Prison Progress…
Neocolonialism as a Relocation Project
in “Post-Racial” America:
an Appalachian Case
or
Listening to the Canaries in the Coal Mine

by

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Appalachian Regional Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>PARC</td>
<td>People’s Appalachian Research Collective</td>
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<tr>
<td>AV</td>
<td>Appalachian Volunteer</td>
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<tr>
<td>EOA</td>
<td>Economic Opportunity Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>OEO</td>
<td>Office of Economic Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMWA</td>
<td>United Mine Workers of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>VISTA</td>
<td>Volunteers in Service to America</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOC</td>
<td>Department of Corrections</td>
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<td>CCA</td>
<td>Corrections Corporation of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>BOP</td>
<td>Federal Bureau of Prisons</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCI</td>
<td>Federal Correctional Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>USP</td>
<td>United States Penitentiary</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEPA</td>
<td>National Environmental Policy Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPA</td>
<td>Environmental Protection Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIMBY</td>
<td>Not In My Back Yard</td>
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<tr>
<td>EIS</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEIS</td>
<td>Draft Environmental Impact Statement</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To all those who gave me the gift of ground to stand on.

To Appalshop and WMMT-FM 88.7 Mountain Community Radio, for their commitment to creating spaces where all voices in the mountains can be heard. A special thanks to WMMT-FM radio for handing me a Marantz digital recorder in the summer of 2008 and telling me to go out and find a story – any story at all. This is the story that I was given.

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And lastly, to my mother and father, Alice Turkel and Mitch Ryerson, for giving me all of the freedom and love that is necessary for any inquiry to exist.
On a hot Monday evening in July of 2008, I found myself sitting in as the guest DJ for the weekly call-in hip hop radio show Holler to the Hood, on WMMT-FM 88.7 Mountain Community Radio in Whitesburg, Kentucky. The Holler to the Hood radio program was started in 2000, by Whitesburg residents Amelia Kirby and Nick Szuberla, as a part of their grassroots effort to confront the sudden and drastic increase of new prisons in the Central Appalachian Mountains that they call home.

As someone has done every Monday night for the past decade, I spent the evening answering phone calls from the friends and family members of those incarcerated in one of the eight prisons within the station’s local signal radius, recording their messages in order to play them out on the radio starting at 9 PM. While many prisons set exorbitant rates for phone calls, the Holler to the Hood radio show provides a toll free number for people to call, so they can relay messages to those on the inside free of charge.

“Good evening, you’re on Holler to the Hood, would you like to give a shout out?” I answered time after time when the studio phone rang.

The calls came steadily in, from Texas, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Florida. They spoke of the weather at home, of birthdays and bike rides and letters on the way. A kindergartner called in to tell her father she had learned the alphabet song and a teenager called to tell his dad about the plans for his high school graduation party. A Grandmother called in to read a poem to her grandson. Occasionally there were
distant promises of future visits being planned – two, four, six months away – and
talk of trying to figure out a way to make the trip. Many were dialing the area code of
a county in a state where they had never set foot, and perhaps never would.

Most of the callers were regulars, phoning in to give yet another weekly
update on their lives; a calm attempt to offer comfort while confronted with horror, to
insure an unbreakable connection against the forces of incredible separation, and to
remind their loved ones that they were not, against all odds, forgotten. That miles and
miles and miles away daily life was still happening, and there were people
desperately waiting for them to come home again.

Towards the end of the evening I answered a phone call from an older woman.
I don’t know where she was calling from, but it felt like she was far away because the
connection was bad, and her voice kept fading in and out between static.

“Hi your on holler to the hood,”
“Hello, how are you tonight?”
“I’m good. How are you tonight?”
“I’m very well.”
“Would you like to give a shout out?”
“Definitely.”
“Go right ahead.”

“Thank you. Good evening divine art of Allah. Blessings and Peace be unto
you… Rain we had last night. It rained and it rained and it rained and it rained and it
rained. And sounds the day. Thank God for the showers of blessing, we need the
rain for the fruits and the vegetables to grow… I hope you are doing very well and I
hope that things are shaping up for you. To your fellow inmates, we wish them a blessed evening and hope that things are shaping up for them also. Please enjoy what the summer brings, freedom, time for the air to blow in your face. Get some exercise, and I hope they allow you to be outdoors sometimes so you can enjoy the beauty of nature. So may the Good Lord continue to bless you all, and have a blessed evening.”

