reference to the way in which some individuals manipulated Medicaid for the purpose of "doctor shopping").

Research participants supported other "workfare" programs as well. David, for instance, told me that he had supported Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. He did not support it because it reduced government assistance, but because he believed that it would connect unemployed individuals to jobs while inculcating a work ethic. Indeed, as opposed to impugning "big government, David told me that he wished that the federal government would *do more* for the region. Rather than direct material assistance programs, however, he sought public employment programs and wage subsidies: "Why couldn't the government supplement the wages of people who work at McDonalds around here" he wondered

[201] The fact that four out of the five factors that he cited conform to the tenets of the culture of poverty thesis speaks to the way in which many residents had internalized the stigmatizing discourses that outsider observers had developed in order to account for Appalachian poverty.

aloud during one of our many hikes. As I discuss further into the chapter, he along with other participants also expressed support for the tobacco subsidies that once flowed into the county, because they required residents to farm their land in order to make due on them.

Thus, as the collective commentary reproduced above demonstrates, participants' opposition to government welfare programs was moral, not ideological. Unlike Tea Party Patriots, Shale County's middle-class Republicans did not oppose the idea of government assistance. That is to say, they did not heed an Objectivist worldview that impugned the state and celebrated laissez-fair capitalism. Rather, they simply rejected the propriety of policies that provided direct cash assistance to the poor. Such programs violated many of the precepts that undergirded the county's moral and religious order. As residents of an historically agricultural community with a strong Christian influence, Shale Countians embraced the ideals of self-reliance and hard work. While FDR's programs "put people back to work," residents believed that LBJ's programs kept them out of work. Although this represented a mis-recognition in many respects,[202] it marked an ideological "penetration" in others.

Because the programs that most residents relied on were means-tested, they did sometimes create a disincentive to work. If one secured gainful employment, she would endanger her SNAP, WIC, SSI, DI, and/or TANF benefits. Both Lauren and Mary told me, for example, that they avoided the pursuit of work because their SSI benefits were contingent upon remaining below a maximum income threshold.[203] While driving to the grocery store one day, the former stated that she preferred the security of her SSI check to the insecurity of holding

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[202] Mass unemployment and persistent poverty did not result from means-tested government assistance programs. Eliminating direct-cash assistance to the poor would not renew the collective work ethic and transform the way in which residents made economic ends meet. To the contrary, there were simply too few jobs to absorb Shale's "redundant population" of displaced farmers and miners.

[203] This, however, was not the only reason that they did not "pound the pavement" in pursuit of work. As Chapter Six notes, structural unemployment, transportation barriers, lack of social capital, and poor reputation also undermined their employment prospects.

down a job. "Jobs," Lauren noted, "come and go," whereas her SSI payment remained constant—a position that was both rational and consistent with the subsistence ethic (Scott 1977).

If the first factor that precipitated opposition to direct material assistance programs was moral and historical, the second was experiential. Because the programs on which the lumpen class relied were often inadequate for making economic ends meet, and because they did not even begin to meet the lumpen's social, cultural and emotional needs, many welfare recipients manipulated their benefits. Misuse of government assistance programs often took place in the open. If it did not, stories about misuse spread like wildfire through the county by way of gossip.

Countless middle-class participants told me stories about witnessing community members sell their food stamps for cash; sell the items that they purchased with their foodstamps for cash; engage in "doctor shopping" with their medical cards; and celebrate the day on which the government approved them for a "crazy check," which, in local parlance, referred to approval by the Social Security Administration for SSI benefits. While these instances marked themselves indelibly into the memories of witnesses, middle-class residents rarely remembered—let alone noticed—instances during which welfare recipients used their benefits as intended. This resulted in stereotypes about the cultural attributes of the unemployed—stereotypes that had a basis in fact, to be sure, but that could in no way be generalized to all recipients of government assistance.

Beyond simply seeing and hearing stories about welfare misuse, middle-class residents accumulated a stock of negative experiences with those who inhabited the lumpen class. Because the social insurance principle continued to operate among the poor, they often entreated middle-class residents for money and favors. Given that they had experienced a degree of

separation from the county's patriarchal moral economy, the middle-class tended to view these requests as brazen, unreasonable and indicative of an "entitlement mentality." Those who made the requests, on the other hand, viewed them as legitimate socio-cultural demands. Moreover, because addiction was widespread, many middle-class residents had witnessed intoxicated individuals engaging in disagreeable behavior, and some had even been victimized by those who were attempting to support their addictions. More generally, the middle-class tended to blame the lumpen for giving the county a bad name by entrenching hillbilly stereotypes. Their interactions with the poor, in any case, were rarely agreeable. They believed that the poor made unreasonable requests upon them; neglected to express gratitude for favors; abused the assistance programs that their tax dollars funded; that their abuse had mired the county in drug addiction; and that their deviant survival strategies sustained the cultural stereotypes from which they had long sought to escape.

Because most middle-class individuals had seen welfare misuse, heard stories about welfare misuse, and personally witnessed the devastating effects of drug addiction that government medical care sometimes enabled, they developed negative perceptions about social welfare policies—particularly those that involved direct material assistance. Even the few liberal individuals in in the county with whom I spoke expressed this sentiment. Alexander—a staunch Democrat who articulated a desire for more "socialistic" economic policies during our interview—told me that he resented the way in which federal welfare programs had been "perverted." While he expressed approbation for the government programs that had originated during FDR's presidency, which in his view had required a "willingness [to work and] a desire for people to improve their lives," he viewed the "remnants" of the New Deal and Great Society in a negative light. "These welfare checks [and] these food stamps," he argued, required nothing

of recipients while offering nothing to the nation in return. If anything, he felt that they deprived residents of their independence while enabling harmful habits like smoking, alcoholism and drug addiction. The negative externalities of modernization and social welfare policy, as I will elaborate in the following sections, were thus conflated.

In sum, although most middle-class residents expressed support for government efforts to alleviate human suffering, they thought that the direct material assistance programs that had emerged from the War on Poverty were misguided. For one, the violated the values that had grown out of the county's moral economy of subsistence farming. They also violated several Christian precepts that had historically reinforced that moral economy—the Protestant emphases on cultivating a work ethic, achieving self-reliance and accepting Jesus as the only means of redeeming one's intrinsically corrupted nature. Additionally, middle-class residents had accumulated a critical mass of negative experiences with welfare recipients. Because most had personally witnessed welfare manipulation or personally experienced an unpleasant interaction with a welfare recipient, they developed the belief that social welfare programs produced laziness, moral decline and dependency.

Their perceptions contained a kernel of truth at the same time that they represented symbolic violence. The problem was not that the government had implemented idealistic programs that clashed with the harsh realities of "human evil," as David put it, but that the government had implemented programs that were poorly designed, inadequate for addressing residents' material needs, and wholly unconcerned with meeting their social, cultural and emotional requirements. Because most recipients only received $600 to $650 in per month in cash assistance, they were almost forced to manipulate their benefits in order to secure additional income. Because means-testing created a disincentive to pursue employment, moreover, they

often had to hustle in order to supplement their meager incomes. And because irrespective of income, residents remained isolated, devoid of transportation, culturally stigmatized, and tacitly excluded from full participation in the larger society, many engaged in deviance—especially addiction—in order to achieve a satisfactory adjustment to their unfavorable social circumstances. A more sensible and robust support net might very well have eliminated the actually existing shortcomings of material assistance that were highlighted by the middle-class' rhetoric. That written, despite their inadequacy, many people did use their benefits as intended. And even if the government did design optimal programs, the chief problem in the county would remain a lack of jobs.

10.4 A Lack of Sociological Imagination

Shale Countians' unfavorable opinion of Democratic proposals for expanded government assistance resulted not just from moral objections and negative personal experiences with welfare recipients, but from difficulty contextualizing the survival strategies of the lumpen class. As the previous section noted, lumpen individuals often had to entreat others for money and favors, use their assistance programs in unintended ways and hustle in order to make ends meet. The widespread deviance that this entailed resulted in various social dysfunctions. As Chapter Seven notes, both hustling and widespread addiction contributed to the erosion of the county's civil society by undermining social capital and public trust. Those who had been negatively affected by theft, addiction, defaulted loans, and so on resented those who had hustled them. Rather than attributing such behavior to a lack of other options, however, middle-class individuals tended to pathologize it. Even I—a person well-versed in the scholarly literature regarding extreme poverty and its consequences—occasionally succumbed to the inclination to attribute the unpleasant realities of living in the gray zone to personal defects and an impoverished culture.

Indeed, it was not until I left Shale County and achieved sufficient personal and analytic distance from the individuals who had conscripted me into their network of "disposable ties" that the nature of their hustling crystallized.

Thus, while it is sometimes easy for individuals to attribute the undesirable but necessary behaviors that occur within gray zones to blocked opportunities and structural disadvantage, it is less easy for those who have been victimized by such behavior to do so. Social proximity to lumpen abuse and the intimate violence associated with it, I found, discouraged advocacy for and empathy with the lumpen class while encouraging blame-the-victim mentalities. As Chapter Seven discussed, even Harry Caudill—a person who cognitively knew that internal colonialism, national market dynamics and problematic policy-making at both the local and national level had socially and economically crippled Appalachia—could not culturally and emotionally accept the conclusions that his writings proffered. Privately, he blamed Appalachia's problems on its people and their culture. As his story suggests, one can hardly avoid personalizing those whom one knows on a personal basis. Amid the personalities and problems that form the fabric off everyday life, the scaffolding of structural disadvantage fades from the public purview.

Thus, if long-term immersion within the gray zone undermined certain moral restraints among the lumpen, it crippled the sociological imaginations of the middle-class. Due to witnessing disagreeable behavior and being taken advantage of, they began to view the symptoms and consequences of poverty as poverty's underlying cause. While David routinely admonished the inequality that Shale Countians confronted, for example, he resorted to cultural explanations of the county's social problems at the end of day—explanations that emphasized the poor's lack of faith, inadequate work ethic, drug abuse, lack of parenting skills, and so on. His emotional attitude (as distinctive from his cognitive one), I would argue, had resulted from

years of battling poverty on the frontlines—that is to say, years of wading through the negative externalities that structural inequality had produced in region. As one sunk deeper into those trenches, it became more and more difficult to grasp the effects of structure even if one knew that it was there.

Some individuals, moreover, consciously chose to deny the structured basis of local problems. For them, to recognize the delimiting effects of structure would involve undermining one's own sense of agency and self-efficacy. If the county's problems were structural in nature—that is to say, the results of agricultural depletion, modernization, changing energy markets, etc.—what could one do but submit to them? Attributing local problems to culture, on the hand, was to render them mutable, especially for those working anti-poverty ministries. Indeed, the need to preserve agency in part explained the anti-EPA ideologies that many residents adopted as well. While many factors contributed to the demise of Appalachia's coal industry, government regulation was the only factor that residents could take action against, and thus the only factors they could change. Thus, because structure was difficult to appreciate from the trenches, and because one's sense of self-efficacy diminished in proportion to the extent that one embraced structural accounts of poverty, many middle-class residents embraced cultural explanations of local social problems.

The crippling of the sociological imagination, which amounted to yet another form of mis-recognition, ultimately resulted in greater aversion to Democratic social welfare provisions and a preference for conservative approaches to redressing poverty. Conservative approaches, in line with the emotional experiences of many residents, recommended personal responsibility and behavioral modification. This approach was an easy sell to those who had been victimized by several times over. Progressive pundits, in this sense, are somewhat arrogant to chastise such

individuals for ignoring the structural contours of poverty. Such an attitude is rather easy to adopt from the comforts of one's armchair but is not as easy for those who live in the gray zone.

As noted, however, immersion in the gray zone ultimately resulted in a situation in which the symptoms of poverty became conflated with the causes. It thus resulted in anti-poverty initiatives that had a limited capacity to redress poverty. Both Dawn and Lynette (another missionary whom interviewed), for example, spoke to me about their efforts to inculcate the poor into responsible behavior. Learning budgeting skills was a recurrent theme in their interviews as well as in the commentary that permeated The Lord's Table. While individuals can always learn to budget more scrupulously, the root of the problem for many poor people in this case was not a lack of budgeting skills but a lack of resources with which to successfully budget. Because poor Shale Countians had so little disposable income, they would have to budget to the letter in order to even hope to avoid running out of money. On such a small budget, moreover, less room for error existed—an issue that led reformers to hold the poor to unreasonable standards. Minor lapses in budgeting and petty manifestations of unproductive behavior that would never be scrutinized among more affluent people were inflated with exaggerated significance when enacted by the poor. Indeed, the loss of sociological imagination that immersion in the gray zone brought became a self-fulfilling prophecy for many of the county's middle-class denizens.

10.5 An Inconvenient Coincidence: Modernization and the War on Poverty

As Chapter Seven adumbrated, a narrative of decline permeated the county. While visiting the county's Historical Society on a hot and sunny afternoon in July 2012, for example, I became engrossed in a long conversation about the county's "cultural decline" with a man named Tommy and a woman named Edith. Both visited the Society often in order to catch up with friends and work on their genealogies. Tommy, who was in his early 60s, had previously

operated a funeral home but had since successfully run for county coroner. Edith, who was in her 70s, was a retired school teacher. When I asked about how the county had changed since their childhoods, they responded with commentary that was very similar to that of Maria's in Chapter Seven.

Tommy, for instance, lamented how the community's agricultural tradition had declined. In particular, he propounded on how the loss of price supports for tobacco had hurt the county.[204] Both Edith and Tommy argued that tobacco had been a crucial part of the economy, and that almost everyone who owned land in the county had cultivated a small tobacco plot at some point in her life. While admitting that these plots did not enable residents to make a living, they emphasized how they provided much needed income support, worth perhaps a few thousand dollars each year. They also commented on how yearly farm work facilitated a work ethic, as tobacco cultivation was labor intensive and required consistent toil (thus, as with the WPA, middle-class residents supported government intervention into the local economy when it required beneficiaries to work).

When recalling her own childhood experiences with tobacco, Edith noted how farming, along with cultivating a work ethic, facilitated positive community relations and the development of social capital. She explained how many shopkeepers in town used to extend credit on the expectation of future tobacco revenues. If a farmer needed to buy a new car, for instance, the salesman would provide the car and collect payment in "December," when checks for tobacco sales were issued. Edith said that no one in town made the monthly payments that have now become the norm. Tommy agreed, noting how the community "doesn't necessarily operate like that anymore." With a tone of nostalgic lamentation, he groused about how the legal apparatus

[204] This occurred when congress passed the Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act in 2004, which ended planting restrictions, price support loans and other regulations that it made it possible for small growers to turn profits in the face of corporate agribusiness.

had been injected into community relationships—about how social life in the county had become predicated on contracts rather than trust.

Edith agreed, noting how payment was not an issue in the past—how it would be unspeakable not to make good on one's debts. She recalled how her aunt during her youth kept tabs on debts "down to the half cent." Both also spoke how in the "old days," theft was not a problem even though it had exploded in years past. Both, in various ways, attributed these problems—a declining work ethic, the loss of trust and neighborly reciprocity and rising crime—to drugs and "cultural decline."

Such commentary abounded among research participants. Almost all of the middle-class participants with whom I spoke believed that the county was in the midst of decline. An unwillingness to work, community fragmentation, immorality, drug abuse, and crime were cited as evidence. Although the specific changes that participants lamented stemmed from a variety of structural forces—such as internal colonialism, market integration, population growth/land exhaustion, and urbanization—middle-class individuals tended to attribute them solely to social welfare programming. Given the way in which lumpenization had coincided with LBJ's War on Poverty, this was a logical articulation. Because both farming and coal-related employment had declined at the same time that reliance on state support had increased, many Shale Countians conflated government assistance with changes that ultimately resulted from the broader forces of modernization.

In other words, assuming welfare dependence even existence, it merely symptomized the changes that modernization had brought; it did not cause them. The conflation, in any case, resulted in widespread antipathy toward Democratic proposals for expanded state assistance. Indeed, one of the most frequently occurring codes in my data analysis was "welfare

dependence," which referred to instances in which participants decried the way in which local individuals and families had come to rely on government assistance in order to make ends meet. Middle-class individuals believed that it was these programs that had undermined the economic independence that once prevailed in the county.

When the regional newspaper ran a story commemorating the anniversary of Harry Caudill's death, for example, I asked David how he felt about Caudill's diagnosis of the region's social problems. David responded that Caudill's internal colonial model of poverty had identified "sore spots" in the mountains, and that his book was largely accurate. Yet, while acknowledging that "many people had come into the mountains and exploited its people," he stated that he disagreed with the outcome that he felt Caudill's book had produced: The War on Poverty. He then began a long soliloquy, which spoke to how the War on Poverty had failed and allegedly mired mountain people in dependency.

While David believed that "internal colonialism" and labor exploitation had contributed to Appalachian poverty and social problems, he did not believe in the promise or propriety of the federal government's policy prescription. His response, as foreshadowed above, must be situated within context. David viewed the War on Poverty in a negative light because he associated it with the socio-cultural changes that dovetailed with economic modernization, and because direct cash assistance to the poor violated a belief that was fundamental not only to the local moral order but to his religious ideology—the importance of hard work and achieving self-sufficiency.

Tommy weighed in on this theme as well during our discussion at the Historical Society. When I asked about the sources of Shale's social problems, he immediately began discussing how assistance programs were culpable in creating them. He said that the assistance programs

began as a good idea but had had many unintended consequences. The primary negative externality, he claimed, involved creating intergenerational dependence, which he asserted undermined the work ethic.[205] Tommy claimed that programs, which range from food stamps, to WIC, to SSI, and to rent subsidies through the local community action agency, allowed individuals to live their entire lives without working.

During a focus group that I conducted with several school teachers who were involved in local drug prevention efforts, one participant, similarly, echoed this statement by stating: "I honestly feel like Shale County is such a poor county, and that the majority of our people have been on welfare for so long, it's like it's handed down to their children." Adam, who was 65, spoke to this theme during his interview as well:

> Things are not progressing good, they're degressing. And I think that entitlement to a big degree causes that. There are people who have never had a job; they don't know how to do a job. And…it's much easier to lay on the couch until ten o'clock in the morning and get up and go down the street and come back and lay until lunch…Most of the people who grow and never have a job, they get the minimum Social Security. And then the government says if you lie and say that you're mentally challenged, then you can get another check. You have three little children and you get another check. And you do this and go to school and then you get another check. So the game is how many checks can I collect. Not that we don't have people who don't need them, but we've taken away from those who need and given to the ones who just want the liberty of doing whatever they want to whenever they want to at everybody's else's expense.