As she talked I found myself yet again in the excruciating position of middleman, holding one end of the phone line in a private conversation that wasn’t meant for me, but that I had somehow become a part of – and that the aching one-sidedness of the conversation was because I was the wrong person on that other end. But as she spoke I felt the vibrations of a voice that was traveling hundreds of miles, over mountains, across bridges, along interstate highways, and into the WMMT studio, to become a radio frequency that could penetrate through concrete walls into steel cages on top of strip mines – and there was nothing anyone could do to stop it.
Prisons have long served as liminal spaces both inside and outside the boundaries of constitutional law, belonging to (in fact, invented by) but not of the United States. The birth of the penitentiary, a form of punishment defined entirely upon the denial of freedom, is culturally grounded in democratic values.

- Michelle Brown, “Setting the Conditions” for Abu Ghraib: The Prison Nation Abroad

For more than a century, Appalachia has provided a challenge to modern conceptions of the American dream. It has appeared as a place of cultural backwardness in a nation of progressive values, a region of poverty in an affluent society, and a rural landscape in an increasingly urban nation. We know Appalachia exists because we need it to exist in order to define what we are not. It is the “other America” because the very existence of Appalachia convinces us of the righteousness of our own lives.

- Ronald D. Eller, Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945

I think we should not stand in the way of progress for our county. Indeed the federal government’s plans to build a prison has gained momentum. They predict a payroll of $17 million would be an enormous economic boost for our county, and I agree.

- Katy Lynn Gilreath of McCreary County, Kentucky, in a letter of support written to the United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, April 4, 1999

… at the very time when it most often mouths the word, the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism – a humanism made to the measure of the world.

- Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism
Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present a model that examines and connects the present crises of rural development and mass incarceration in the United States of America today. It is an anxious attempt towards finding a framework that opposes both the extreme poverty of majority-white populations in Central Appalachia, and the mass incarceration primarily of people of color from urban America, while acknowledging both the differences and similarities between these distinct positions of social, economic and political marginalization. By locating shared systemic causes for both realities, and the increasing geographic overlap of these socio-spatial categories of exclusion, the theoretical architecture of this project aims to challenge the construction of both at the same time, rather than perpetuating dominant narratives that often frame localized struggles against rural poverty and urban mass incarceration in opposition and/or isolation. Although the immediate focus of this paper is on the region of Central Appalachia, and specifically eastern Kentucky, I believe that this model is applicable to, and indeed inseparable from, other geographies throughout the nation.

In my own restless attempt to look forwards, I needed to look backwards. The title of this work is intended to echo that of the essay “Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia or Bury My Rifle at Big Stone Gap,” written by Helen Matthews Lewis, Sue Easterling Kobak and Linda Johnson, and presented to the American Anthropological Society in 1972. This work became the lead essay in the now out-of-print book Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case, a collection of essays by Appalachian scholars, artists and activists published on the
Appalachian Consortium Press in Boone, North Carolina. This visionary text presented the first and only comprehensive analysis proposing the model of Appalachia as an internal colony of the United States, and became the ideological cornerstone for much of the radical organizing in the region throughout the 1970s. Sociologist and activist Helen Matthews Lewis was the lead theorist of the model, and structured her analysis of Appalachia existing as an internal colony on Robert Blauner’s theory of the internal colonization of black Americans, outlined in his work *Racial Oppression in America.* In building from these two seminal theorists, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the continued relevance of their works today, and proposes a new theoretical model that brings them together again. In order to do so I needed to look further back in time, to Sylvia Wynter’s *1492: A New World View.*

Ultimately, by looking backwards and forwards at the same time, this paper aims to remain firmly grounded in the present. The title of this work is also intended to display my own hope and respect for the political race project proposed by Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres in *The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy,* and for all those who recognize race and culture as the

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1 Helen Matthews Lewis, Sue Easterling Kobak, and Linda Johnson, "Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia, or, Bury My Rifle at Big Stone Gap," in *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case,* ed. Helen Matthews Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Askins (Boone, NC: The Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978). My title intends only to humbly pay tribute to this foundational work. This work is titled *an* Appalachian Case, as opposed to *The* Appalachian Case, to acknowledge that this undergraduate thesis is neither a comprehensive nor collective study of this particular proposed model.


fundamental organizing concepts for collective social change. As Guinier and Torres explain their metaphor,

Race, for us, is like the miner’s canary. Miners often carried a canary into the mine alongside them. The canary’s more fragile respiratory system would cause it to collapse from noxious gases long before humans were affected, thus alerting the miners to danger. The canary’s distress signaled that it was time to get out of the mine because the air was becoming too poisonous to breathe.

Those who are racially marginalized are like the miner’s canary: their distress is the first sign of a danger that threatens us all. It is easy enough to think that when we sacrifice this canary, the only harm is to communities of color. Yet others ignore problems that converge around racial minorities at their own peril, for these problems are symptoms warning us that we are all at risk.

I too believe that we need to hear the miner’s canary – before it is too late for all of us – and this is my own attempt to listen.

But before we begin in must be said that this undergraduate thesis takes on far too many things at once, and leaves many holes unexplored in the process. It is at best the skeleton of a model. It is my hope that this project is simply another beginning, not an ending, in the asking of these questions. However anemic, the purpose of the model is to offer a diagnosis for, rather than simply a documentation of, the problems we face today. As Donald N. Anderson writes in the preface of *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case*, “The accumulation of descriptive data, while important, fails to provide our most needed information – an explanation of the tragic conditions. Deprived of an understanding of causal factors,

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5 Ibid., 11.
we can scarcely respond to any social problems with rational, consistent strategies.”

It is precisely for this reason that we must turn to the canaries in the coal mine. Like a medical doctor, we must look beyond the obvious fact that their lungs are catastrophically collapsing, to ask, why can they not breathe? Because as every doctor knows, it is only from this point of questioning that the process of healing can begin. As Guinier and Torres write, “One might say that the canary is diagnostic, signaling the need for more systemic critique. Political race, on the other hand, is not only diagnostic; it is also aspirational and activist, signaling the need to rebuild a movement for social change informed by the canary’s critique.”

Chapter One locates this work within the continuum of recent Appalachian history. I trace the immediate intellectual origins of the present moment from the year 1964. Chapter Two locates this work within the spectrum of existing scholarship on prison expansion. At of the end of the chapter I introduce my own conceptual framework of neocolonialism as a relocation project. In Chapter Three, I detail the process of “prison progress” in eastern Kentucky, primarily focusing on McCreary County in the years leading up to the completion of the United States Penitentiary McCreary (USP-McCreary) in 2003. In Chapter Four, I return to McCreary County, in an attempt to understand how things have changed in the county since the construction of the USP-

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7 Guinier and Torres, The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy, 12.
McCreary, and to consider the current direction in which our country is progressing.

In the conclusion, I try to listen to the canaries in the coal mine.
Chapter One
From a Whitewashed War towards a New Kind of Welfare

On April 24, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson landed in Martin County, Kentucky in a Marine helicopter. The trip made him the first and only president to ever visit the county. President Johnson stepped down from his helicopter onto unemployed sawmill worker Tom Fletcher’s front porch in the county seat of Inez, and, in front of an entourage of photographers and journalists, declared an “Unconditional War on Poverty” to the nation. The moment was captured for all eternity through the camera lens of Time Magazine photographer Walter Bennett, and permanently marked Central Appalachia as the symbolic stage for President Johnson’s mission to “eliminate poverty” through his Great Society Program.8

Launched in response to a national poverty rate of roughly nineteen percent, the rates in Appalachia were much higher, with roughly one in every three citizens living below the poverty line. In Martin County the rates were even more extreme. The county’s per capita income was just $300; the lowest in the state of Kentucky, and 70% of the population was unemployed.9