Adam's commentary is instructive. In the passage above, he expresses dissatisfaction with the county's joblessness, stating that many people in the county "have never had a job" and "don't know how to do a job." In the absence of jobs, such people lacked the ability to meet their cultural expectations and achieve status within the local moral order. After all, how could they exhibit a work ethic and achieve self-reliance while unemployed? Rather than attributing

[205] He made sure to add, however, that he did not believe in fully doing away with them, which he said would be inhumane. He said something to the effect that they needed to be gradually phased out or simply restructured.

joblessness to agricultural decline, economic disinvestment and a changing energy market, however, Adam attributes it to the poor's ostensible sense of "entitlement."

Adam's commentary demonstrates how class and status intersected in Shale County. Joblessness rendered the lumpen incomeless and hence poor. At the same time, joblessness foreclosed the conditions required for status attainment. Because the moral order of the mountains stigmatized reliance on others—which ran against the grain of self-reliance—accepting government assistance brought dishonor. This in part explains why people like Adam ridiculed the recipients of government assistance. His anger had less to do with the reach off government and more to do recipients' failure to exhibit self-reliance. As commentary cited throughout the chapter demonstrates, participants praised the New Deal, workfare programming, farm subsidies, and state-sponsored development. They opposed government only to the extent that it undermined self-reliance. Because the Democrat-led War on Poverty had coincided—in many ways by happenstance—with a sweeping loss of self-reliance across the county, and because reliance on assistance programs marked one as "dependent" rather than self-reliant, middle-class participants opposed most welfare programming. Had status been less tied to work and self-reliance, and had welfare reliance been understood as a consequence rather than a cause of joblessness, they may have exhibited a different attitude toward government assistance.

The fact that the middle-class' negative perceptions toward government assistance were ritualized within the county's culture further undermined support for the Democratic Party's expanded entitlement platform. Almost every economically secure individual with whom I spoke expressed disgust for the "first of the month," the day of each month on which those receiving government assistance benefits had funds and/or vouchers deposited into their accounts. For the poor, the first of the month represented a momentous occasion. Because it

marked their “pay day,” they eagerly anticipated it and experienced joy and relief when it came. In order to retrieve their checks, celebrate, make purchases that had been deferred, pay bills and settle debts, and simply bask in the collective energy that temporarily enveloped the area, they typically "went into town" on the first. While Valley Town was ordinarily a sleepy town with sparse traffic and commerce, it came to life on the first of the month. Customers filled local stores to the brim of their capacity, and an influx of automobiles generated bumper to bumper traffic on the roads that led into town. In short, Valley Town became abuzz.

While the first of the month marked a joyous occasion for the poor, those in the middle class despised it. For them, it symbolized how the county had transformed from a cohesive agricultural community to an atomized “mailbox economy.” On the first, the middle-class felt as though the poor literally descended from the hills upon Valley Town in order to collect their unearned benefits, and that they disrupted the flows and patterns of everyday life while irresponsibly depleting the funds that had been deposited into their EBT accounts in the process. The important caveat, of course, was that rather than symbolizing cultural decline and welfare dependence, the first of the month simply dramatized the way in which modernization had overhauled Shale’s traditional way of life. It did not ritualize welfare dependence so much as it ritualized the way in which modernization had undermined the county’s economic independence—that is to say, how market forces and state-sponsored development had undermined the capacity to provide for oneself and lumpenized a large proportion of the populace.

Yet, innumerable conflations occurred. When I asked Edith, a retired educator in her 70s, how the county had changed since her childhood, she lamented how many people in Shale—especially younger ones—had “lost their values.” She and the other two men with whom I was

chatting all noted that they refused to go into town and do shopping on the first of the month. Edith noted how she had gone into town on the first of the previous month and was shocked at how "rude" many of the people she had encountered were. She also repined how children no longer respected their parents and elders, recollecting how two teenagers whom she had seen had demanded that their grandfather buy an item that they desired. Throughout our conversation, she and her friends continued to conflate the negative externalities of modernization with the first of the month and hence government assistance programing. The way in which the advent of assistance programs had coincided with broader forces of socio-economic change thus amplified middle-class residents' resistance to them.

Indeed, given their negative experiences and stereotypes, the middle-class viewed essentially any and all of the lumpen's behavior on the first of the month as evidence of irresponsibility. Simply coming into town and shopping was taken as evidence of irresponsibility. This was because, as Martin and Desmond (2010) argue, political ideology does not consist of values so much as understandings of what the world is like and how it works. Rather than providing a view of the world, it fills in the world by offering cognitive shortcuts. In this case, rather than having to scrupulously analyze and assess the lumpen's behavior, middle-class residents could simply conclude that because welfare recipients used their benefits for unintended ends, and because they collected benefits on the first of the month, that their behavior during that time was irresponsible.

10.6 The Conservative Habitus: History, Personalism and Embodiment

Apart from opposition to "government handouts," other forces drove conservatism as well. The first was historical legacy. Unlike Frank's (2004) Kansas, Shale County had served as a Republican stronghold for 200 years. Founded by families who held strong personal ties to the

Republican Party (Billings and Blee 2000), its residents voted Republican throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. It did not, as such, transition from a hotbed of radical populism to a bastion of conservative partisanship.[206] Rather, residents had long followed the lead of the county's founding families. As Chapter Eight illustrated, most had no choice but to do so. Voting for the wrong candidates—at any level of government—could endanger one's access to municipal resources and even result in physical harm.

Second, and perhaps more interestingly, was personalism. Indeed, the same forces which drove local politics also drove national politics: Personalism, patronage and personal experience. Voters sought out candidates whom they believed shared their values and understood their experiences. Social similarity and personal knowledge, as it did at the local level, reassured voters that elected officials would provide "help"—perhaps not personally, but at least in relation to the county and region. Shale Countians thus wanted to know where the president was from, who his family was, how he had personally served the country, and if he shared similar values and life experiences.

In an op-ed submitted to the local paper several years ago, for example, a local writer attacked Ted Kennedy for being "out of touch" with ordinary Americans after he made remarks that were critical of Wal-Mart. The columnist asserted that Wal-Mart was the "champion of the working class," as it was the only store that provided access to the things that his family needed and wanted. He impugned Kennedy for his opposition, admonishing that not everyone "has the privilege of not having to shop at Wal-Mart."

[206] Most proximate counties did transition from reliably Democratic localities to Republican ones. That written, radical populism never permeated these areas. Having always remains somewhat conservative, these areas sought labor protections, a more equitable share of government investment and recognition as ordinary Americans as opposed to "poor people" (Portelli 2010; Eller 2009).

As with the hegemony that coal operators and local elites had achieved, the writer's column does not suggest that he embraces Wal-Mart's business policies and political activities so much embraces the company's cultural proximity to his own experiences. Coal operators, local elites and, in this case, Wal-Mart, ostensibly understand him; they stand in solidarity with him whereas people like Ted Kennedy stand against him. All three parties have been able to successfully brand themselves as bastions of the poor, even though many of their economic and political policies hurt the poor. The politicians that fared well with local voters thus sold the fact that they knew and understood them—not necessarily that they could benefit their economic and political situations.[207]

In a second example, while chatting with my neighbor Justin—a construction worker in his late 30s—I inquired if he had been following the 2012 campaign for president. Justin replied that he had not closely followed it: "I don't know too much about this Romney guy. He's a governor someplace, ain't he?" When I replied that he was the governor of Massachusetts, Justin noted—disapprovingly—that Massachusetts had strict gun control laws. He then began to repine his disappointment in relation to the 2008 election. He very much admired John McCain and was upset when he lost. Justin asserted that McCain was a very "honorable man" who had "been around" for a long time. Justin also boasted that he was from Arizona—a state that he liked and had lived in for several years. Finally, Justin praised McCain as a "war hero" whose father had served as a Rear Admiral in the Navy. Recounting how McCain had been shot down as a fighter pilot, suffering thereafter as a prisoner of war, he exclaimed: "God…what else could

[207] What is also interesting about the writer's column is that while he assailed Ted Kennedy, he praises JFK and RFK for fighting for civil rights and "the right of all Americans to live a good life rich or poor. These men lost their lives fighting for the things their brother tries every day to tear down. Kennedy and his ACLU devil worshipping friends will not prevail."

you do to show a greater love for your country?" McCain's military service also personally resonated with Justin, who came from a "family full of marines."

On the other hand, Justin asserted that Obama had "not been around long enough," and that he was he was "more or less unknown" to the world outside of Illinois. Moreover, Justin noted how many people doubted the authenticity of his birth certificate. Additionally, unlike McCain, who had demonstrated allegiance to the military through his personal service, he was unsure of Obama's support for the military: "I'm a big supporter of the military, he emphasized. For several minutes, he continued to reiterate his disappointment with regard to McCain's loss.

Justin's calculus for rendering political evaluations provides insight into his political epistemology. In both 2008 and 2012, liberal pundits conveyed concerns with President Obama's birth certificate as a manifestation of racism, xenophobia and ignorance. Rather than bigotry, however, it was personalism that undergirded people like Justin's apprehensions about the President's birthplace.[208] As we see in this vignette, the reasons that Justin gave for supporting McCain were personal ones. Unlike Obama, McCain had "been around" for a long time. Justin thus felt like he knew him on some level—especially given that he was from a state in which Justin had formerly lived. Moreover, Justin knew that McCain supported the military—a priority to him given that most of his family had served in the Marines (his brother, at the time of our conversation, was stationed in Afghanistan). Not only was Obama relatively new to the political scene, but—according to media propaganda—his citizenship could not even be verified. Obama, in short, resembled an "outsider," while McCain struck Justin as a person whom he could trust. As the previous chapter illustrated, many people were leery of placing their trust in those whom they did not know. As the Sheriff implied in during his campaign, one could only trust those whom they knew on a personal level.

[208] Few Shale Countians, I must note, even expressed concern about this issue.

Even policy preferences harbored a basis in personal experience. After small talk about the economy, Justin told me that gun control was another thing that he was "big on." Becoming almost angry, he stated that he did not want anyone to touch his guns, and that guns had never killed anyone, that only people had done so. He went on to discuss how as long as he had a gun, he could provide for his family. He also discussed how this went "along with [his] support of the military," and that "it [didn't] seem right" that his fathers and grandfathers could die to give people the freedom to bear arms, only to have them taken away in vain.

Defense of the right to bear arms among conservatives has long perplexed liberal pundits, who have chalked pro-gun ideologies up to misinformation, hyper-masculinity, irrational fear, and a will to power (Kahan and Braman 2003). Second Amendment support among Shale Countians like Justin, however, was rooted in the embodied nature of political socialization. The belief that US citizens should have more or less unrestricted access to firearms was neither a cognitive perspective nor an opinion that individuals embraced due to consuming pro-second amendment ideology. Allen (2012) underscored this point in a recent op-ed piece that was published the *Washington Post* regarding the Left's failure to implement comprehensive gun control reform after the Newtown Massacre in Connecticut:

> We're talking about the very best people, the people with statistics and proposals for regulation, crawling around in the sunlight of their social-scientific rationality. They never find a solution because all their legislation, academic studies, mathematical proofs, and proposals for waiting periods, background checks and buying limits aren't going to do much more than they ever have. Nor are the pleas of the progressives asking why anyone would ever want to own a gun—thereby demonstrating their arrogance toward the people who own the hundreds of millions of guns in the United States (p.online).

As Kahan and Braman (2003) have shown, cultural worldview explains variation in individual attitudes toward guns and gun control—not exposure to statistics and facts. They argue that policymakers and gun-control activists, as such, should focus less on amassing statistics that

demonstrate the negative externalities of lax gun control laws and more on formulating policies rife enough with social meaning to appeal to a broad range of cultural outlooks.

Embracing a similar logic, and drawing on the Hofstadter's (1970) classic exposé "America as a Gun Culture," Allen (2012) thus argues that advocates for gun control will fail until they overhaul the US' cultural affinity for gun ownership:

> The gun problem, however it's defined, can't be solved by statistical correlation between gun ownership and gun deaths, or by sneering at gun owners, or by lawmakers calling for more laws...Instead, we need to look at America as a *gun culture* [my emphasis].

Like other commentators, however, Allen ultimately confounds the origins and operations of working class culture, directing his attention to the mass media. He concludes the article by attributing the nation's enthusiasm for guns to video games and movies, asserting that "we might start with public pressure on the media and mass entertainment."

Justin's support for gun ownership was not tied to movies or video games. It was tied to an inherited set of material practices and a way of life, the inculcation of which was unconscious and began early in childhood. Desmond's (2006) excellent work on wildland firefighters reveals how we can tap the processes through which individuals develop political orientations by examining how one's primary habitus, i.e. "one's most deep-seated dispositions," "transform into a specific *habitus*." He argues that we should investigate how organizations and institutions "tap into, build upon, and condition these dispositions" into a set of attitudes and political preferences. In his own work, Desmond showed how the US Forestry Service converted the skills and dispositions that young men raised in rural, masculine, working class upbringings had acquired into an occupational identity that entailed opposition to environmental protection measures.

A similar process engendered pro-Second Amendment ideology in Shale County. The more time that I spent with subjects who articulated support for firearms, the more I realized the extent to which firearms were woven into their way of being in the world—how gun control threatened not just access to firearms, but their perceived way of life, perhaps even their very identity. Just as the emotional and embodied experiences of childhood predispose one to certain types of occupations, so they do also with political attitudes. In Shale County, playing outside, being in the forest, fishing, hunting, and target practicing during youth meshed with a belief in gun ownership as a fundamental right that concretized in adulthood. Indeed, Hofstadter (1970) himself located the origins of America's "gun culture" in the dispositions inculcated by rural living:

> What began as a necessity of agriculture and the frontier took hold as a sport and as an ingredient in the American imagination. Before the days of spectator sports…hunting and fishing…were the chief American sports…for millions of American boys, learning to shoot and above all graduating from toy guns and receiving the first real rifle of their own were milestones of life, veritable rites of passage that certified their arrival at manhood…The most gun-addicted sections of the United States are the South and the Southwest…This no doubt has something to do with the rural character of these regions…The gun..had a natural place in the South's outdoor culture (p.online).

The relationship between the "country-masculine" habitus (Desmond 2006) of subjects and their political attitudes first began to strike me during a summer evening in July, on which I had gone outside in order to catch some fresh air after a long session of typing fieldnotes. About ten minutes after I ventured out, Justin, his ten year-old son, Christopher, and another young boy, Connor, who lived with his parents in a nearby trailer, walked toward where I was standing in the yard. Connor was carrying his bow and several arrows. Justin approached to catch up with me, lighting a cigarette as we exchanged small talk about the weather. Connor, who had by this time begun target practice, approached Justin several times as we spoke, asking sophisticated

questions about the range and velocity of his 20lbs bow. Justin responded with precise answers to each question.

Eventually Connor set up a soda can to further hone his aim. With an excellent grasp of how to handle the bow, and coming very close to striking the can, he fired off several arrows as Justin and I watched. Eventually he handed the bow to Cody to try a shot, but Cody responded that he did not like Connor's bow. Justin mentioned that it was not like Cody's, who had a bigger, more professional one in the house. As such, he tried to pass the bow off to Damien, Connor's half-brother who had recently joined the family from Louisville. Damien, however, responded that that he did not like shooting. I then fired off a few shots, missing the target wildly on each attempt. As I returned the bow to young Connor, who was only nine years old, he made intermittent comments about its shortcomings, already suggesting a sophisticated understanding of how the device worked.

As Connor continued to shoot, I asked Justin if he was a big hunter. "Oh yeah," Justin replied, exclaiming that he loved to hunt. I asked what kind of game was around, and he told me that turkeys and deer were plentiful and that squirrel season was approaching as well. He also engaged in some extended commentary about fishing, telling me about how one could fish in the pond close to our house, though he did not recommend keeping the fish given how polluted it had become due to local dumping. He laughed about how he could catch fish out of a mud pond but never did well in the pay lakes, and he told me a few stories about his friends, who had caught huge fish of all different sorts in them (having a strong grasp of different fish species, he described the types in detail).

Justin also told me about how he used to be a "big trapper," lamenting how the practice was now frowned upon. He said that he grew up doing it, however, and that he used to sell the

furs, catching mostly Muskrat and raccoons. I asked if he ever ate any of it. He laughed, and said that his granddad made him and his brothers try raccoon once. He said that one could live off of it in a last resort, but that it was not good, shaking his head and exhibiting a look of disgust. He recounted one story about how he had set a trap, and that he heard it go off few moments later as he was walking way. He said that he thought he had incorrectly set it. When he pulled the trap up from the water, however, a muskrat bit him, which he had to kill with a rock before prying it off of his finger. He said that he had been bitten and injured by all sorts of animals while young. He mentioned another occasion in which he was collecting eggs from his sister's chicken coop. He said that he had stuck his hand into one of the coops and felt a slight sting. Figuring he had gotten a splinter, he pulled his hand out only to find that a copperhead had bit him (upon realizing this he fell through the coup).

As Justin continued to tell stories, Christopher chimed in with various remarks about weapons, ammunition and their applications in different types of hunting and self-defense situations. At one point he stopped to ask his father if there was any bigger piece of ammunition than a .50 caliber. "Shoulder-fired or handheld," Justin had to clarify, to which Christopher replied "shoulder-fired." At another point in the conversation, Christopher told us about videos he had watched on Youtube, in which individuals shooting large caliber guns had injured themselves upon the recoils. At the end of the conversation, he asked if we could take his dad's .22 into the woods and fire off some rounds. Justin stated that they could do so tomorrow, as it was getting dark.

Throughout our conversation, I was struck with Connor and Cody's precocious knowledge of—and ostensibly "natural" disposition toward—hunting, weapons and the outdoors. Their knowledge and dispositions were of course not natural but anchored in the

materiality of their lives as denizens of a rural area. Having been raised in a city, having never hunted and having fired a gun only once previously in my life, I had little to contribute to the conversation. Nor did Damien, Connor's half-brother from Louisville, who winced whenever Connor fired his bow and remarked on how he did not understand why Connor enjoyed shooting and hunting so much (Damien was a lover of animals).

The "county-masculine" habitus, as Desmond terms it, which developed from coming of age in a rural, working class setting, played an important role in eventually conditioning Justin's political ideologies. In other words, an elective affinity (Weber 1968) formed between his childhood experiences, which ossified into a durable set of dispositions, and his political viewpoints. The county's violent history, moreover, had also conditioned opposition to gun control. The *New York Times* special correspondent who spent time in Shale County in 1899 made several comments about the "custom of going armed" in the area. The custom traced to the county's legacy of violent feuding and continued among many residents in present day. Indeed, David carried a 9mm handgun on him wherever he went. His son, who frequently volunteered at The Lord's Table, did so as well. Max not only carried a .38 special, but kept a gun in every room in his house. Justin carried a handgun where he went as well. While sitting in the coffee shop that I often wrote fieldnotes at in Rock City, I routinely saw patrons who kept pistols holstered to their hips. Often, I encountered Dominique there—sometimes feeling intimidated while speaking to him, given that he too packed heat. As Dawn mentioned in Chapter Seven, some residents had become accustomed to arming themselves while voting. While the messages of groups like the NRA perhaps resonated with Shale Countians, it did not *cause* their pro-gun dispositions. It simply reflected the county's historical tradition and the cultural practices into which many residents had been inculcated from birth.

To carry a gun and to oppose gun control were thus "natural" acts. For most participants, they did not reflect cognitive perspectives so much as deep socialization. The vignettes reproduced above thus reflect the embodied and emotional contours of Shale Countians' Republican partisanship. They show how conservative political preferences were not mere opinions but rather extensions and articulations of a habitus that was years in the making. In so doing, they reveal the *temporal* inaccuracies within dominant accounts of working class conservatism. The focus on mass media and interest group activity by scholars and pundits belies a static view of political belief formation, in which political opinions are thought to develop instantaneously and without context. However, as Glaeser has shown, political understandings are generative rather than static. They not only begin to take shape during childhood socialization but are anchored in unconscious tastes, preferences and dispositions—that is to say, a habitus. When subjects in my study expressed their political opinions, whether those opinions involved support for the Second Amendment or opposition to social welfare policy, they did not formulate them on the spot. They were tied, to the contrary, to a context, an accumulated set of experiences and a particular way of being in the world.

Those carrying out liberal and environmental advocacy in the county typically failed to realize this. As a result, they attempted to politically engage conservatives at the level of reason and cognition, which stirred frustration. As Maria lamented:

> This is one thing that is going on that's kind of really scary…we're not able to listen to the other point of view, and the whole idea of a democracy is that we would talk about these things and then make a good decision…During the whole mining thing here, I had this real good friend…and [we] started getting into some pretty heated exchanges about [mountaintop removal mining], because everything I said he just totally disagreed with, and everything he said I disagreed with, and it sometimes got nasty.
>
> …So anyway…so we were getting into it on that, and I said—and I thought this was like a clencher—to me this was a clencher—I said, you know the University of West Virginia recently did studies that show the effects of mountaintop removal mining on water

> quality, and it's very, very detrimental. And [he] just said: "I don't put much faith in studies." [Laughs profusely]...I was just horrified because it's like, my God, if you can't quote a scientific study as evidence…there's no hope for anything.

Although many Shale Countians operated according to a political epistemology of emotiveness and experience, progressive activists like Maria relied on a political epistemology of reason in order advance their causes.[209] As Maria's commentary intimates, they also tended to hold up the Enlightenment rationality that they employed toward politics as superior to the emotionally and experientially anchored politics of conservatives. Indeed, progressive residents with an interest in reform actively encouraged residents to abandon the metrics on which they had traditionally relied in order to render political decisions. That is to say, they encouraged them to choose candidates based on their professional credentials, experience, independence, and personal integrity—not their personal connection to and knowledge of them, their capacity to secure favors via patronage, or their willingness to provide monetary compensation for votes.

The county's liberals and conservatives thus embraced different political epistemologies. They worked from different sets of epistemological assumption, maintained different sources of truth, and possessed different sets of political understandings. Martin and Desmond (2010) thus argue that:

> Political ideology should be conceived, not as a set of values that correspond to one's self-placement in the political field, but as a kind of social ontology. It is not that liberals and conservatives are looking at the same thing and applying to it different values in their evaluations; it is that they are looking at different things housed under the same rubric (p.2).

Liberal and conservative voters, in other words, do not apply disparate values to information and events that are perceived identically; they apprehend the same events and information in fundamentally different ways (e.g. poor people, social welfare, coal, etc.). Martin and Desmond

[209] This "progressive" epistemology was more often employed by individuals who had undergone higher education, lead cosmopolitan lives (regularly accessing information from multiple and diverse sources), and lived or had lived in urban areas.

(2010) thus dismiss the "the dominant conception of political ideology," which "assumes that liberals and conservatives possess different sets of values" (p.5). Instead, they argue the different ideologies possessed by liberal and conservatives describe not so much diverging values but different images/understandings of what the world is like.

This is why Maria and her friend appeared to speak past one another. In a sense, they spoke different political languages. Pitching social scientific facts at a coal supporters whose sense of truth was foregrounded in other sources was produced incredulity in lieu of agreement. Recognizing this, Gramsci once stated:

> The popular element "feels" but does not always know or understand; the intellectual elements "knows" but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other (quoted in Patnaik 1988, p.PE-2).

Gramsci, in other words, was concerned with the ascendance of Enlightenment Rationality in Marxist thought—i.e. the way in which Marxists tended to dismiss the views of ordinary people as "superstitious, naïve, meaningless, irrational, and so on" (Patnaik 1988:PE2). Many Marxists believed that philosophy should debunk the folk views of the poor and replaced them with scientific "truth." Recognizing both the arrogance and futility of this stance, Gramsci sought a return to certain pre-Enlightenment thought. Rather uncovering universal, rational principles and disseminating them to the masses, he believed that in order to mobilize support, organizers would have to access people's feelings and sense-perceptions. It was only by accessing and speaking to people through the lens of their own political epistemologies—i.e. by function as an "organic intellectual"—that progressives could engender support among the popular sectors.

Liberals living in Shale County—and the progressive organizers who occasionally ventured there in order to mobilize support for their causes—failed to do this. Whether in relation to coal, guns, social welfare policy, or local politics, they disregarded residents'

"feelings" and "sense-perceptions" and employed social-scientific rationality in order to influence their views. Maria, for instance, expressed incredulity when the man with whom she was debating dismissed the studies that she cited. Subscribing to an alternative political epistemology, and occupying a different social ontology, however, she could cite a whole litany of studies, and they would probably fail to influence him. Maria and her friends, in other words, would gain little traction in her efforts to sway opinion as a "traditional intellectual." Their inability to relate to the political epistemology that other Shale Countians possessed undermined their efforts to promote liberal causes, no matter what they were.

10.7 The National Consequences of Local Spoils

While the previous section spoke to the *temporal inaccuracies* that afflict dominant accounts of working class conservatism, this section highlights their *spacial inaccuracies*—that is to say, their focus on mass media and national interest group activity in lieu of local institutions, organizations and experiences. The tendency to generalize one's local experiences to the national political context first began to occur to me in the summer of 2012 during the lead up to the presidential contest between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney. While making breakfast one morning, I had tuned into a local talk radio show. Not long after tuning in, a conversation developed between the host and a local caller, both of whom were lamenting the possibility of an Obama victory. As the conversation wound down, the pair discussed a news report regarding how Obama had courted a senator from Florida by promising millions of dollars in federal grants in return for support on his legislative agenda. Offering a lesson in political education, the host remarked: "They have a big word for that—pork barrel legislation." The caller retorted: "well…call it what you will, seems like vote buying to me."

The exchange exemplifies how local voters interpreted national political events through the filter of corrupt local politics. While listeners in areas without histories of vote-buying might have written the story off as an illustration of routine politics or an unremarkable instance of government waste—both rather innocuous interpretations—Shale Countians attached greater and more damning significance to pork barrel legislation, efforts to expand entitlement benefits and the quid-pro-quo nature of Washington politics. In this case, due to his previous experiences with local patronage, the listener interpreted the story about Obama as an instance of "vote buying," nor mere "pork."

Instances of subjects viewing the 2012 presidential election through the filter of Shale County's legacy of corruption, clientelism and welfare manipulation abounded during the course of my field work. While taking a break from the volunteer work that we were carrying out at The Lord's Table one day, a big, sturdy man in his early forties named Sean joined a conversation that I was holding with Bruce. As Bruce criticized the government, Sean began commenting on the upcoming election, exclaiming: "I ain't voting for Obama; he took my job!" Sean then proceeded to tell me how the EPA had shut down his mine in 2009, and about how workers throughout the region were losing their mining jobs. In Sean's view, the nascent EPA restrictions had nothing to do with environmental protection. Rather, he argued that the Obama-controlled EPA had revoked existing permits and refused to grant new ones because Kentucky and its legislators had refused to support him during the previous election. He angrily attested to how scores of permits had been granted in the West, where mining continued unfettered due to the region's electoral support for Obama.[210]

[210] In reality, mining has increased in the West relative to Central Appalachia because its coal has a lower sulfur content, which facilitates compliance with EPA standards, and because Central Appalachia's most profitable coal seems have already been mined.

Sean's interpretation of the Obama EPA policy was doubtless influenced by his experiences with corrupt officeholders in Shale, who have historically abused their authority in order to discipline unsupportive voters. As Arnett (1978) and Perry (1971) have noted in previous studies of political patronage, officeholders in rural Appalachia often punish uncooperative residents by threatening their employment, reassigning them to jobs in remote areas (known as being "banished to Siberia") and cancelling business contracts. While the notion that Obama would block coal permitting in Central Appalachia in order to punish the electorate for voting Republican might seem overly cynical if not conspiratorial to those outside the region, the interpretation was perfectly in keeping with the accumulated experiences of those who lived there.

Just as the experience of being punished for failing to vote correctly shaped how Shale Countians interpreted federal policy, so too did their observations of and experiences with government spoils. In the following passage, a commentator for the local newspaper, portending disastrous consequences for the county's poor during the forthcoming winter, speaks to residents' frustration with this spoils system and how it translates into generalized cynicism toward government:

> People you better get prepared and bundled up, if we have a bad winter people are going to die in this county. Small businesses are going to go broke because the utility companies are going to stick it to us good, mark my word. I hope the county leadership is thinking about an emergency plan for poor people in this county. If they're not they will regret it and be responsible for a lot of suffering by the very young and the elderly. A lot of homes will lose their electric and gas before the winter is over and people will freeze and go hungry.

He goes on to attribute these problems to a corrupt spoils system at all levels of government:

> The Federal Government has failed us completely. Our state government is in shambles because of "Jobs for Friends," a program that's been in state for a hundred years and worked pretty well up until now…The true fact of the matter is we have allowed the

> whole system to turn into help out those who helped you first, it doesn't matter if they can do the job right.

In the column, the contributor laments—in an outraged tone—the likelihood that children and the elderly will freeze to death during the winter due to inadequate housing and the inability to pay for heating. He attributes these hardships to patronage at all level of government, or, in his words, the "Jobs for Friends" program. The column illustrates the writer's political epistemics of experience in the sense that he assumes that the same problems that plague federal government are the ones that plague local government (which, in point of fact, is almost certainly an accurate interpretation). This is why he argues that the federal government has "failed us completely." He assumes that, like local government, it is a corrupt patronage system designed to benefit officeholders and their supporters, not the public good.

Because officeholders consistently rewarded political supporter with jobs, contracts, road work, access to municipal water, and legal favors (e.g. leniency in criminal proceedings and/or help with welfare adjudications), residents often viewed efforts to expand government benefits with skepticism. Adam, a 65 year-old man who worked with several local ministries made the following remark about Obama's efforts to implement anti-poverty programs in Appalachia during my interview with him:

> I listened to a girl last week, she was just resounding all the greatness of Obama and all the programs and how the poor were being helped and all this stuff. But I turn around, and I look here in our county, and I see people putting their little card through at the grocery store, and they get a truckload of pop, and they take the pop up here to another little grocery store, and they sell it for cash, and then they can buy cigarettes and beer and stuff like that. And I'm wondering, how are these people going to vote? I know how they're going to vote. They're not going to vote to have any of that cut off.

Like the radio caller, Adam interprets Obama's desire to expand government assistance not as a means of reducing economic inequality, improving living standards or extending benefits to entitled citizens. Rather, he interprets it as means of securing re-election by doling spoils out to

voters. Even if he had viewed Obama's platform as a sincere effort to assist low-income citizens, his personal observations of welfare manipulation, which clashed with progressive rhetoric, had darkened his attitude toward them.

While Obama's campaign rhetoric depicted a deserving, noble working class that would benefit from government assistance, Adam's personal experiences had produced a much different interpretation. Rather than deserving and noble, he had experienced Shale's County's poor—many of whom had employed fraud in order to obtain SSI benefits while manipulating the state's SNAP and Medicaid programs for cash—as lazy, rude and self-entitled (as documented in Chapter Seven). Instead of sympathy, they evoked anger. Second, his experiences contradicted the understandings that Obama and other liberal politicians had attached to government assistance. Rather than helping struggling families to make ends meet, Adam had observed them exacerbate local problems with family discord, substance abuse and unemployment. Echoing the commentary of other respondents, Adam lamented how he had personally observed local addicts use Medicaid reimbursements to sate prescription pill addictions, exchange SNAP benefits for cash, which were in turn used to buy cigarettes, pop and alcohol, and feign mental illness in order to secure SSI.

Adam's commentary speaks to the yawning chasm between the understandings of social welfare benefits that urban progressives held relative to those that rural voters in economically distressed areas held. An election-related conversation that I had with Bruce just a few weeks after I met him further illuminates this gap. After a local candidate for state senator approached us in order to ask for our votes while tailgating at a Shale County High School football game, I asked Bruce if he followed politics. He replied that he ordinarily did not take great interest, but that he had begun to do so over the past year. He then leveled a number of accusations against

Barack Obama. Mentioning the Affordable Care Act in particular, he asserted that Obama was corrupt and dangerous. As he finished expressing his thoughts, I asked Bruce why, in particular, he opposed the ACA.

After asserting that Obama had gotten the courts to change minute language within the bill, without which it would not have been approved, he stated that forcing the entire country to acquire medical insurance was an awful idea, noting that "Medicaid is the BEST insurance you can get! It pays for doctors, prescriptions, everything…there are no co-pays!" He predicted that expanding coverage would encourage people to quit their jobs, pursue government benefits and acquire and sell prescription pills through guile, which he asserted would exacerbate the local drug problem.

Bruce's commentary, like Adam's, reveals how Shale Countians' observations of welfare manipulation among the lumpen class had conditioned the way in which they thought about government assistance. Because Medicaid manipulation marked an important survival strategy for poor residents in the county, Bruce assumed that expanding Medicaid would increase the incidence of individuals diverting prescription medications for profit, which he believed would exacerbate the region's drug problems. Notably, he attacked neither the quality of Medicaid nor expressed ideological opposition to the concept of government healthcare. To the contrary, he asserted that "Medicaid is the BEST insurance you can get! It pays for doctors, prescriptions, everything!" In other words, unlike Tea Party activists from middle class backgrounds, who opposed government assistance on principle, Bruce and Shale Countians opposed the bill on experiential grounds, that is to say, based on what they had observed in their personal lives.[211]

[211] A more nuanced way to understand the differences between rural, Appalachian conservatism and Tea Party conservatism involves taking the abstract nature of the latter group's experience into account. In other words, my point is not that Tea Party activists appeal to principle while the Republicans in Shale appeal to experience. My point is that Tea Party activists, who predominantly hail from suburban, middle-class backgrounds, experience

The discourse described above, which construed Obama's intentions to expand antipoverty programming as an attempt to purchase the political support of low-income voters, continued throughout the election season. Soon after he won re-election, Bruce told me that Obama had in essence stolen the election. As I was leaving The Lord's Table one evening, Bruce, who was parked outside with his car running, asked me to step inside for a moment to chat. As I sat down, he began to make some derogatory comments about the Democrats, but then stopped himself by claiming that he was "non-partisan." He then redirected his criticism to Obama, whom he impugned as "rotten to the core." Referring back to a conversation we had held earlier in the day, he asserted that Obama had defeated Romney only because low income people depend on the damaging entitlement programs that he sought to promote and expand.[212] While partisan pundits and activists had doubtless promoted this understanding, it was Shale's context, which was defined by patronage relations, corruption and vote-buying that accounted for Bruce's receptivity to it. Throughout the election season, Bruce continuously described a national clientelist system, which mirrored the one operating at the local level, in which the poor exchanged their political support for benefits that kept them ultimately dependent on the government. Cynically, he constantly reiterated that it was "all about money."

10.8 Experiential Politics: Examining Environmental Attitudes

The tendency to universalize local experience to federal policy was even more acute when subjects had had directly negative interactions with government institutions. While hiking through the mountain terrain one day with David, for instance, a conversation about coal and politics arose. During the conversation, David assailed the positions of "the environmentalist."

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politics as a set of principles (e.g. through books, debates, newspapers, etc.), whereas rural conservatives often experience the political process directly—usually by way of clientelism, development projects and the expansive nature of assistance programs in their localities.

[212] When I asked why 83% of Kentucky had voted against him, if that was the case, he told me that Obama's assault on the coal industry had turned Eastern Kentucky against him.

Like Sean, he lamented how the EPA had granted few new coal permits. When I asked why they had held up permitting, he cited the policies of president Obama, who he argued sought to get "tough on coal." David then began to state his view that environmental regulation had lapsed into disequilibrium. He asserted that without governmental regulation, companies would ravish the earth. Similarly, he stated that left to their own devices, the environmentalists would inhibit all mining and thus all economic development related to it. He stated that the dilemma called for balance—a policy that permitted responsible mining.