But the choice of centering Appalachia was far more than statistical. Constructed by elites as culturally distinct, homogeneously white, overwhelmingly poor, and geographically removed, Central Appalachia was as peripheral to the national conscience as President Johnson’s poverty relief funding was to the federal

budget. In a decade of nationwide racial, social and economic unrest, Appalachia was a safe place to isolate and publicize government reforms for the problems that faced the nation, in order to promote stability through localized rather than structural changes. As Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward write, “the key to an understanding of relief-giving is in the functions it serves for the larger economic and political order, for relief is a secondary and supportive institution. Historical evidence suggests that relief arrangements are initiated or expanded during the occasional outbreak of civil disorder produced by mass unemployment, and are then abolished or contracted when political stability is restored.”

The history of the war on poverty in Appalachia demonstrates this analysis.

Finding and Defining the Battlefield

The emerging interest in Appalachia began before President Johnson took office, during the Kennedy administration. In 1963, Harry M. Caudill, a lawyer and writer of Letcher County, Kentucky, published *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, a landmark text that continues to influence the region today. In this work Caudill documents the historically constructed poverty of the region, tracing its roots to the absentee ownership of the coal industry, and the industry’s strong ties to corporate backers in the Northeast, enabling the massive outflow of mineral profits that yielded minuscule reinvestments in the region.

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By Caudill’s own account, in the fall of 1963, the head editor of the New York Times gave a copy of Night Comes to the Cumberlands to reporter Homer Bigart, “and suggested that he make a trip to eastern Kentucky and report on whether the book exaggerated the region’s plight.” Bigart did just that, and by October of 1963, his articles were published in a series with front-page headlines in the nation’s most prominent newspaper. As Caudill summarizes Bigart’s articles,

He described a part of America that had slipped into dependency, dejection and peonage, and, even worse, was sliding inexorably toward backwardness and ignorance…. He told of gasping, dust-choked coal miners huddled in cluttered, decaying shacks, of drafty, dilapidated schools and the pinched, drawn faces of children. He quoted a county health doctor who described children so hungry they ate the dried mud from between the rocks of chimneys…. Bigart raised the specter of death by starvation and cold in the bleak months ahead and marveled at so vast and island of poverty in what John Kenneth Galbraith had so lately called the “affluent society.”

The report was so graphic and received such wide publicity that, as Caudill explained, President Kennedy began to understand that “Even a low priority-item like the rescue of dying Appalachia could be turned into a politically fruitful issue.” President Kennedy quickly pledged $45,000,000 from his executive funds towards immediate winter relief for the region. To make his commitment to the region known, President Kennedy planned to schedule a trip to eastern Kentucky as soon as he returned from a trip to Texas in November of 1963. Yet the trip to Texas was his last, and his journey to Appalachia was never realized.

But the momentum had begun. Many scholars describe the decade of the 1960s as the years of “the rediscovery” of Appalachia, and locate Bigart’s front-page

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12 Caudill, The Watches of the Night, 4.
13 Ibid., 5.
14 Ibid., 6.
story as “the first of what was to become an avalanche of reporting about Appalachia in general and eastern Kentucky in particular.”\footnote{15} By the middle of the decade national media coverage of the region had reached a level of furor. In 1964 a CBS film crew traveled to Letcher County to document the holiday season for the nationally aired news special \textit{Christmas in Appalachia}. The piece showcased desperate parents unable to provide Christmas gifts for their young children, and resulted in a momentary flood of aid from northern philanthropists. NBC soon followed suit, and came down from New York City to film in Floyd County. In January of 1964, \textit{Life} magazine published the photo-essay “Valley of Poverty,” consisting of images taken by \textit{Life} photographer John Dominis from all over eastern Kentucky but primarily Letcher County, exhibiting further desperation and despair. As the magazine article began,

\begin{quote}
In a lonely Valley in eastern Kentucky, in the heart of the mountainous region called Appalachia, live an impoverished people whose plight has long been ignored by an affluent America. Their homes are shacks without plumbing or sanitation. Their landscape is a man-made desolation of corrugated hills and of hollows laced with polluted streams. The people themselves – often disease-ridden and unschooled – are without jobs and even without hope. Government relief and handouts of surplus food have sustained them on a bare subsistence level for so many years that idleness and relief are not their accepted way of life.\footnote{16}
\end{quote}