He then invoked the construction of Chad's Hope in order to illustrate how regulation had fallen out of equilibrium.[213] He asked me if the edifice, in my opinion, encroached upon the natural landscape and disrupted the environment. I told him that it did not appear to do so. He then repeated the story that he had told me the first time that I had visited the facility, regarding how the EPA had threatened to sue he and his partners, because they believed that the development would disrupt the environment of an endangered snail that lived in a nearby ditch. David, in this example, used his personal encounters with the EPA as a reference point for evaluating the organization's activity at the national level. Because David had experienced the organization's attempts to regulate the construction of Chad's Hope as absurd, he viewed their broader regulatory efforts vis-à-vis coal mining as intrusive and ineffectual as well.[214]

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[213] A few years earlier, David, in collaboration with several other community members, had secured a grant to build a faith-based drug rehab facility in Shale County. A man whose son had died from an overdose donated 70 acres of land for them to build the facility on in order to accommodate their limited budget. Ken told me, however, that "the environmentalists" protested, asserting that an endangered snail was living in a ditch on the proposed construction site, and that the construction would disrupt its habitat (he said all of this in a mocking and incredulous tone). David stated that the EPA held up the construction process for a long time, and that he eventually had to get in touch with his congressman (who had been instrumental in channeling the grant to him) in order to resolve the situation.

[214] Beyond mirroring Bruce and Sean's line of thinking, David's commentary is interesting because it illuminates the disjuncture between his *political beliefs* and his *political decisions/actions*. In the final part of the exchange, David states that without governmental regulation, companies would ravish the earth. He also states, however, that environmentalists, left to their own devices, will inhibit all mining and thus all economic development related to it. In many of our other conversations, David had praised the federal government for protecting the Daniel Boone National Forest, commenting in a wistful fashion on how he would have loved to have bounded through the old growth forests that once dominated the area. He stated that the dilemma called for balance—a policy that permitted

Individuals who had personally experienced coal-related pollution, however, typically did express support for EPA regulation. As Benjamin, a 42 year-old mechanic and environmental activist, whose daughter had developed respiratory problems due to air pollution from a coal processing plant located near their house, explains in the following passage, one's attitude toward the EPA's coal policies hinged almost entirely on one's lived experiences:

> PL: Has living next to the processing plant, has that kind of shaped your environmental views and—maybe in a broader sense—your political views toward the industry in general?
>
> B: …If I had never been put through this, I wouldn't know what I know now and how I feel of it…I'd be just like anybody else that don't live in it and have to deal with it…Before I started seeing my child affected by it, I didn't know what was behind it…One day I'm going to get to see my child off that medicine, at least I pray for that, and I want to look back at this as a learning experience…Because that's what it has been.… Ten years ago, I would have been the first one to stand up to you in your face and say, don't you say nothing about the coal industry…because my daddy raised me from the coal industry. Now the shoe is on the other foot. I have to sit back and watch my child suffer at the hands of the coal industry, so I kind of look at it a little different than what the other person looks at it like, you know? I mean, I can see people's point. *The thing about it is, is they can't see my point, because they don't live in it the way I do. I can look at their point, because I know that's their way of life. That's their livelihood. That's how mom and dad is keeping food on the table for them, but they can't look at it from Benjamin's way, because they don't know what I live in…*They don't have a sick child at home with asthma, who can't hardly breathe at night time that they're having to give all this medication to every day. They don't got to deal with that, so they know nothing about it. So I've got to be honest. I'd be just like everybody else if I didn't live [next to the plant] and didn't watch my child suffer from it…You would never hear Benjamin's story, because I wouldn't have a story to give you.

Benjamin, in this telling passage, attributes his discontent with the coal industry to personal experiences, specifically his negative interactions with the coal processing plant located near his

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responsible mining while hedging against destructive industrial practices. Given these beliefs, how did Ken come to hold such a one-sided interpretation of Obama's EPA policy? The answer rests in the county's hegemonic civil society (discussed in the subsequent chapter). Contrary to the Lockeian assumptions that undergird most theories of communication, which posit the individual as a meaning making sovereign who rationally implicates neutral stimuli/information, Gramsci's work posits that ruling classes exert "moral and intellectual" leadership over subordinates. They exclude information from public discourse and filter/shape the information circulates through it. The industry has been able to represent EPA regulation from the standpoint of their interests. In other words, Ken views EPA regulation more or less through the lens of coal executives, not as an impartial individual. His politics of experience (the snail incident) worked to confirm his negative orientation to the EPA.

home. He asserts that if his daughter had never fallen ill from the coal dust that the plant released onto his property every day, like others in the area—those who "don't live in it and [don't] have to deal with it"—he would hold a favorable opinion toward mining due to its celebrated status in local history, the limited jobs it provides and industry propaganda. Benjamin's case suggests that "Bayesian Updating" requires a dramatic emotional and physical experience, not simply contradictory information propagated by political and environmental advocacy groups. Because he had been socialized into support for coal since boyhood, given that his father had worked in the mines for 32 years, his pro-coal attitude had ossified into part of his habitus. The undoing of his pro-coal ideology required something equally powerful—watching his daughter suffer as a result of coal-related pollution.

Wade, a 50 year-old educator and environmental activist whose father had also raised him with coal money, made the same point to me. Although his children had not fallen victim pollution-related illness, the experience of seeing coal operators destroy the land on which he was raised prompted him to develop pro-environmental, anti-coal beliefs:

> PL: How was it that you became politically active against the mountain top removal and so forth?
>
> W: I'd just said this is it…You know, I hated to see my land, that I grew up in and around, just blowed all to hell, and water, you know, destroyed. It's so heartbreaking to watch.

As Wade describes, watching the land on which he grew up being "blowed all to hell" spurred him to reconsider his beliefs about coal mining. The experience of seeing coal operators rape and pillage his surroundings was too "heartbreaking" to square with his hitherto pro-industry attitude. The other community activists with whom I spoke described an almost identical process of environmental belief formation. Maria told me that watching the land that she loved fall victim to mountaintop removal mining spurred her activism. Liz, a coordinator with a state-

wide progressive advocacy group that focused on curtailing mountaintop removal mining, told me that she became active after her grandmother fell ill with cancer due to the industry's water pollution.

Indeed, notable personal experiences—especially the experience of hardship—formed the common denominator among politically active citizens in Shale County, no matter their political orientation. Environmentalists had suffered pollution-related illnesses, born witness to the destruction of landscapes in their communities, and been displaced from their land. Pro-coal supporters had, in most cases, been raised on coal-money, many having spent time in the mines themselves. And as I describe in the previous chapter, scores of community residents got involved with the church's march against drugs due to the personal hardships that they had suffered in relation to addiction in the community.

10.9 Conclusions: Penetrations and Limitations

Armchair commentators have developed a variety of accounts with which to explain the conservatism that prevails in some impoverished rural areas. As Chapter Three discusses, such accounts almost always conform to one of two overarching explanations: Misinformation and/or stupidity. The culture war thesis suggests, for example, that the likes of the Christian Coalition have duped the poor into voting on hot button moral issues in lieu of their economic interests. Other explanations blame activist news organizations, like Fox, for biasing the poor with specious information, which supposedly shapes their conservative voting patterns. Whatever the explanation, such commentators impugn the poor's false consciousness—that is to say, their susceptibility to manipulation by partisan propaganda, and their fundamental inability to discern their own best interests.

I found little if any support for either explanation. As Bartels (2008) argues: "Small-town people of modest means and limited education are not fixated on cultural issues…In contemporary American politics, social issues are the opiate of the elites." Indeed, during my fieldwork, the individuals who expressed strong opinions about gay marriage, abortion and other "culture war" issues came from middle-class backgrounds. Affluent individuals attended church more often than the poor and exhibited, on average, a much higher level of religious devotion.

As Gelman et. al's (2008) work shows, pundits tend to conflate community-level voting data with individual political preferences (that is to say, they make an ecological fallacy). Because low-income individuals living in Shale County faced transportation barriers and/or felt alienated from the political process, many abstained from voting. County-level voting data was thus weighted toward middle-class sentiment and failed to accurately register the political pulse of the county as a whole. This hardly mattered to most pundits, however, who—by way of a more damning conflation—viewed all Appalachians as poor anyway.

More importantly, though: Even though some middle-class individuals expressed indignation toward issues like abortion and gay marriage, their economic priorities typically trumped their social concerns. Even among the most fervent of culture warriors, Shale's socio-economic problems were too salient to ignore. The very notion that those living within the gray zone of rural poverty could lose sight of the county's immediate socio-economic problems in the vain pursuit of an abstract moral agenda, I would argue, is so far-fetched and condescending as to be absurd. David, Bruce, Paul, Max, and other religious participants impugned the social welfare policies of liberals far more often than they decried their stances on abortion and gay marriage. When they spoke about politics and community problems, they focused on joblessness, drugs, crime, and "dependence on government," not on homosexuality and abortion.

Interestingly, it was here that religion became most politically influential—in the economic rather than cultural realm. Had Thomas Frank (2004) analyzed the Protestant work ethic in lieu of the so-called culture war, his analysis of the relationship between Christianity and conservatism might very well have pushed the literature forward as opposed to backward. Rather than precipitating culture war, the Christianity of middle-class participants organized their opposition to "government handouts." Much as Furnham (1982) has observed, I found that: "People who strongly endorsed the Protestant work ethic stressed negative individualistic explanations for unemployment and were, by and large, more against welfare payments than those who did not strongly endorse those beliefs" (p.277).

Moreover, while adherence to the Protestant work ethic resulted in many Republican ballots, those ballots rarely came at the expense of middle-class voters' economic "interests." If anything, religious devotion facilitated them—at least for the middle-class. David and Sam, for instance, received a massive faith-based grant from the Bush administration for their drug prevention efforts in 2005. Because the state of Kentucky embraced faith-based approaches to drug prevention, moreover, policymakers often prioritized them for funding. Religion, in short, formed a frequent pathway to state resources.

In any case, the Republican that Shale Countians elected were rarely fiscally conservative. The county's congressional representative, state senator and state representative were all remarkably effective at securing pork barrel legislatio for the county. Like West Virginia's notorious Robert Byrd, Shale's congressional representative used his position on the House Appropriations Committee in order to steer scores of pet projects into Eastern Kentucky. He has been so effective, in fact, that liberal pundits began deriding him as the "Prince of Pork" several years ago. Shale's state senator and state representative have similar track records at the

Kentucky level. Although local power brokers ultimately co-opted much of this money as patronage, thus ensuring that it rarely made its way to the poor, Republican officeholders could at least tout the measures that they had taken in order to "help people" and provide Shale County with its fair share of government largess. While hile Frank (2004) construes Republican ballots as anti-statist ballots, I, as such, observed quite the opposite pattern.

Also in contrast to Frank's (2004) analysis, I observed little if any evidence suggesting that Republican ballots jeopardized the government benefits upon which Shale's poor relied. Poor people, that is to say, were not voting material assistance away by identifying with Republicans. While many families did draw from SNAP, Medicaid and the Federal Student Lunch Program, which Republican spending cuts have indeed targeted, most poor individuals relied primarily on SSI and SSDI in order to make ends meet. For them, SSI was the crux of their state support. Because few people (including politicians) are aware of SSI's scope, however, and because, unlike most other assistance programs, SSI is funded directly by the US Treasury as opposed to the Social Security Trust Fund, it typically evades budget cuts. Indeed, the program is structured such that recipients typically draw benefits for life. As Chana Joffe-Walt (2013) notes:

> Once a worker gets on disability, there are really only two ways out. You get old enough that at 65, 66-years-old, you move on to a different government program, Social Security for seniors, or you die. Those are the two ways people exit disability.

SSI and SSDI enrollments have expanded considerably since Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (Joffe-Walt 2013). As the number of families on welfare has declined, that is to say, the number of low-income individuals receiving SSI and SSDI insurance has increased. In the midst of deindustrialization, rising unemployment and welfare reform, disability insurance has thus become a de facto welfare program for the

nation's expanding lumpen class (Joffe-Walt 2013). Indeed, while only 2.2 percent of US citizens receive SSI benefits, and while only 4.2 percent of Kentuckians receive SSI, more than 25 percent of Shale County's 18-64 year-old population collects them. This process of enlisting the lumpen into the SSI doles had been enabled by what Joffe-Walt (2013) calls the "disability industrial complex" (see also Harvey 2011 and Henderson and Tickamyer 2008). The complex consists of unscrupulous physicians and attorneys who assist the country's "redundant populations" to secure—often by way of fraudulent means—SSI and SSDI coverage.

Soon after my fieldwork ended, for example, Eric Conn, a notorious Eastern Kentucky attorney, and David Daugherty, an Eastern Kentucky judge, were indicted by federal prosecutors for engaging in massive Social Security fraud throughout the region. Conn, who ran a website called "mrsocialsecurity.com," solicited poor individuals who sought to obtain SSDI benefits. Daugherty, in turn, took underhanded measures in order to ensure that he oversaw the vast majority of Conn's cases. The two then conducted sham proceedings in order to create the appearance that they were performing authentic reviews of claims. In the federal indictment again them, the prosecuting attorneys contended that Daugherty:

> Held perfunctory proceedings…merely opening the record, identifying those in attendance...reading the Social Security number and naming the claimant and their attorney, then granting the case and closing the record, before moving to the next Conn Claim.

Between 2006 and 2010, as such, Daugherty conducted up to 20 hearings—all Conn cases—between the hours of 9am and 11am on court days, approving all of them. In the year 2010, for instance, he reviewed 1284 SSDI cases and approved 1280 of them—a 99.7 percent approval rate. Together, he and Conn collected nearly $4 million in commission payments from the Social Security Administration as a result of the scheme.

Figure 11

While SSI/SSDI fraud was not always so unabashed and egregious, duplicity governed a large proportion of the cases. With few other options for securing income, many lumpen individuals had few others options than to pursue a "crazy check." Indeed, Thomas, a man in his early 30s who conducted community service at The Lord's Table five days per week as part of his "drug court" sentence, was in the process of applying for SSI during the course of my fieldwork. He had arrived at The Lord's Table on time every day for almost a year, where he diligently completed five to eight hour work shifts. There was nothing wrong with him other than the fact that, as a convicted criminal in one of the poorest counties in the country, he had

little if any chance of securing a job. Without other options for work or state assistance, he thus had to feign an inability to work in order to attain an SSI check.

This carried the unintended consequence of de-politicizing government benefits. In other words, because the lumpen had to engage in duplicity in order to secure programs like SSI, they ceased viewing them from the standpoint of entitled citizens making legitimate demands on the state. Rather, they came to view assistance programs from the standpoint of "hustling." Residents, as such, made little distinction between their rights and entitlements as citizens and their informal attempts to secure survival resources within the context of the county's gray zone. Thus, because Republican partisanship did not target the primary source of the poor's state support, and because the poor did not view their benefits through the lens of political entitlement in any case, they did not perceive an interest in voting for Democrats in order to preserve the social safety net.

If the poor perceived no economic benefit in supporting Democrats, however, the county's middle-class unequivocally perceived an interest in voting against them, whom they blamed, albeit somewhat spuriously, for the county's "welfare dependence." Like much of their commentary, the middle-classes' assessment of government assistance contained a kernel of truth at the same time that it represented symbolic violence. The claim that receipt of SSI/SSDI undermined one's incentive to work, for example, was largely accurate. Because the Social Security Administration's disability insurance programs were designed to provide assistance to those who were incapable of working rather than putting able-bodied people back to work, they were rife with labor disincentives. As Autor and Duggan (2007) concluded in a comprehensive study of the two services: "Our core observation is that SSDI, and indeed all non-work contingent retirement programs, discourages work" (p.3).

This is not to say that lumpen individuals did not want to work or that they would refuse good work if presented the opportunity. It is rather to say that within the confines of Shale's economy, in which the few jobs that existed were low status, low paying, and required both transportation and "knowing somebody" in order to obtain, SSI was a safer option. Once that option was pursued, it was rarely reversible. As Joffe-Walt (2013) noted, transfer into a different assistance program, landing a job that paid a salary exceeding the maximum income threshold or death were the only occurences that would end one's benefits.

Even though reliance on SSI and SSDI had actually emerged as a coping mechanism in response to the way in which the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act's dismantled comprehensive cash assistance programs like AFDC, most middle class residents were unable to make the connection. Welfare reform, as such, only amplified resistance to government assistance. As those who formerly received benefits from other programs transitioned into SSI and SSDI, the associations that middle-class residents drew between fraud, unwillingness to work and government aid intensified. The reason, of course, was because they became truer.

Apart from pointing out actually existing problems with respect to SSI's incentive structure, the middle-classes possessed other reasons to oppose the Democrats' alleged desire to establish a welfare state as well. As discussed throughout the chapter, the middle-classes conflated government assistance with the various community problems that had resulted from modernization, such as addiction, community fragmentation and cultural change. The structure of the federal government's SSI and SSDI programs also ran against the grain of the moral order by which they lived while violating their Protestant-based beliefs in hard work and self-reliance.

10.10 Conclusions: Significations versus Outcomes

In conclusion, although the middle-class outvoted Shale's poor, both classes tended to exhibit Republican partisanship. While the reasons sometimes diverged, there was considerable convergence as well. Both, for example, voted Republican in order to signal support for the coal industry and opposition to the EPA. Given the coal industry's hegemony in the region, a vote for Obama was viewed not only as a vote against jobs but as a vote against Appalachia. Poor voters in particular opposed Obama on economic grounds, attributing the downturn in mining—and hence their unemployment—to his alleged environmentalism by way of the EPA.

The Romney campaign capitalized upon this situation during the election. As Shear (2012) notes, Romney's 2012 presidential campaign "aggressively tapp[ed] into anger at President Obama's environmental policies." Reporting on campaign activity throughout Central Appalachia, he noted innumerous billboards, articles of clothing and campaign signs that linked Obama with joblessness, such as "Yes Coal; No-bama," "Coal=Jobs" and "Make Coal Legal." One of his interviewees described how "the region feels under siege and at war" by heightened environmental regulations, and how he personally blamed Obama for Central Appalachia's hardships.

Both classes also perceived greater social similarity between themselves and conservative candidates. Because many of the Republicans politicians for whom they voted hailed from rural backgrounds and thus expressed support for issues like "gun rights," Shale Countians more easily identified with and trusted them. The personalization of politics was thus writ large for both rich and poor voters. So too was the tendency to view government as a corrupt spoils system. Indeed, both classes generalized their negative experiences with local government to the national political sphere.

Yet, because a great deal of distance separated them from national politicians like Barack Obama, they experienced federal spoils in a different fashion than local patronage. Why did voters condone patronage at the local level but not at the national level? For one, they did not personally know national politicians like Barack Obama, nor had they personally received help from them. In most cases, moreover, they knew little about them, and what they did know involved not commonality but difference. Democratic politicians were viewed as urban outsiders. Rather than helping the people, they were viewed as having historically imposed upon their affairs while insulting them in the process. While both poor and middle-class voters resented Obama's image as an ostensible outsider who would punish the industry to which their collective identity was tied, middle class voters resented Obama for an additional reason: On no level could they identify with his rhetoric or political epistemology.

While Obama sought to improve a hardworking, ennobled working class' socio-economic standing with state projects, Shale's middle class had experienced Shale's poor in the context of the gray zone. Rather than an ennobled working class, they perceived an ignoble lumpen class comprised of lazy, manipulative, selfish, opportunistic, brazen, and above all intoxicated individuals. Time and again, they had witnessed the lumpen employ manipulation and duplicity in order to collect Supplemental Security Income. They had seen them use their medical cards in order to obtain drugs, which were often diverted for profit. They had watched them purchase groceries with food stamps and thereafter sell them for cash. They had ministered to children who grew up in addicted households. Above all, they had observed the poor being idle, given that there was nothing to do, nowhere to go and no capacity to achieve mobility in the county. Their political understandings of poverty, the poor and government assistance thus fundamentally diverge from those of people outside the gray zone. It was not that they

necessarily held different values than Obama; it was that they literally operated according to a different set of experiences, images and understandings.

Moreover, based on these personal experiences, they believed that expanding government assistance programs would exacerbate the county's problems. After all, the lumpenization of the poor, which deprived many families of their economic independence and capacity to subsist through farm labor, coincided with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, which had attempted to modernize the county through social programming, government assistance and infrastructure. Part coincidence, part the result of modernization, part conflation, and part the product of the culture of poverty undertones that ran parallel to the initiatives, they had experienced Democratic redistribution policies in a negative way.

Shale Countians thus viewed national politics through filter of parochial experience and understanding. Chief among these experiences were personalism, patronage, corruption, and outside agitation. Democrats represented all of the problematic negative externalities of these phenomena without offering any of the benefits. They bought votes with social programs but would not personally help people. While almost all politicians engaged in various unscrupulous practices in order to shore up support, personal knowledge did not temper the wheeling and dealing that national politicians enacted. In short, Democrats and their politics existed on a plane of hopeless abstraction when personalism—meaning both personal assistance and personal knowledge—was the key to political legitimization.

The literature, as noted, either attributes conservatism to false consciousness (Frank) or denies that it exists (Bartels 2008a). What none of it does is take the political preferences of voters in impoverished rural areas seriously. In a sense, the latter position is almost more patronizing than the former. While adherents of the first position assume that conservative

voters could not possible possess a valid reason for voting as they do, adherents of the latter are so assured of the impropriety of conservatism among the poor that they deny its metaphysical possibility. This study has endeavored to intervene into the inadequacy by allowing for the possibility that conservatives in Shale County knew what they wanted politically and held valid reasons for embracing those interests. This is not to suggest, however, that their votes, in every case, seamlessly translated into their desires and interests.

It is perhaps most useful to heed what conservative partisanship signified as opposed to what it resulted in. Conservatives living in the gray zone are often held to a high standard in this regard. When Democratic officeholders engage in disagreeable behavior, progressives tend to blame the individual. When Republican officeholders engage in disagreeable behavior, on the other hand, progressives fault not only the officeholder but those who elected her into office.

When evaluating Republican votes from the standpoint of their significations rather than their outcomes, which voters ultimately do not control, they become rather difficult to refute. The poor and working class Shale Countians who adorned "Friends of Coal" stickers on their cars and trucks were stating: "I would like a job—a job that my community values, and that allows me to earn a living" Those who wore hats and t-shirts emblazoned with the slogan "coal is not just a jobs, it's a way of life" sought to express: "I am proud of my background, and I wish that those who live outside of Appalachia would stop questioning my character and intelligence." And those who impugned the welfare state and the ostensible "government dependence" that it had produced, were in many ways simply trying to say: "I am concerned about unemployment, poverty and addiction in my community, and I wish that things would return to how they used to be—when we could provide for ourselves, when our children were not dying from drugs, and when we formed a community."

10.11 Thinking Through Conservatism Theoretically

The Lockeian view of communication and ideology formation discussed in Chapter Three suggests that information is transmitted into empty vessels, who process and make rational decisions based on the information. Leftists express bewilderment when the poor support economic, environmental and political policies that ostensibly disadvantage them. They attribute their behavior to misinformation (e.g. they listen to Bill O'Reilly and watch Fox News) and poor decision-making, if not stupidity due to inadequate education (they do not fully understand the issue and thus render irrational judgments). Both of these arguments conform to the flawed Lockeian model of communication and decision-making, which emphasizes accurate information and rational cognition. My analysis suggests a different model of political attitude formation.

For one, rather than relying "reason" to make decisions, my data suggest that political decision-making is an emotional—even bodily—process. Secondly, the Lockeian model assumes that assumes that all information is created equal. My data, however, suggest that individuals prioritize "knowledge" gained through personal experience and information originating from primary groups as opposed to, for example, mass media. Many Shale Countians viewed national political issues through the lens of localism, however. That is to say, they generalized Shale County's corrupt quid-pro-quo political style to national politics. This provides reason to doubt the hype about Fox News' role in spreading ideology.

Why do voters condone patronage at the local level but not at the national level? For one, they do not personally know national politicians, nor have they received help from them. Moreover, they know little about them, and what they do know involves not commonality but difference. Democratic politicians are viewed as urban outsiders. Rather than helping the people, they have historically imposed them into their affairs--usually in an insulting fashion.

The county's stunted public sphere, moreover, has enabled the coal industry, which has a strong interest in Republican government, to achieve hegemony. During the 2012 election, industry officials conveyed Barack Obama as an out-of-touch outsider who sought not only to wage war on coal, but to wage a way on Appalachians themselves. His presidency, their advocacy suggested, would replace the rural way of life with urbanism.

Poor and middle-class Shale Countians voted Republican for both similar and different reasons. While both resented Obama's image as an ostensible outsider who would punish the industry to which collective identity was tied, middle class voters resented Obama for an additional reason. They could not identify with him on any level. While Obama sought to improve a hardworking, ennobled working class' socio-economic standing with state projects. Shale's middle class, however, had experienced Shale's poor--who had been lumpenized--as lazy, manipulative, selfish, opportunistic, brazen, and above all intoxicated. They the lumpen class feign disabilities in order to collect Supplemental Security Income. They saw them use their medical cards in order to obtain drugs, which they later diverted for profit. They saw them purchase groceries with food stamps and sell them for cash. Above all, they saw them being idle, because they had nothing to do, nowhere to go and no capacity to achieve mobility. They ministered to children who grew up in addicted households. They believed, based on their personal experiences, that expanding government assistance programs would exacerbate these problems. After all, the lumpenization of the poor, which deprived them of their economic independence and capacity to subsist through farm labor, coincided with Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, which had attempted to modernize the county through social programming, government assistance and infrastructure. Part coincidence, part the result of modernization, and part the product of the COP undertones that ran parallel to the initiatives, they had experienced

Democratic redistribution policies in a negative way.

Shale Countians thus viewed national politics through filter of parochial experience and understanding. Chief among these experiences were personalism, patronage, corruption, and outside agitation. Democrats represented all of the problematic negative externalities of these phenomena without offering any of the benefits. They bought votes with social programs but would not personally help people. While almost all politicians engage in various unscrupulous practices in order to shore up support, personal knowledge did not temper the wheeling and dealing that national politicians enacted. In short, Democrats and their politics existed on a plane of hopeless abstraction when personalism--meaning both personal assistance and personal knowledge--held the key to political legitimization.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER 11

THE INGREDIENTS OF CONSENT IN SHALE COUNTY: MODERNIZATION, PERSONALISM, HEGEMONY, AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

11.1 Summary

This dissertation has sought to explain why people sometimes embrace—and even identify with—economic and political actors who appear to harm them. It has done so by examining three instances of consent among the rural poor. Chapter Eight explored why Shale Countians tended to support politicians who openly abused their positions in local government. Although the officials in question had corrupted the democratic process and perpetuated the county's economic underdevelopment, most residents withheld cooperation from the federal agents who attempted to investigate them. Even after they were convicted, many protested against the punishments that they had received, asserting that they were unreasonably severe.

Chapter Nine explored why Shale Countians tended to support an industry that, across the vicissitudes, had dispossessed residents of their land, subjected them to dangerous and exploitative work conditions, employed violence in order to subdue dissent, co-opted local government, and contaminated the regional environment. Despite an abundance of research suggesting that the industry caused myriad negative externalities and offered few if any economic benefits, residents almost ubiquitously opposed efforts to promote sustainable development and environmental protection. Mere association with environmentalism tarnished one's reputation and political legitimacy in the community.

Finally, Chapter Ten examined why Shale Countians tended to support a political party that consistently targeted the economic aid on which they relied for reduction or elimination. Although the county had received an influx of federal dollars from the Democratic Party's War on Poverty, and although the majority of Americans believed that the Democratic Party represented the interests of the poor and disenfranchised while the Republican Party represented the wealthy and privileged, Shale Countians overwhelmingly voted Republican during national elections.

Why did residents of all social classes consistently support economic and political actors who exerted an ostensibly injurious effect on their community? And what, if anything, do these three instances of "consent" possess in common? The portrait of consent that I have tried to develop has sought to move beyond explanations that stress misinformation, stupidity, false consciousness, and mass media manipulation. In place of those models, I have sought to develop a conception of consent that is rooted in the political understandings of social actors themselves—that is to say, their personal experiences, social and material realities, local cultural understandings, and collective memories. I approached those who "consented" to ostensibly harmful arrangements as neither stupid nor perfectly self-aware, and as neither misinformed nor omniscient. Likewise, I viewed them neither as "cultural dopes" nor as beacons of rationality who successfully maximized their economic interests in at every turn.

Instead, I approached the participants of my study as dynamic social actors who possessed a variety of interests and motivations. Rather than delimiting interest to the material realm, I assumed that participants possessed social, cultural, political, and psychological interests. Unlike the "stupidity model," I took these non-material interests seriously and avoided the tendency to reduce reality and rationality to economics. As Smilde (2007) has shown, people

can and do act "rationally" through culture. Moreover, while I did not approach participants as naïve, I also did not dismiss the possibility of their susceptibility to influence. Unlike the "misinformation" model, which suggests that the poor passively respond to any and all stimuli, I emphasized resilience and selectivity. Rather than assuming that participants mindlessly internalized elite and media propaganda, in other words, I focused on the role that significant others played in shaping understanding, and how social context and personal experience conditioned the reception of cultural and political work.

These theoretical decisions were predicated upon the belief that accounts of subaltern individuals vacillate between two extremes. The poor and disenfranchised are constructed either as cultural dopes who make easy fodder for elite domination, or they are constructed in heroic terms—as people who are fully aware of the political and economic cosmos that they inhabit and always make the right decision. The former position represents a mash-up of the imperialism, reductionism, essentialism, and teleology that plagued early proponents of Vulgar Marxism, modernization theory and 19th century anthropology. It presumes that the social scientist can objectively perceive reality, that she knows what is best for her subjects (as opposed to participants), and that she perceives the ultimate direction of history. The latter position, on the other hand, represents the liberal neutrality that has come to plague those who have taken postmodern, post-structuralist and post-colonial approaches to the extreme. It reduces the social scientist's findings to one perspective among many and dissuades her from engaging in anything that remotely approximates implication. The failed residues of the former have precipitated the latter. While the latter is more respectful, epistemologically speaking, it is equally as inadequate.

My approach has attempted to pave a middle road. It would be absurd to assume that I knew what my research participants did not know, and that stupidity and misinformation

produced their cultural understandings. It would be equally absurd to assume that the reprehensible corruption, economic dispossession and exploitation, and environmental devastation that those understandings at least in part enabled were not present. In many ways, my approach simply sought to reveal how subjects prioritized their diverse interests. Rather than denying that their understandings reinforced the positions of authority into which coal operators, corrupt power brokers and the Republican politicians had ascended, I attempted to reveal what remained invisible to those on the outside—the symbolic, social and cultural benefits that those actors provided to Shale Countians. These were precisely the interests that environmentalists, local reformers/activists and Democrats had neglected to accommodate.

This marks the difference between the "false consciousness" that Vulgar Marxists such as Thomas Frank espouse and the "moral and philosophical leadership" that Gramsci's hegemony theory propounds. Coal executives, conservative politicians and local officials did not impose false ideas upon Shale Countians. They recognized Shale Countians' own ideas, ordered those ideas and made articulations among them. The ideas that they ordered and articulated, moreover, were "true." Coal did represent a "way of life," local office holders did "help" those who approached them, and many recipients of government assistance did misuse their benefits. Shale's hegemonic leaders, as such, did not fabricate. They did, however, exclude, de-emphasize and re-articulate that which challenged their legitimacy.

Their capacity to do so rested in their ability to tap if not share in the political epistemology that Shale Countians inhabited. This was where environmentalists, reformists and liberals failed. Acting as "traditional intellectuals," they tended to exhibit a fundamental misunderstanding with regard to the experiences, interests and identities of those whom they sought to influence. Nowhere is this more evident than in the accounts of working class

"consent" that I have critiqued. When subalterns expressed interests that diverged from those on the left, the left dismissed their interests as instantiations of stupidity. And when subalterns pointed to dimensions of reality that leftists ignored or lacked interest in, the left dismissed their observations as unimportant or misinformed.

Those who sought change in the community did not possess different values relative to those who "consented" so much as they apprehended the world from the standpoint of a different epistemology. They looked upon reality, in other words, from different angles and different experiences, and they possessed disparate motivations and goals relative to those who consented. Whereas the former perceived environmental destruction and internal colonialism, the latter perceived collective memory and the possibility for a better future; whereas the former perceived elitism and corruption, the latter perceived a "friend" and source of "help;" and whereas the former perceived entitlements for the ennobled working class, the latter perceived drug money for a duplicitous lumpen class. While neither party was "wrong," both proffered definitions of the situation that were incomplete and partial to their own needs and desires.

What ultimately accounted for the political understandings and interests that "consenters" developed relative to anti-coal activists, reformers and Democrats? As a whole, my findings suggest that it was the set of experiences associated with the county's "road to modernity" that encouraged conservative political understandings. A predominantly isolated county dominated by subsistence farming until the 1940s, Shale's integration into broader markers, capitalist relations and the auspices of the federal state came later than it did for many U.S. communities. Because a corrupt local state mediated that process, and because macro-level economic and political forces cut its socioeconomic development short,[215] Shale failed to accrue many of the

[215] I discuss these forces in greater depth elsewhere. For now, suffice it to say that they involve the rise of neoliberalism, which reduced the United States' economic competitiveness abroad, which resulted in

benefits typically associated with industrialization. Like many rural areas within the United States (see Moreton 2009), the community experienced a stunted process of "development" and transitioned almost directly from a preindustrial, agriculturally-oriented society into a post-industrial one.

While Shale has exhibited Republican partisanship since its preindustrial days, its unique process of modernization imported those partisan views into the present.[216] Because local elites consistently capitalized upon state-directed modernization efforts in order to form corrupt patronage networks, the poor became distrustful of economic empowerment initiatives. Often, government assistance programs clashed with local values vis-à-vis self-reliance and hard work as well—values that modernization amplified by lumpenizing former subsistence farmers. Perhaps more importantly, the uneven processes of modernization undermined the economic and political independence of those farmers, which positioned local elites and representatives of industry to achieve hegemony.

The more global effects of modernization fortified the leadership positions of coal operators and local officeholders as well. The diffusion of modernist values throughout the nation generated stigmas and stereotypes with regard to rural poverty, which elite actors capitalized upon in order to forge identifications with the poor and dispossessed. Many of my findings, as such, spoke to the attitudes that the rural poor adopted as they came into contact with cultural discourses that demeaned them. These discourses not only exacerbated socioeconomic

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deindustrialization, while encouraged state retrenchment, especially with respect to entitlement and anti-poverty programming.

[216] This is not to suggest that political understandings are a dependent variable, which simply reflect stages in a monolithic process of historical development. I subscribe to no teleology and heed the many cogent critiques that have been levied against modernization theory, which predicts a seamless road to progress. My argument, to the contrary, is that processes of modernization play out differently according to when, where and how they unfold. Sometimes they produce socioeconomic development. In other situations, they produce economic dependency if not retrogression. In Shale's case, they engendered economic dependency, stunted development and renewed conservative sentiment.

disadvantage by generating feelings of social exclusion, but provided fodder for elite politicking. Powerful political and economic actors capitalized upon the rural poor's sensitivity to urban disdain in order to block environmental advocacy waged by outside organizations, thwart community reformers and activists, and discredit liberal politicians.

Shale's story thus speaks to the cultural consequences that policies of "internal colonialism"—itself a modernist phenomenon—have waged on rural Americans living in the Appalachian region. Years of stigmatization and othering had precipitated a profound sense "double consciousness" among mountaineers. A desire for dignity, integration and acceptance had consequently ascended to the forefront of their collective political consciousness. Outsiders often had difficulty appreciating these interests and desires given that they had never experienced the pangs of social exclusion. They thus the poor's cultural interests as "false" and "irrational."