As historian Ronald D. Eller concisely summarized the new mainstream attention on the region, “such accounts transposed Appalachia into a marketable media commodity and helped to establish a pattern of critical but superficial commentary that would sustain the image of Appalachia as a problem area for years to come.”\footnote{17}

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\footnotemark[15] \footnotemark[16] \footnotemark[17]
\end{flushright}
And as the *Life* article demonstrates, the image created was far more complex than simply a display of economic deprivation.

This single opening paragraph from *Life* encapsulates much of how devastating stereotypes were constructed to individualize and isolate failure, effectively deflecting deeper analyses of the ways in which social inequalities and patterns of environmental destruction are perpetuated. From the very first sentence it locates eastern Kentucky as an invisible geography, existing in a “lonely Valley,” “in the heart of the mountainous region,” far from all centers of civilization. In the following two parallel phrases the description equates Appalachians’ agency in the construction of “their homes” as being pre-civilized “shacks without plumbing,” and the ruination of “their landscape” as one of “man-made desolation.” Such calculated literary repetition places the blame for environmental destruction on the regions’ residents rather than on national mining corporations or the complimentary lack of federal mining regulations, thus presenting Appalachians as an uncivilized population that does not know how to properly take care themselves or their land. In such a way the land and the people are defined in the same terms: as isolated, wrongly cared for/“unschooled,” and thus rapidly deteriorating. Poverty is further naturalized as a hereditary “disease-ridden” condition, rather than a class position created by the greater economic structure of the nation.

In not making a single reference to the mining *industry*, the description prevents recognition of the fact that most of the land being destroyed no longer even belonged to Appalachian residents. In such a way the article succeeds in constructing the narrative of Appalachia as a region that has “long been ignored by an affluent
America,” rather than confronting the reality that Appalachia was central to the existence of “affluent America.” The article later quotes the statistic that in the 1960s, 65% of U.S. soft coal came from Appalachia. But within this framework this incredible statistic is irrelevant; the causes of the conditions have already been established. Due to their own deficiencies, Appalachians are entirely reliant on “government relief and handouts of surplus food,” a destructive dependency by which “idleness and relief are now their accepted way of life.” Such a narrative disallows consideration of the inverse equation: that “affluent America” is entirely reliant on the mineral resources of Appalachia, a destructive dependency that requires the exploitation, devastation and misrepresentation of the regions’ land and people.

Tellingly, this social critique became widely established throughout the decade, outlining the “culture of poverty model” that extended far beyond the region of Appalachia. As intellectual historians David S. Walls and Dwight B. Billings summarize the model, it is one that “identifies the internal deficiencies of the lower-class subculture as the source of the problem.” The critique was first articulated in the U.S. in the late 1950s, to justify colonial domination in the third world, with social scientist Oscar Lewis being one of the most recognized initial theorists of the model. But it quickly became used to explain domestic inequalities as well, most famously exemplified by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Nixon’s chief advisor on urban social problems, in his 1965 report, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Liberation*. This legendary report, which caused an outpouring of backlash from Civil Rights Movement leaders and intellectuals, located the breakdown of the black

family structure as the root cause for the reoccurring “cycle of poverty and disadvantage” experienced by so many Black Americans.\(^{19}\) As Moynihan reported, At the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of the Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. It is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time…. The white family has achieved a high degree of stability and is maintaining that stability. By contrast, the family structure of lower class Negroes is highly unstable, and in many urban centers is approaching complete breakdown.\(^{20}\)

Moynihan’s critique centered on quoted rates of divorce, “illegitimate births,” and female-headed households among black Americans. It is important to note that Moynihan was politically liberal, and did not directly reference Lewis or other conservative theorists who promoted the model. But in entirely lacking any structural or historical analysis of the processes by which ideologies of race and patriarchy are constructed and how they function, his framework remained wholly consistent with the theory that the behavioral norms of marginalized groups causes their condition of poverty.