Moreover, while Thomas Frank and other culture war theorists blast poor rural voters for getting their economic interests wrong, much of Shale's story involves well-intentioned government investment and relief efforts failing to alleviate persistent poverty. As opposed to a panacea, anti-poverty programs often served as a boon for local corruption by yoking recipients to the power brokers who administrated them rather than producing empowerment. By opening new markets, moreover, state-sponsored development undermined the foundations of agriculture and its cultural traditions, fractured deep rural neighborhoods and exacerbated social isolation.

All the worse, government development and aid programs came packaged in demeaning assumptions regarding the backwardness of rural people, which brought their feelings of exclusion full circle. Republicans, on the other hand, proffered a version of reality that more closely aligned with Shale Countians' personal experiences of modernity and government

programming. Because they aggressively channeled pork barrel projects into the county, they also developed a reputation for providing aid and "help."

Finally, independently of the processes of social change, personalism shored up the hegemony of local politicians, coal operators and even national Republicans to an extent. Because Shale County did not develop according to the tenets of modernization theory—which is hardly a surprising finding, given that that modernization theory represents an ideological fantasy—it came to form a market economy with limited population and a "traditional" culture. Shale's small size and personalism, paradoxically, generated one of the most formidable barriers to local democracy and the development of counter-hegemonies.

Throughout much of the 20th century, political sociologists lamented how modernization had begun to transform America's "democratic society of publics" into a totalitarian "mass society." In the *Power Elite,* Mills (1956), for example, asserted that urbanization, industrialization and population grown had replaced public discussion with technocratic decision-making and reasoned political debate with irrational appeals to pathos. In the new mass society, he claimed that the ratio of givers to receivers of opinion had narrowed; that the possibility of answering back an opinion without reprisal had declined; that the relationship between opinion and social influence had widened; and that the degree to which institutional authority penetrated social life had risen. Concentrated powers, as such, had supplanted the "scattered little powers" that once comprised the country's political fabric. In the new "mass society," alienation thus prevailed, as voluntary associations lost their function as genuine instruments of the public, and technocratic spokesmanship came to stand in for pluralism.

Although Mills conceded that the pluralism that supposedly existed within the democratic society of publics was "a set of images out of a fairy tale [that was] not adequate even as an

approximate model of how the American system of power works," it is instructive to pit Shale County's political structure against his ideal type of rural publics. My findings, in diametric opposition to his claims, suggest that "massification" (not to be confused with modernization) offers one of the few hopes of democratizing the county and pluralizing its political structure. As a rural community without mass institutions, anything but "reasoned debate," "the free ebb and flow of discussion," an equal ratio of givers to receivers of opinion, and the "possibility of answering back opinion without reprisal" existed. To the contrary, patronage, particularism and fear prevailed, as a cabal of elite actors controlled the county's economic opportunities and political institutions. Personalism, moreover, which mediated political relationships, shaped the way in which "democracy" played out. Elections often represented referendums on individual personalities as opposed to policies, and particularism instead of universalism governed institutional decision-making.

This situation not only shielded local officeholders and executives from criticism and gave them significant power and influence over constituents, but further complicated the efforts of reformers. Outside activists and community members with an interest in social change expressed incredulity toward the political choices of locals, given that they possessed an alternative epistemology for formulating political views and making political decisions—one that drew upon the Enlightenment traditions of reason and science. Their pluralist epistemology clashed with the personalistic and experiential epistemology that "consenters" harbored, which prevented dialogue and intersubjectivity. Reformers, as such, talked past the targets of their advocacy. Each group believed the other to be foolish for anchoring their opinions and views in sources of information/experience that were seen by the other as illegitimate.

Reformers thus encouraged residents to abandon the metrics on which they had traditionally relied in order to render political decisions. That is to say, they encouraged them to choose candidates based on their professional credentials, experience, independence, and personal integrity rather than their personal connection to/knowledge of them, their capacity to secure favors via patronage, and their willingness to provide monetary compensation for votes. As with other forms of advocacy, however, this ultimately belied an inability to understand "consenters" and speak to them on their own terms. If such individuals ever wish to establish influence in the mountains, they must adopt an "organic" as opposed to "traditional" attitude. This does entail simply reframing their advocacy and employing different media through which to propagate it, but expanding it by recognizing and taking measures to accommodate the cultural, symbolic and psychological interests of poor mountaineers, which include jobs, social inclusion, full citizenship in every sense of the term, and acknowledgment of their history and values.

11.2 Contributions

While many scholars have approach political understandings as isolated, independent objects (Glaeser 2011), my analysis relied on connecting the politics of my research participants to the lived circumstances that produced them. When contextualized and viewed through a "value free" lens, I showed that Shale County's politics ceased to represent the "panorama of madness and delusion" that armchair theorists like Thomas Frank depicted. Instead, they became sensible and intelligible. While popular explanations attribute the "paradoxical politics" of the rural poor to a top-down process of ideological diffusion spearheaded by conservative activists, misinformation and/or stupidity, I highlighted the role that personal experience and

local history played in shaping conservative partisanship among those living in distressed, rural communities.

Unlike dominant accounts of rural conservatism, I showed that media programming played only a minor role in Shale Countians' political socialization. Primary groups, local institutions, significant others, and personal experiences played a far more important role in establishing their Republican partisanship. When interests groups and mass media did influence their political views, I showed that they did so only because primary socialization and local institutions had created an underlying receptivity to them, serving as a filter through which national political events and media information passed.

Moreover, as opposed to carrying out an abstract, rational political-decision making process, I demonstrated how subjects came to political decisions through an emotional, if not embodied, process. My findings emphasized how personal interactions and experiences with the local political structure, which was marked by paternalism, patronage relations and corruption, shaped how Shale Countians interpreted national political events and personas, even when those events and personas bore little relation to events and personas operating at the local level. My analysis thus works toward the construction of a relational-pragmatist model of political decision-making and a political epistemology of emotiveness and experience. This model helps to show how people think about and experience environmental degradation and economic change in impoverished rural areas, and how class/spatial stigmas shape political and economic attitudes.

As a whole, the dissertation highlights some of the most important forces driving political conservatism, pro-coal sentiment, support for corrupt local states, and persistent poverty in the rural United States today—especially in the Appalachian region. It also depicts the barriers that exist to civic participation in poor rural areas, which helps to explain why many rural

communities remain ostensibly quiescent in the face of political, economic and environmental onslaught. Perhaps most of all, it tells the story of how state-directed modernization efforts and processes of internal colonialism have disadvantaged those living in rural areas. All too often, privileged outsiders have blamed rural Americans for the outcomes that this absentee political and economic infiltration have created, ensuring that permutations of the long-debunked "culture of poverty" thesis explain away their social problems.

The dissertation has also illustrated what hegemonic ideologies do for those who embrace them—with an eye toward encouraging future researchers to think about the meanings and frameworks that hegemons provide for subalterns. This offers a corrective to work that emphasizes false consciousness by illustrating that hegemony is neither false nor necessarily harmful. The dissertation, lastly, also provides a dynamic portrait of lumpen abuse that depicts Shale County's lifeworld from several angles. My findings show how the lumpen experience their own social activity, how those outside the lumpen class understood their survival strategies, and how symbolic violence and mis-recognitions come into being.

The study holds several policy implications. First, my findings regarding local corruption recommend county consolidation as a strategy to impersonalize politics, pool regional resources, dilute opportunities for patronage, and democratize Eastern Kentucky's public sphere. Similarly, my findings recommend further professionalization of civil service jobs as a means of curtailing patronage and nepotism within the local state. The state could significantly reign in the power of local officeholders by professionalizing government jobs, imposing more stringent degree, licensure and training requirements, democratizing the application process, outsourcing hiring decisions, and enlarging counties so as to destabilize the elite's "personal touch." Standardizing the job selection and election processes in order to utilize universal rather than particularistic

criteria, moreover, would improve the quality of institutional personnel, increase institutional performance and dilute the coercive control that government personnel come to wield.

Second, my findings recommend better grant support for local development that decreases matching requirements while increasing external oversight. This would lower the economic burden of local projects while mitigating against the pursuit of extraneous development. In the same vein, my findings recommend economic development that focuses on local resources, for example tourism, crafting and history, in lieu of the modernist projects that seek to attract industry through infrastructure and tax credits. Alternative development will not only help to promote economic independence and positive collective identity, but will help ensure more sustainable development for the future.

Third, at the state level, my findings recommend that Eastern Kentucky be prioritized for coal severance and unmined mineral tax proceeds. So long as clientelism is reduced, a greater share of these moneys would help to promote economic development that stresses diversity as opposed to the mono-economy of coal and heavy industry. At the national level, my findings recommend a degree of welfare reform. Assistance to the poor should be increased while means-testing should be scaled back or eliminated. In order to promote social integration and conform to local mores, programs also should be tied to work and community improvement. Similar forms of aid should also be granted at the county and city levels. The reintroduction of price supports for tobacco and the use of subsidies for the creation of markets for locally grown produce are potential examples.

Fourth, federal aid should also target local neighborhoods for restoration and institutional development. Deep rural areas would benefit tremendously from recreational opportunities, healthcare access and education. This means rethinking the movement toward consolidation,

centralization and urbanization in order to renew country communities that have declined. Rural transportation options should be improved in order to give mobility to those who are poor. This does not necessarily mean building more roads but rather providing public transportation options for them.

Fifth, and last, at every level, state, media and legal organizations should take measures to safeguard the dignity of rural populations—especially Appalachians. The state, media organizations, legal officials, and activists have all done their part to confront the stigmatization of disempowered groups across the vicissitudes. Appalachians and other poor whites, however, remain one of the few groups that much of society continues to deem worthy and acceptable of ridicule. As I have taken pains to emphasize, their rhetoric, in many cases, is often far more hurtful and damning than even the material forms of disadvantage that capitalist development and state policy have waged. It would do everyone—not just Appalachians—well to eliminate it.

APPENDIX

THE UNDERSIDE OF ETHNOGRAHY: RETHINKING THE ETHICS OF INTIMACY

Abstract

This paper reexamines the meaning of *advocacy*, the nature of *interests* and the value of *immersion* during a time when personal, emotional and political encounters in the field are taken as hallmarks of ethical and reliable research. Drawing upon my experiences studying social suffering in Central Appalachia, I argue that the multidimensional and contradictory nature of subjects' interests makes successful advocacy difficult to formulate let alone accomplish. I then argue that immersive methods can, contrary to the intentions of reflexive practitioners, harm research subjects, bring harm to the researcher and breed resentment toward subjects in a way that impinges upon the processes of data collection, representation and the production of "emancipatory knowledge."

The Underside of Ethnography

In recent years, participant action research (PAR) and public sociology have developed important places within the social sciences. Both have roots in a broader tradition of humanistic research that has sought to develop "emancipatory knowledge" (Habermas 1972).[217] Ethnography—with its capacity to "restore to other people the meaning of their behaviors" and circulate subaltern knowledge—has played a prominent role in this tradition (Bourdieu et. al 1963: 259). Phillipe Bourgois (2002) has argued, for example, that ethnography harnesses the

[217] Emancipatory knowledge refers to knowledge that can be used to unsettle power hierarchies, dismantle structures of domination, and inveigh against chauvinistic and prejudicial worldviews. For statements on social science's capacity to produce such knowledge, see Mills 1959; Domhoff 2003; Graeber 2004; and Wright 2010. For statements on ethnography's unique role in affecting positive social change, see Burawoy 1991; Bourgois 2002; and Wacquant 2004.

key to understanding extreme social suffering. He advocates using immersive research as a weapon with which to confront the structural-power relations that have produced suffering across history. While Bourgois and others have asked us to consider ethnography's potential for progressive social change, however, we must also consider its potential for causing damage. This paper explores ethnography's capacity for exacerbating the very social suffering that it seeks to redress.

My analysis draws on my experience conducting ethnographic research in "Shale County," a rural mountain community in Central Appalachia that is one of the poorest and most unequal places in the United States. While living there over the course of a nine month long community study, I investigated three questions: how economic restructuring, the erosion of government income-assistance programs, and the federal war on drugs were affecting daily life among the rural poor; how the rural poor secured a living outside of formal opportunities for employment; and why, given Appalachia's longstanding problems of clientelist exploitation and political corruption, many of them have remained ostensibly quiescent in the face glaring inequality, injustice and abuse.

During my fieldwork, I became entangled in the lives of my subjects in a number of unexpected ways—as a friend, confidant, object of romantic interest, potential "hustle," and enemy. While my role as a "full participant" yielded a depth of sociological understanding, it raised a number of questions with regard to the ethics of immersive field research. As Stacey (1988) argues, "fieldwork represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships" (p.23). My "intrusion" consisted of bringing scarce resources into a destitute social world—namely money, an automobile, and a measure of social status. While living in Shale County, I made loans to subjects that were used to buy drugs. I transported their drugs in my car. I

covered for their unscrupulous and illegal behavior. I intervened in domestic disputes. My presence and behavior exposed subjects to risks that they would not have faced otherwise. More often, my subjects led me into situations that jeopardized my well-being and career. As my time in Shale County drew to a close, the meaning of advocacy, the nature of my subjects' interests, whether my research had helped or harmed the people whom I sought to benefit, and whether those people viewed me as a friend or as a "disposable tie" had become unclear.[218]

In the sections that follow, I sketch out the complicated ways in which the researcher's life can intersect with the lives of her subjects during fieldwork. My analysis seeks to critically reexamine the meaning of *advocacy*, the nature of *interests*, and the value of *immersion* during a time when personal, emotional and political encounters in the field are taken as hallmarks of ethical and reliable research (Irwin 2006). Drawing upon my own field experiences, I argue that the multidimensional and contradictory nature of subjects' interests makes successful advocacy difficult to formulate let alone accomplish. I then discuss how immersive methods can, contrary to the intentions of reflexive practitioners, harm research subjects, bring harm to the researcher, and breed resentment toward subjects in a way that impinges upon the processes of data collection, representation and the goal of combating social suffering.

Research Ethics and Advocacy after the "Reflexive Turn"

When preparing for field research, ethnographers have ample resources on which to draw, such as institutional review boards that audit informed consent statements and handbooks that aid in the construction of interview protocols. At the conclusion of field research, similarly, a tome of scholarship on coding and reflexivity is available for thinking through the processes of interpreting and representing data. Curiously, however, few resources exist for guiding

[218] Disposable ties refer to strangers who are befriended and used for the resources that they can provide access to but who are ultimately "burned" after those resources run dry (Desmond 2012).

ethnographers through the actual processes of fieldwork. As Laureau and Shultz (1996) argue, statements on field methodology tend to be "overly general in their expositions." Many are filled with "platitudes" (p.2). Such platitudes are of little help when attempting to negotiate the unpredictable situations and ethical quandaries that arise during immersive fieldwork.

While sociologists associated with the Chicago School considered how researchers should relate to subjects and inhabit their research settings, their guidelines rarely extended beyond self-interested admonishments to uphold the professional status of the researcher herself and the moral norms of the discipline. Polsky's (1967) methodological reflections on the study of "hustlers, beats and others," for example, emphasized the possibility of carrying out genuine field research on criminals without having to associate "with them as one of them" (p.124). His writing underscores how early debates on research ethics were more concerned with circumventing "contamination" of the research setting and the researcher than on respecting the well-being and personal interests of human subjects.

Taking heed of these and other shortcomings, contemporary scholars associated with the "reflexive turn" have dismissed the notion of an uncontaminated "natural setting" in which "the other" dwells and the related ideal of scholarly detachment.[219] Two ethical imperatives motivate this stance. The first is the idea that representation is not a straightforward and innocuous process of transposing one's findings. Reflexive scholars view it, rather, as a politicized process that is shot through with ideology, power and symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Britzman 1995; Collins 1991; Kuklick 1991). Failure to acknowledge how one's pre-suppositions shape the collection and interpretation of data, they contend, mischaracterizes the

[219] Also referred to as the "interpretive turn," "postmodern turn," and "crisis of representation," I am here referring to the way in which social scientists have adapted their research methods to the critiques that many scholars began to levy against positivism during the 1970s and 1980s. While the scholastic and hermeneutic imperatives for these critiques are beyond the scope of this paper, see the following for key statements: Clifford and Marcus 1986; Spivak 1988; Collins 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; and Britzman 1995.

experiences of others and perpetuates chauvinistic discourses. The second imperative is the idea that those who are researched should be treated as *people*, not as *objects* to be exploited by the scholarly gaze (England 1994). Pretenses of detachment and objectivity, reflexive methodologists argue, reify inequalities between the researcher and the researched (Stacey 1988; Devault 1996; Coffey 1999; Pillow 2003).

In light of these ethical considerations, reflexive scholars have generated a new approach to qualitative research. As Irwin (2006) notes,

> in response to critiques from feminist, existential, and postmodern qualitative researchers, the idea of maintaining objective and distant relationships with research subjects gave way to the belief that researchers could and, in some cases, should become intimately connected to research participants (p.155).

Indeed, Irwin argues that reflexive sociologists have advanced a "call to intimacy," eschewing detachment and objectivity in favor of "intimate familiarity" with subjects and personal/emotional encounters in the field (p.157). "Instead of being critiqued for their over-involvement, researchers who bec[o]me deeply immersed in their settings" are now "praised for having better data and much more complex and sophisticated renderings of their subjects" (p.157). This is a far cry from the traditional notion that over-involvement, pejoratively termed "going native," would undermine the researcher's capacity to accurately analyze data.

Reflexive scholars promote such intimacy through the ideal of *immersion*. As Macleod (1996) asserts, "the best fieldwork emerges when the sociologist is completely immersed in the community under study" (p.114). Kleinman and Copp (1993), similarly, contend that that the ideal fieldworker

> is the anthropologist. We think of anthropologists as those who get fully immersed…Fieldworkers measure their competence by degrees of immersion. If field researchers cannot produce proof of immersion, they lose their readers' trust (p.18,19).