The very same year that Moynihan published his report on black Americans, Jack E. Weller published a book on Appalachian Americans titled Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia, which became the most widely read application of the “culture of poverty” model to the region.\(^{21}\) As demonstrated by the title itself, Weller’s work employs a Darwinian discourse of time, and relies on the bio-evolutionary paradigm of the Other as existing outside of, or behind, Western Judeo-Christian conceptions of linear progress. Weller first came to the Appalachian

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Mountains as a missionary in 1952, and his sociological account was based on his thirteen years serving as a minister in a parish of the United Presbyterian Church in West Virginia. Paralleling Moynihan, Weller identified the “Appalachian personality type,” as the core obstacle to regional progress, and defined Appalachian culture by a dysfunctional family structure, a lack of commitment to education and a fear of authority. Like Moynihan, Weller located an absence of patriarchal control, attributed primarily to the fact that “the mountaineer has never been financially secure,” as a fundamental problem of the Appalachian family structure. According to Weller, such inadequacies force the mountaineer to be “dependant upon his relationships with those in his family and reference group,” a necessarily destructive arrangement by which “His security is not based within himself, on his own abilities and talents. Thus he can never be sure of himself as a person in his own right.” By emasculating mountain men in such a way, Weller identified the lack of male authority both inside and outside of the home as a key component in the inter-generational perpetuation of the “culture of poverty.” As he writes, “The very permissive and indulgent child-rearing practices of the mountain family also create insecurity, for children are trained to believe that their desires are paramount.” In such terms, Weller denied the existence of a socially acceptable adult male presence, reinforced the singular image of Appalachian women as inherently weak and “permissive,” disallowed the consideration of functional female-headed households, prioritized individual, male economic gain over collective well being, and derided

22 Throughout the text the title “Mountaineer” only applies to white Males, effectively erasing women and people of color as mountaineers.
Appalachian children for obeying only their “desires,” thus perpetuating the negative stereotype of Appalachian people as inherently lazy and licentious.\textsuperscript{23}

In order to understand how such a destructive model gained such widespread acceptance throughout the nation, one must consider what purposes this scholarship served. In such a way I find it more useful to consider how this model succeeded, and for whom, rather than how it failed. As intellectual historian Demetrius Eudell writes, “Rather than asking what literary texts mean, or whether a specific history is true or false, objective or subjective, we should now like to ask: what do these narratives do?”\textsuperscript{24}

During the years of the war on poverty, alongside the outpouring of new works that located cultural “deficiencies” as the root cause of poverty in Appalachia, other works promoted theories of modernization by elites as the only solution. As Ada F. Haynes outlines this body of scholarship, “Related to the culture of poverty thesis are those that attribute the poverty of the region to the lack of modernizing elites. At times these theories are used interchangeably or are included in the same work.”\textsuperscript{25} Either located within the same text, or used side by side, these mutually reinforcing theoretical models cannot be separated. And in observing this collective body of work, it is clear that a crucial function of the “culture of poverty” model is how it supports modernization theories that outline how reported deviancy can only

\textsuperscript{24} Demetrius L. Eudell, "After the Humanities? Or after the Épisteme? Toward "a Humanism Made to the Measure of the World" in \textit{Center for the Humanities 50th Anniversary Conference} (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 2009).
be corrected through the aid of modernizing elites, by reforming individuals into the cultural and behavioral norms of middle-class white America.

Nowhere is this more clear than in Weller’s *Yesterday’s People*. As Weller writes,

> Middle-class children are brought up expecting that they will succeed, and they are helped by their parents to move toward success, subordinating their present wishes in favor of long-range plans. Mountain children, however, have had very few contacts with successful adults, and their families have been unable to help them achieve a success in the outside world about which they know little.\(^{26}\)