Beyond arguing that immersion yields high quality data, most reflexive scholars highlight the ethical imperatives for personal and emotional engagement in the field. Oakley (1981), for instance, argues that remaining detached and cool while participants bare their souls underscores the uneven power relations that exist between researcher and subject. Emotionally intimate relations with subjects, on the other hand, are thought to dismantle those power hierarchies. Similarly, postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial researchers have viewed the distant, objective ethnographic voice of traditional narratives as a lie based on distortions and exclusions (Clifford and Marcus1986). "Intimate methods," on the other hand, are deemed to be

> more accurate, less exploitative, and less "colonizing" than objective and distant methods…concerns about inequality, power, and social location bolster the intimate research tradition (Irwin 2006: 159).

Scholars who consider the ethics of intimacy, as such, question not the utility of deep involvement but its possibility given the realities of social stratification (e.g. Stacey 1988; Irwin 2006). So long as the researcher can build egalitarian relationships with her subjects and take stock of her positionality, immersion is considered an unqualified good. Only a handful of scholars have considered how ethnographers might go too far in the quest for intimacy (Irwin 2006). When they do consider inappropriate intimacy, their reflections almost always remain limited to considerations of sex and romantic attraction in the field.[220]

The ethics of intimacy, however, require more expansive consideration. During fieldwork, ethnographers become entangled in the lives of their subjects in all sorts of unanticipated ways. The slipknots into which they weave themselves are often complicated, morally ambiguous, and risky not only for their subjects but for themselves. This holds particularly true when studying impoverished and/or marginal populations.

[220] See, for example, Grauerholtz et. al 2013; Irwin 2006; Goode 1999; Krieger 1996; Kulick & Wilson 1995.

In the following sections, I draw on fieldnotes in order to better illustrate the everyday ethical dilemmas that can ensue from immersion in research settings that are marked by extreme social suffering. I then analyze how those dilemmas compromise not only data collection but the ends of ethics and advocacy. My goal is to problematize a key but taken-for-granted assumption of the reflexive turn—that intimacy via immersion produces data that is more ethical and of a higher quality than information yielded from more detached methods. I show, to the contrary, that when applied without caution, intimacy can breed unnecessary risks, stunt the sociological imagination, and reproduce the very structures that it seeks to topple.

One Night in Shale County: A Lesson in Ethnographic Entanglement

I awake in a room that is pitch black, forgetting for a moment where I am. Save for the flickering digits of an alarm clock, which read 1:24 am, I see only darkness. Nearly a minute passes before my brain registers the sound that had roused me from slumber—a faint tapping emanating from the left-hand side of my room, near the door. I hold my breath and hope that the limbs of the overgrown blackberry bush outside and not the late-night antics of my drug-dealing neighbors/informants are the culprit. As the crescendo grows louder, I resign myself to the fact that the thumping of fingertips, not bush limbs, has awoken me. Feeling too tired to interact with Amy and Lauren, I consider pulling the covers over my head and pretending to be asleep. But the thudding continues for another 30 seconds. Realizing that there is no escape, I stumble out of bed—half-awake and very annoyed—in the hope of quickly sending them back to their apartment, so that I can return to sleep.

Drawing the curtain away from my glass door, my crusted eyes make out Amy's barely discernible visage amid the darkness. She stops tapping, steps back from the door, and whispers something inaudible while motioning for me to come outside. The thick glass muffles her

words, and I can't grasp what she is saying. Quieting my voice so as not to wake Dawn, the 73 year-old missionary with whom I share the house, I try to explain that I don't have a key for the door, that I can't hear her, and that I don't want to come outside right now. "It's late," I add with crotchety oomph. While I had hoped that my curtness would send her on her way, Amy is persistent. She raises her voice and hisses something to the effect that I need to come outside "RIGHT NOW." Though hard to see her, I can now tell by the shrill tone of her speech and the way that she is nervously darting her arms through the warm summer air that something is wrong.

Still not convinced that her plight merited the interruption of my sleep, I motion for her to walk around to the front door on the other side of the house so that I can let her inside. Stepping out of my bedroom, I wince as the hinges of my door screech open. The house is silent in absolute way, and each of my footsteps generates a seismic convulsion that reverberates through every board and rafter within it. Tip-toeing across the creaky wooden floor into the foyer, I am convinced that Dawn has already awoken, and that her rage grows fiercer each time that the floor beneath me groans from the weight of my forward-moving body. As I hop to the front door in a final dash to simply get the noise over with, my mind flashes with impending dread to the explanation that I will have to give in the morning for my late night travails.

When I finally arrive at the door, I fumble with the deadbolt—making even more noise—before swinging it open. I don't see Amy, so I walk onto the wooden porch, down some steps that lead to a cobblestone walkway, and begin making my way toward the gravel driveway that lies to the left of the house. I wince as the cobblestones jab into my bare feet, finally espying Amy, who is standing in the driveway—her face and figure dimly illuminated by the yellow spotlight affixed to the wooden pole above us.

As I make my way toward her, she raises her index finger to her lips, signaling for me to remain quiet. Traversing the final cobblestones and stepping onto the sharp pieces of gravel, which cut into my bare skin, her swollen face finally becomes visible. The sickly yellow light pulsating from above illuminates a puffy lower lip that is crusted at the corner with dried blood. Her cheeks are pink, distended, and shiny with tenderness. She struggles to fully open her right eyelid, which is a sallow-blue color and collapsing under the weight of inflammation.

"What happened to..," she cuts me off before I can finish. With tight-lipped seriousness, she asks if I can give her a ride. "Lauren was beating on me. She kicked the baby [Amy is six months pregnant]. I gotta leave…I can't take this anymore." "What happened?" I begin to ask again—still confused and asleep. This time before finishing, I hear Lauren bellowing from somewhere behind us: "Aiiiimmmmyyy… Where-youuu attt, girl? Aiimmmmee…" Her speech is slurred, almost incomprehensible.

Amy looks me squarely in the eye. With a penetrating glare, she lowers her voice to a sterner tone and demands: "Don't let her see you, okay? Can you drive me to my friend's house? I don't have no one else to take me. Can you take me? I can't let her find me." She is clutching a white garbage bag, and two smaller grocery bags rest by her feet. They contain all of her possessions. "Yeah, I can take you. I need to get my keys though...okay?" I reply, not knowing what else to do. Amy nods, and tells me to meet her at the bottom of the driveway. She needs to hide from Lauren, she says. "I'll be back in a minute," I whisper, as I begin scuttling over the gravel and cobblestone in order to retrieve my wallet and keys. I can still hear Lauren's incoherent bawling in the background as I leave. Amy has already disappeared into the darkness by the time that I reach the porch.

As I slip into the house, I am no longer concerned with waking Dawn. Now I am fretting about how I will handle Lauren in the morning. When she sobers up and realizes that I have secretly transported her longtime lover away in the middle of the night, she will not be pleased. While I have always felt ambivalent about Lauren, she is my key informant. Moreover, she is my neighbor and one of the few friends that I have in an area where establishing trust is a lengthy and difficult process. Perhaps most worrisome is the fact that Lauren is an unpredictable drug dealer/drug addict who is associated with people who could rough me up in the event that I anger her.

I am mostly concerned about Amy. While 34 year-old Lauren is loud, garrulous and crass, 28 year-old Amy is quiet and agreeable; I have always enjoyed her company. But I have no idea where she wants me to take her at this hour. She has few friends, no money, and no place to go as far as I'm concerned. Nonetheless, she is waiting outside—with her battered face and unborn child who may very well have perished in Lauren's drug-induced attack—expecting me to take her someplace.

Rummaging through my pants pockets, I finally locate my wallet and keys, jam my feet into a pair of shoes, and hasten to the car. As I start the ignition, back up in order to turn around, and lurch the car into first gear, Lauren—wobbling from intoxication and still wailing for Amy—appears in my headlights. "Shit!" I curse out loud. She tries to wave me down with a maladroit gesture, but I drive past her to the end of the driveway and out of sight, never making eye contact. As I round the driveway's sloping curve, I spot Amy sitting in the darkness with her three bags. I stop, help her throw them in the trunk, and speed away before Lauren has a chance to catch up.

Amy sobs quietly as I exit the mountain hollow and drive toward the main road. We are both silent for a few minutes. I glance at her every now and again, not knowing what to say. "Are you okay?" I finally inquire, in as gentle a tone as I can muster. "Yeah…I'm fine," she mutters in a cracked voice. She repeats that Lauren "kicked the baby," shaking her head in mortified disbelief. I try to probe about her stomach and the child, but she responds in a flustered retort that she doesn't know if the child is okay or not—that she doesn't want to talk about it. So I stop talking, and we return to riding in silence.

After a few moments, Amy tells me that Lauren had fallen asleep with a few dollars in her pocket earlier in the evening. When she awoke, the money was gone. Naturally, she blamed Amy, who adamantly denied the accusation. While the money turned up under the couch cushions two hours later, Lauren, who was "messed up on pills," accused Amy of planting it there in a misguided attempt to cover up the transgression. She then proceeded to beat her, cursing her integrity and dignity all the while. After finishing the story, Amy exhorts, through yet more tears, "I am done with her, I'm never going back to her, I'm not putting up with this no more."

I ask if this is the first time. She shakes her head, looking ashamed. She confesses that Lauren has abused her several times in the past—much like her ex-fiancé, who on one occasion beat her so severely that she miscarried an earlier pregnancy. She says that Lauren is also much like her cousin, who sexually abused her from the age of seven onward. As we continue driving, I remember a comment that Amy had made several days earlier, as we discussed our mutually troubled pasts—a remark about a psychiatrist who had told her that she would have "lasting problems" due to the sexual abuse that she had suffered as a child. I wonder, with a feeling of

hopeless resignation, if tonight is simply the latest manifestation of those "lasting problems." As I think about it, Amy croaks, in a very sad tone, "I am so tired of bad things happening to me."

As we pass a gas station, I ask Amy if she needs to stop to get anything. She has stopped crying now and is sullenly looking out the window—gazing off into unknown horizons. "I don't have no money," she says in a quiet voice. After a brief pause, she adds that Lauren had called and cancelled her food card (WIC) after the fight—her only source of state support. I try to offer my sympathy, but she is in her own world now, staring out the window even more intently, oblivious to what I am saying.

After more driving through the winding mountain roads, Amy directs me to a double-wide trailer that I had visited a few days ago on a drug run. After using her Medicaid benefits to renew a Xanex prescription, Lauren had directed me here in order to "move" the pills, claiming that she needed to collect "babysitting money" that was owed to her by the house's tenant. I had told Lauren earlier in the day that I would no longer allow her to transport drugs in my car, but desperately needing the money and having no other ride, she had crafted the babysitting ruse in order to con me into making the stop. In the few minutes that we were there, I saw her make the sale, and as I pulled away from the driveway, seven or eight men made their way down it, pursuing the exultant escape that the pills would soon offer.

I reminisce on that occurrence as I pull into the driveway for the second time this week. Amy exits the car, asking me to wait in order to ensure that she is able to get inside. She pounds on the door for several minutes, yelling for "Tom" to open, while I nervously sit in the car. Many of the pills that are pushed through this part of Appalachia originate in Georgia's lax "drive-thru" pain clinics. Amy and Lauren have repeatedly warned me to heed caution with my

very conspicuous "Georgia tag." I gaze about fearfully, half-expecting a cop to approach and harass me while I wait for Amy.

Fortunately the police do not appear, and Tom finally opens the door. He is a large middle-aged man who looks disheveled with sleep and is nude except for a long blue t-shirt, which barely covers his crotch. After exchanging a few words with him, Amy walks back toward my car. I exit in order to grab her bags and help carry them inside. As we make our way into the trailer, Tom looks alarmed—even violated—that I have entered his home. We look at each other uncomfortably but say nothing, as I drop Amy's garbage bag on the kitchen floor.

As I turn toward the door, sensing Tom's eyes on me all the while, Amy stops me, saying, "don't tell Lauren where I am; promise me." I promise, but she looks skeptical: "PLEASE…don't tell her where you took me; she'll come looking for me, okay?" I assure her that I will not inform Lauren of her whereabouts. Amy then gazes at me with a somber expression. The swelling around her right eye has intensified, and her other eye is now puffy, red and bloodshot with tears. She looks tired and sad—all worn out. "It was nice to meet you…if I don't never see you again," she says in a sincere but urgent tone, glancing at Tom in order to assure him that I will now be leaving. "You too," I mutter, not being able to avoid thinking that this is an awkward and hollow way to say goodbye. We exchange a curt hug, and I walk out the door.

Entering my car and pulling away, I think about Amy and her sad life as I drive through the blackness of the small, deserted mountain town. By the time that I have returned to the house, I am trying to forget everything that just happened, not wanting to think about or deal with it. I want to help Amy, but I have no idea how to do so, let alone if I will even see her again. Moreover, given my relations with Lauren, I am not even sure that I did the right thing by

driving her away (after all, Amy is also a drug addict who has indeed stolen drugs and money from Lauren in the past. She too has deceived me, and her word is as good as Lauren's). Squeezing my eyes shut while stopped at a traffic light, I try to anticipate tomorrow's conversation with Lauren and Dawn, and what I will say. I feel guilty before falling asleep, as I regale in the fact that I will be home in a few weeks and disentangled from this whole mess.

The very next day, as I pull into the driveway after conducting a late afternoon interview, I see Lauren and Amy standing outside and talking to one another outside of their apartment. Amy's face is still puffy, swollen and bruised. Lauren calls out to me as I exit my car. As I approach, she smiles while Amy lowers her head in shame. I have no idea what to say or do. The three of us, at least for the time being, pretend like nothing happened last night.

The Ambiguity of Interests and Advocacy

When conceptualizing my field research, I had fashioned abstract plans for carrying out a "community study." In the proposal that I submitted to my PhD committee, I stated that I would "participate in the quotidian aspects of communal life...and live there as typical Shale Countian." In a community marked by pervasive substance abuse, disproportionately high rates of crime, and pressing material hardships, my callow "analytic techniques" proved telling. "Participating in the quotidian aspects of communal life" involved engaging in illegal activities that never crossed my mind when completing my mandatory Institutional Review Board application. "Living as a typical Shale Countian" required managing tendentious relationships, dropping everything that I was doing in order to provide favors and rides to my destitute informants, transporting drugs in my car, covering for unscrupulous behaviors, extending petty loans and enforcing mounting debts, and often great embarrassment. Whether the "participant

observation" was helping or hurting my subjects—many of whom were poor, unemployed, battling drug addiction, and "on the run" (Goffman 2009)—was almost never clear.

While IBR training and qualitative methods courses prepared me for things like maintaining confidentiality and ensuring informed consent, they did not advise me of the proper way in which to handle a violent domestic dispute between my key informants or handle their drug addictions. Nor, for that matter, did they apprise me of how to identify their *interests*, carry out *advocacy* for them, or generate knowledge that could be used for their benefit. Scholars conducting ethnographies in other "grey zones" have faced similar dilemmas. The murky water that ensues opens up room for treacherous miscalculation.

Consider the fuzzy yet dire choices regarding interests and advocacy that Pearson and Bourgois (1995) faced while studying homeless drug addicts. On one occasion, they debated whether to call 911 when a subject overdosed and became ill. What was in the subject's interest: protection from potential death, or protection from potential arrest? They also struggled with how to formulate appropriate social and emotional responses to the dangerous and unhealthy choices that their subjects enacted. When one informant choked on a few packets of heroin and subsequently almost died, Pearson had a "tantrum," feeling hopeless, inadequate and nearly abandoning the research. Bourgois, on the other hand, tried to remain detached, focusing even greater concentration on documenting what was happening. Who responded appropriately? Was Pearson unprofessional? Was Bourgois callous and self-interested?

On yet another occasion, Pearson assisted one of his subjects to locate a vein by squeezing his bicep, which helped him to inject heroin. Although the informant needed Pearson's help, Bourgois reproached him for providing it. Who was right and who was wrong in this situation? How should they have weighed the short (sating a craving) versus long term

(kicking a dangerous habit) interests of their subjects? These questions are difficult if not impossible to answer.

The problem is that the "interests" of research subjects are rarely straight forward.[221] To the contrary, interests are multi-dimensional and conflicting at best, and vague, ambiguous and over-determined at worst. Oftentimes the researcher possesses only a vague conception of her own interests. Those of her informants remain even further from reach. Given the ambiguity of interests and advocacy, discerning whether one is helping or harming poses difficulties that are oftentimes insuperable.

While observing Lauren and Amy's everyday lives, I endlessly wondered what it meant to "advocate for them," of what "advancing their interests" entailed. Never getting very far, I eventually reduced my meditations to a more a more practical question: what did helping them as a friend mean? Did it mean loaning them money for the fix without which they would be desperate? Did it mean arbitrating their disputes? Did it mean driving them from house to house through mountain hollows in order to locate someone to whom they could sell their contraband?

Even these questions proved impossible to answer. The intuition of my "academic habitus" (Bourgois 2002) usually screamed "no!"—that facilitating Lauren and Amy's wheeling and dealing led to self-destructive behavior and was anything but helpful. But in the post-industrial, post-welfare economy that they occupied, this was not necessarily the case. Perhaps my own cultural categories had colored, if not distorted, my conception of their interests and my ability to advocate for them while in the field. At the micro-level, Amy and Lauren's most pressing problem involved their lack of disposable income—not necessarily their involvement in

[221] While a number of scholars have developed analytical conceptions of the "political interests" that various social formations should embrace, a review of these formulations remains outside the scope of this paper.

the drug scene. The small favors that I provided as a "disposable tie," while often illegal, were essential to their day-to-day survival.

For instance, I recall an occasion when I drove Amy and Lauren to the adjacent town so that Amy could attend her scheduled antenatal care appointment. Her OBGYN prescribed prenatal vitamins. Medicaid, however, denied coverage for the prescription, which left them with only an hour to obtain the cash required for the purchase before the pharmacy closed. I gave Lauren a ride in order to make a quick drug deal, which enabled her to cover Amy's vitamins. On another occasion, I drove Lauren and Amy around so that they could make a few sales in order to earn the money that they needed to cover the rest of the rent that they owed. I was helping, it seemed. My rides and loans were the very favors that kept them afloat. Indeed, after I returned to my hometown in order to teach during the fall semester, Dawn had to evict them both for failure to pay rent, which forced their relocation to a cabin in the woods without operant utilities.