Such a statement defines “success” as an absolute category that is only attainable through a middle class value system. Furthermore, by creating the dichotomy between “middle class children” and “mountain children” this statement assumes that mountaineers cannot be middle class, and thus constructs the concept of success as dependant on geographic location. Such an assumption invisibilizes local power structures, perpetuating the myth that everyone in Appalachia is poor, thus defining the region as a place that exists in isolation from the greater capitalist system. In such a way the geography itself becomes a location of un-success within the terms of the capitalist order, evident in the fact that mountain children “have had very few contacts with successful adults.” Implicit in this statement is the argument that, without the presence of modernizing elites, there is no hope for the future of Appalachian children. By collapsing Appalachian regional identity and class identity into one location of categorical failure, success becomes something that can only be attained in, and embodied by those from, “the outside world” of middle class capitalist America. Thus within this system of logic the only way Appalachians can

succeed is if they leave the region in search of middle-class America, or if, by the same measure, middle-class America comes to save them.

Weller outlines this framework in his chart “Some Contrasting Value Orientations,”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Underlying Question</th>
<th>Southern Appalachian</th>
<th>Upper-middle Class (Professional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the relation of man to nature (and supernature)?</td>
<td>Man subjected to nature and God; little human control over destiny; fatalism</td>
<td>Man can control nature or God works through man; basically optimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the relation of man to time?</td>
<td>Present orientation; present and future telescoped; slow and &quot;natural&quot; rhythms</td>
<td>Future orientation and planning; fast; regulated by the clock, calendar, and technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the relation of man to space?</td>
<td>Orientation to concrete places and particular things</td>
<td>Orientation to everywhere and everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of human nature?</td>
<td>Basically evil and unalterable, at least for others and in the absence of divine intervention</td>
<td>Basically good, or mixed good and evil; alterable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of human activity?</td>
<td>Being</td>
<td>Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of human relations?</td>
<td>Personal; kinship-based; strangers are suspect</td>
<td>Relatively impersonal; recognize non-kin criteria; handle strangers on basis of roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Such a chart is crucial not only in how it reveals sweeping assumptions about mountain life, but also in how it serves to establish a singular, monolithic identity for both “Southern Appalachians” and ideal Americans, defined as “Upper-middle Class (Professional),” and how the two are necessarily and explicitly framed in opposition. In “contrasting value orientations,” Weller is making a value judgment, framing one system as inherently positive, and the other as inherently negative.

27 Ibid., 6.
Whitewashing Appalachia

In seeking to understand the extent to which negative stereotypes were constructed to describe the regions’ residents in order to promote a singular path towards progress, it must also be considered whom these derogatory narratives did not describe. During the years of the War on Poverty, as federal policy debates over poverty ensued and images of poor white Appalachians flooded national media outlets, Black and Native American Appalachians were all but erased from the geography. Such constructed invisibility demonstrates both the dominant Eurocentric historical documentation of the region and the underlying racial logic of the War on Poverty.

The principle federal agency responsible for administering the “War” was the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), created after Congress passed of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Yet in order to get Congress to pass the act, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, political elites were keenly aware of the need to color-code the proposal. As Adam Yarmolinsky, a deputy in planning the poverty program, stated “we were concerned with explaining to the Congress and the public that the poverty program was in no sense a help-the-blacks program, and not only were we saying this, but we didn’t think it was.” Thus in order to get the approval of Congress and Yarmolinsky’s “public,” (an assumedly white, middle-class, anti-black constituency), Yarmolinsky’s OEO “hadn’t the faintest gray tinge to it.” And as Yarmolinsky famously stated, “If anything, color it Appalachian if you were going to color it anything at all.”28 Thus in order to “color it Appalachian” to

28 Katz, The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare, 85-6.
avoid the possible misunderstanding that economic resources might be specifically allocated to black Americans in the fight against poverty, it became necessary to color Appalachia as white.