Perhaps even the role that I played in facilitating their drug addictions served an interest. On a typical day, the three of us spent countless hours driving from house to house so that Amy and Lauren could scrounge up enough income in order to satisfy their daily need for cigarettes, pop and prescription pills. My fieldnotes are littered with commentary about the unhealthy lifestyle that these pursuits engendered and the hours of daylight that they squandered. The way in which they organized their lives around the consumption of harmful substances struck my health and fitness-oriented sensibilities as insane. The help that I provided in securing these items, however, conferred important micro-level benefits that refracted off of the academically-oriented nature of my habitus.

Similar to Lauren and Amy's dogged pursuit of pop and cigarettes, the top priority of subjects in Bourgois' (2010) study of homeless drug addicts involved obtaining and using heroin, often by any means necessary. Beyond providing an ephemeral fix, Bourgois argues that the quest for heroin provided "super-exploited" factions of the urban poor with a sense of purpose, creating a "community of addicted bodies" in a labor market that had no productive use for them (p. 241). Pill popping served a similar purpose for Amy and Lauren. In a context of structural unemployment and social disorganization, the pursuit of drugs imposed a sense of order on everyday life that helped to hold the feelings of anomie that they experienced at bay. Their addictions ensured that they knew exactly what they needed to do upon waking each morning.

But at the meso-level, the survival strategies that I was enabling—and the self-destructive behaviors that they entailed—seemed to be the root causes of many if not all of Amy and Lauren's problems. While my participation in their lives often staved off immediate disaster, one would be hard pressed to claim that I was "advancing their interests" or "advocating for their well-being" by facilitating substance abuse and illegalities.[222] To say nothing of the long term consequences that my enabling posed to their health, it was fortunate that my short-term assistance with rides did not exacerbate their immediate problems. While driving with my dreaded "Georgia tag," on two occasions we narrowly evaded roadblocks that would have put us all in jail. But perhaps that was inevitable. By the time I returned to Shale County for the second phase of my fieldwork, both Amy and Lauren had been incarcerated for possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, and criminal abuse in the first degree.

[222] One can raise the same questions about Bourgois' (1998) research on homeless drug addicts. In one instance he enthusiastically accompanied an informant on a late night search for a heroin peddler. After locating one, he regaled in the opportunity to purchase the product, and then accompanied his informant to a shooting gallery in order to watch him inject the substance with a contaminated needle. Is this advocacy, or is it voyeurism?

At the end of the day, Lauren and Amy's ambiguous and shifting "interests" undermined my capacity to contribute to them through participant action research. To begin with, I imported a different set of cultural affinities into the research settings, which complicated my efforts to parse out what they needed and wanted. Their interests also operated at competing levels, meaning that they often came at the expense of one another. Amy and Lauren's involvement in the drug scene, for instance, served their everyday, existential needs but subverted their longer-term interests. Perhaps most importantly, even if I had been able to successfully disentangle their conflicting interests, I could neither have predicted nor controlled the unintended consequences that my presence would have on the lives of those residing in Shale County.

My attempts to furnish transportation to needy subjects, for example, unwittingly facilitated drug dealing in an area that was experiencing an epidemic of overdose-related deaths. My rides also nearly resulted in the incarceration of my key informants. A colleague studying inner-city policing, in similar fashion, once described to me how her fieldwork accidentally led to the arrest of an informant and friend. At a more macro-level, the Reagan administration drew upon Erving Goffman's (1961) work on asylums in order to shut many of them down during the 1980s. This resulted in enormous suffering for former patients and the creation of mental health ghettos—something that Goffman never thought or wanted to occur. The point, as Becker (2009) has expressed regarding advocacy by social scientists, is that "we don't know what we're doing; you cannot take a complicated machine and push things and see what happens, and expect that will come out the way you imagined." Whether it's through the interventions that we make in the lives of our subjects or through the knowledge that we produce, the good that we hope to accomplish through fieldwork may very well result in harm instead.

Harming the Researcher and Disliking the Subjects

Beyond harming subjects, intimacy in the field can also distort the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation. During fieldwork, ethnographers become entangled in the lives of their subjects in all sorts of unanticipated ways. At the point when their research crosses into genuine participation in a social world, they enter into treacherous territory. Not only will their actions hold potentially serious consequences for subjects—as described in the previous section—but the actions of subjects may very well pose dire implications for researchers. This holds particularly true when studying impoverished and/or marginal populations.

Desmond (2012) has recently brought attention to the way in which the poor rely on "disposable ties" with strangers in order to meet survival needs, asserting that "the strategy of forming, using, and burning disposable ties allow[s] families caught in desperate situations to make it from one day to the next" (p.1295).[223] Disposable ties matter for research because the ethnographer often becomes one. Naïve, in a foreign environment, and eager if not desperate to establish social contacts, the ethnographer makes a promising victim in what Bourgois (1998) calls the "straightforward lumpen logic of the street economy" (p.46). This was indeed my experience. Friendly, full of smiles, and ready to do what people asked of me, I made an easy "hustle."

My susceptibility to hustling presented two challenges. On the one hand, it resulted in a string of personal problems. My bank account dwindled as I made loans that were never repaid. While never arrested, given the number of drug deals to which I was an accomplice, I anticipated being picked up by the police any day. Second, and more at issue, was that due to being

[223] Other ethnographers have made similar observations (e.g. Cressey 1932; Liebow 2003; Howell 1973).

deceived and taken advantage of, I became resentful—if not altogether contemptuous—of many of my subjects. This made it very hard to collect and analyze data.[224]

For one, it is difficult to spend time with subjects who treat other people poorly. I had to take leave of Lauren and Amy on several occasions. Because they hustled so many drug-related rides from me, I had ceased providing transportation by the time we parted ways. After they stole money from Dawn by forging a check, I abandoned most of my trust and regard in them. After the violent incident with Amy, I found it difficult to even be in the same room with Lauren.

Because they cannot do research by themselves, most ethnographers develop coping mechanisms for dealing with these sentiments. More at issue and less often explored, however, is what mounting antipathy mean for interpretation. As my negative interactions with Lauren, Amy and others accumulated, the nature and content of my fieldnotes changed. Feeling deceived and annoyed at the end of my research days, they became flatter, curter and angrier. They also became evaluative, focusing on my personal grievances rather than on the overall social situation. The tentative insights that I attempted to develop through grounded theory (Charmez 2000) acquired a conservative tone, paralleling the "culture of poverty" perspectives (Kephart 1913; Weller 1965; Lewis 1975) that most scholars now roundly reject (Eller 2006; Fischer 1993; Gaventa 1982; Billings and Blee 2000). The negative emotions that resulted from intimate entanglement, in other words, blinded me to the structural context of many behaviors and compromised my sociological imagination (Mills 1959).

This meant blasting my subjects as duplicitous and manipulative rather than attempting to understand how structural social and economic processes had made them reliant upon disposable ties and hustling. While some of my angry musings may have contained traces of insight, most

[224] While scholars have produced a sweeping literature on the protection of human subjects, few have considered how to handle situations in which informants harm or elicit negative emotions from the researcher (Agar 1980; Blee 2002; Grauerholz et. al 2013).

did not. This should serve as a point of caution against pursuing the intimate subject-researcher relations that many contemporary methodologists champion. Bourgois (1998) has argued that such ethnographies risk devolving into a "jumbled morass of individualistic relationships that mask historical processes and deny larger structural-power relations" (62)." Beyond being "personally draining," they often accomplish little more than fueling "stereotypes…and blame the victim convictions" (62).

The negative emotions that intimacy and immersion spawn can also curb the researcher's appetite for advocacy. As my fieldwork carried on, I began to feel like certain informants were beyond help—that their hardships were due to personal deficiencies rather than societal ones. Although ashamed of those feelings, and although they violated everything that I knew about poverty and inequality, they seemed like inescapable conclusions. This is to be expected. As Goode (2002) argues:

> It's difficult to sentimentalize and romanticize the people you're studying if you are in their face—and they are in yours—all the time. This is especially the case if you engage in intimate relations with them over an extended period of time. The fact is, you are acquainted with details of their lives that range from the spiritual to the mundane, from the way they express their most heartfelt emotions to the way they trim their toenails. For me, unabashed advocacy of my subjects was impossible precisely because I knew too much about them (p. 312).

While intimacy in the field yields the benefit of humanizing those under study, it introduces all of the complications that accord with human relationships. The researcher can no longer cast subjects in romantic and heroic categories that obscure their shortcomings and foibles. Viewing Appalachian poverty from the vantage point of the veranda, for instance, reveals images of exploitation, oppression and victimization. Viewing Appalachian poverty from within a morass of personal relationships, however, reveals how many individuals exploit and victimize not only themselves but those who try to advocate on their behalf. This reflects

not an absence of morality but an alternate morality that is better equipped to accommodate the social and material realities of extreme poverty and social suffering. After entanglement occurs, however, this will be far from evident. Grasping the structural context of social life requires that the research reestablish a degree of analytical distance.

Unliked Commentary and Unequal Relations

A final dilemma that can result from intimate research with marginal populations relates to offensive—yet revealing—comments that are made by subjects. Contrary to the prevailing wisdom of the reflexive turn, the research process does not necessarily bring subjects and researchers closer together via "deep identifications" (Kleinman and Coff 1992).[225] The comments that my informants made often upset and unsettled me. While hanging out with Lauren and Amy one afternoon, for instance, Lauren got on the topic of Afghanistan. Commencing a short diatribe, she stated that she "hates Afghans…because they want to blow this country up." She then proceeded into a sweeping critique of Islam, asserting that "in their religion they are rewarded for suicide bombing… they think it *pleases* Jesus!" She lamented how Al Qaeda was out to destroy the country and predicted that we would soon enter a war with Pakistan. As a coda, she added that if George Bush was still president "we would have already bombed them two or three years ago…I don't know if *Osama*, I mean *Obama*, will do it….that nigger!"

This incident created a strange dynamic between us—one that made both of us uncomfortable and lengthened the social distance between us. Lauren's racist commentary offended my commitment to tolerance, equality and social justice, both as a person and as a sociologist. But my mortified response aggravated a different line of cleavage. It placed Lauren,

[225] Most researchers expect to feel positively toward their subjects and achieve personal growth through participation in their lives (Coffey 1999: 138). This reflects the entrenched sociological "lie" of the "friendly ethnographer" (Fine 1993).

a poor, lower class white drug addict, in the condescending gaze of a middle-class, urban academic, making her acutely aware of the demeaning way in which privileged outsiders view "yesterday's people" (Weller 1965). Indeed, immediately after the comment, Lauren began to explain how she did not mean what she said, and how she was "just joking." She added: "but that's what *these hillbillies* think…I mean, that's how *they* talk, they call Obama a 'nigger.'"

Lauren's display of "double consciousness" was not an isolated incident.[226] On a different occasion while conducting an interview at Shale County's historical society, a man interrupted and asked the interviewee what we were doing. I had thought that the interview was going quite well at this point, until she replied, with subdued disdain, "he wants to know about hillbillies." She then proceeded to relate what she believed *I wanted to hear*: all of the age old stereotypes.

These incidents reveal that contrary to the ideals of the reflexive tradition, intimacy will not necessarily level the uneven social relations that exist between subjects and researchers. In my case, the "double consciousness" of my subjects brought into the open what I refused to acknowledge: that despite my progressive intentions, I continued to view my subjects, at least on some level, as "ignorant hillbillies"—that my presence in Shale County was in many ways attributable to these subconscious beliefs in the first place. As Macleod (1996) notes:

> The research relationship…is inextricably bound up with the phenomena under analysis: class…education, opportunity, and marginality. In a sense, the subjects are inscribed in the object: The interview itself is a miniature realization of the broader topic under investigation (p.146).

Ethnographers must take this structural inequality into account when interpreting the ostensibly confessional, unguarded commentary that derives from intimacy. The racist remarks that Lauren and others made often prompted me to resort to reflexive stereotypes. While not

[226] "Double consciousness," coined by W.E.B. Du Bois, refers to the "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p.9).

necessarily responding in force, I would become angry about what I believed to be ignorant and offensive viewpoints. But did Lauren and others really *believe* in what they said? Perhaps. But we must also take seriously Fanon's (1963) contention that oppressed populations who are the victims of society-wide prejudices and stereotypes possess a sophisticated understanding of those who exercise power over them.

While I doubt that Lauren and others viewed me as an "oppressor," I do suspect that they looked upon me as another outsider eager to capitalize upon the defamation of their community.[227] This no doubt influenced how they interacted with me, precipitating forms of symbolic resistance that sought to use subaltern knowledge at my expense. As House (2008) states in his book about Clay County, Kentucky:

> It's one of the poorest counties in America. Name your category, in most cases we're right up there near the top. You'll find Clay Countians who take a perverse pride in that. Or you think you will. What you're seeing is a sense of irony so fine-tuned you'll be left staring at something some Clay Countian has said that has him and his cronies chuckling inside but looking at you with a gaze as blank as a cow's. While you're thinking they're ignorant hillbillies, they're thinking what a gullible sort you are (p. 20).

It is possible that my informants, in the offensive remarks that they uttered, said what they meant but did not mean what they said (Hebidge 1979). When entwined in an uneven relationship with subjects, the ethnographer cannot necessarily take their commentary at face value. This is when Geertz's (1973) "thick description" becomes necessary. While researchers cannot get into the heads of subjects in order to determine what they really believe and feel (Wuthnow 1987), they can situate their rhetoric and behavior in the context that gave meaning to it.

This is not to say that the prejudiced commentary of Lauren and others should be condoned or that it was insincere. It is simply to say that given the uneven nature of our

[227] Shale County appears in the media often, and it is almost never depicted favorably. Reports focus on the county's drug epidemic, its poor level of public health, and its political corruption.

relations, it requires careful contextualization in order to determine what was meant. It is possible that Lauren and others made racist remarks because that is what they believed that I expected them to say—or, at an even deeper level, because that is what they wanted me to believe about them for their own entertainment.

Their commentary, in either case, speaks to the limits of reflexive methodology. While reflexive scholars have encouraged qualitative researchers to dismantle the hierarchical relations that exist between participant and observer, whatever equality is achieved through immersion is fleeting if not patently false. As Stacey (1988) notes, the ethnographer is free to leave the research setting whenever she chooses. While the heroin addicts depicted in Bourgois' work continued to languish on the streets after his project ended, he returned to his family and career. Shortly after driving Amy away from Lauren, I too went home.

The Shale Countians with whom I lived knew that I would eventually return to my "real life" from the moment that I arrived. Their double consciousness revealed not only this, but how despite our temporary common ground, our unequal relations had not changed by the end of the research process. They remained "hillbillies," while I remained a researcher trying to understand their "exotic" way of life. The disagreeable commentary that they occasionally uttered resisted against this reality at the very same time that it reproduced it.

Conclusion: Intimacy and Immersion versus Involvement and Participation

Scholars associated with the "reflexive turn" have promoted intimate, political and emotional encounters in the field as a means of enhancing qualitative research. Intimate methods are believed to overcome the ethical and epistemic problems associated with positivism by forging egalitarian relationships with subjects and encouraging scholarly self-reflection. While I agree with the critiques that reflexive practitioners have levied against traditional methods, I

have argued in this paper that the promise of intimate and politically oriented ethnography rests on three faulty assumptions—especially when the research population is in some way disenfranchised. The first is that research subjects possess a definite and easily identifiable set of *interests*. The second is that *advocacy* can be measured on a continuum marked by various degrees of success rather than harm. And the third is that intimate encounters in the field will forge positive bonds with subjects that dissolve structural inequality.

As Burawoy writes, "being sensitive to power inequality doesn't remove it… social science as we know it today rests on an irreducible level of domination" (p.5). Burawoy, as such, advocates "neither distance nor communion but dialogue" (p.4). The goal of ethnography, he argues, is neither to strip oneself of bias nor account for it; it is to discover and change oneself through interaction with others. In this paradigm, an "'I-You' relation between observer and participant" replaces the "'we' relation of false togetherness" that proponents of intimate field methods advocate, and the "'I-they' relation in which the I often becomes invisible" that plagues positivist methods (p.4). Burawoy calls for "participation but not immersion, observation but not marginality," arguing that the ethnographer should participate in the world of her subjects without pretending to be at one and on equal footing with that world (p.5). She should, to the contrary, establish a degree of detachment without adopting the illusion of being objectively detached.

I agree with Burawoy. The upsides of intimacy and immersion are that they insert researchers into a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1977) that many outsiders lack access to, allowing them to collect "experiential data" (Wacquant 1995). How can one understand poverty, for instance, without having a sense of what it feels like to live in impoverished conditions? How can one understand the survival strategies of the poor without participating in hustles or

being hustled? Engaging in those practices reproduces on some level the state of mind that many subjects live through in their everyday lives, accessing their way of being in the world. This form of participation is also often necessary for establishing trust and comfort with subjects, which expands access and results in richer data.

The key to producing ethical and reliable research, however, involves tapping the carnal structure of feeling that comprises a social world without succumbing to it—that is, getting close, but not so close that one loses sight of the broader dynamics that have conditioned the social situation under investigation. Getting *involved* without getting *immersed* is perhaps ethnography's greatest challenge. Because every study is different, hard and fast rules for achieving the appropriate balance cannot be specified. Qualitative researchers must simply strive to maintain a healthy level of self-reflection. When bad blood develops between they and their subjects, as it did for me, they must develop techniques for disentangling personal animosity from accurate reporting and interpretation. Agar (1980) calls this "detached involvement."

"Detached involvement" is a delicate line to walk—one that I believe I failed to accomplish during my own fieldwork. My "intimate involvement" in Shale County compromised my understanding of social life there in many ways. It also exposed my subjects and I to unnecessary risks at the same time that it created unnecessary tension between us. The data that arose from these situations generally amounted to little more than exploitative vignettes that do more to entrench stereotypes than confront misunderstand and injustice. I would argue that same holds for Bourgois' work, which I have discussed throughout. Certain dimensions of his research provide valuable insight into the social worlds of the "super exploited"—the shooting practices of homeless heroin addicts, for instance, and the social organization of heroin

copping. The sociological value of spending an "intimate" evening drinking fortified wine with subjects and helping them to inject heroin, on the other hand, is far less clear.

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