This was not hard to do, considering how Appalachia as a region has long been constructed as a geographic location of exclusive whiteness, a false assumption that remains strong in the contemporary national imagination. Stemming from accounts of Daniel Boone’s heroic expedition through the Cumberland Gap into Kentucky in 1775, to the first generation of folklorists who “discovered” the region towards the end of the 19th century in search of “the surviving remnants of European songs from what was perceived to be America’s sole surviving remnant population of pure Anglo-American stock,”29 Black, American Indian, and interracial cultural narratives have been consistently erased and undocumented throughout the region’s history, creating the reality by which, in the words of anthropologist Patricia D. Beaver, Appalachia has been “white-washed and homogenized.”30 Thus as Edward J. Cabbell writes in Blacks in Appalachia, “Black people in Appalachia are a neglected minority within a neglected minority.”31

The historical erasure of black Appalachia was supported by the massive outmigration of citizens from rural to urban America during the 1940-50s because of a wave of rapid mechanization in agriculture and the mines. Piven and Cloward quote the statistic that “over 20 million people, more than 4 million of them black,

30 Ibid., 6.
left the land after 1940.” The disproportionate numbers of black Americans who migrated to city centers during these years was due largely to the fact that, as Leon F. William writes, “The decline in agriculture and the coalfields hit blacks the hardest, as they were the first fired and were not privy to the skill training need or had not the resources to take advantage of the new mining and agricultural technology.” Yet as Williams also observes, “Statistics extolling the black exodus from the South during the decades beginning, especially, with 1950, while accurate, failed to note that a significant portion of that black migration was from the Appalachian sections of the nation.” Thus the dominant narratives of mid-century black urban migration work to erase both black history in Appalachia, and the continued black presence in Appalachia.

Yet most relocated black Americans faced the same structures of injustice and exclusion in American cities, leading to the increasingly high rates of black poverty in urban America that fueled Moynihan’s “culture of poverty” model. Many locate this drastic demographic shift as a key part of the build up for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. And at the very moment when “social unrest” was spreading throughout urban America as black Americans demanded equality, the Johnson administration created the OEO, called it a “War,” focused its efforts most visibly on rural Appalachia, and constructed it as exclusively white.

Yet in “coloring” Appalachia white, it had to be a whiteness that was distinct from the cultural norms of middle-class white America, in order to explain the

region’s astronomical rates of poverty without exposing the roots of injustice. Thus the Appalachian “culture of poverty” was cemented into the national conscious to an extent that remains strikingly present today. It remains a whiteness that is both romanticized and stigmatized; simultaneously celebrated as the “core creed” that inspired the nation’s rugged individualist democracy, and stigmatized by long list of derogatory names such as “rednecks,” “trailer-park trash,” “white trash,” and “hillbillies.” Offensive caricatures of poor white “hillbillies” as ignorant, “backwards,” sexually perverse, lazy, gun loving, violent, alcoholic and dirty, remain pervasive images in American popular culture.\(^{34}\) Thus it is a whiteness that has captivated and confused scholars for decades. Many to point to the high rates of white poverty in Appalachia as proof that American poverty is “colorblind.”

For conservatives, the idea of poverty as “colorblind” works to deny the pervasiveness of institutional racism, and thus upholds the “culture of poverty” model in that it supports the argument that the behavioral norms of marginalized groups causes their condition of poverty, rather than societal structures of injustice, exploitation and exclusion. On the other hand, in opposition to the proponents of the “culture of poverty” model, many leftist scholars point to the region’s high rates of white poverty as proof of the inherent exploitation in a capitalist system, and thus as evidence of the need for class-based alliances, supporting a Marxist framework for social change. As Ada F Haynes writes in *Poverty in Central Appalachia: Underdevelopment and Exploitation*,

I believe a Marxist analysis is the best approach for explaining poverty in the Central Appalachian region for the following reasons: (1) it is not based upon

\(^{34}\) See for example: John Boorman, "Deliverance," (USA: Warner Home Video, 1972).
an ahistorical concept of ethnicity; (2) it clearly demonstrates the relationship between the poverty of the region and the rate of exploitation of the working class; (3) it is capable of dealing with the diversity of the region; (4) it is substantiated by empirical findings; and (5) it addresses the question of how capital accumulation can fail to lead to development.

A Neo-Marxist theory is especially suited for explaining Appalachian poverty because it readily explains situations that modernization theory finds paradoxical. For example, Appalachians, as an ethnic group, are unusual in that they consist of white, protestant Americans, most of whom have lived in the United States for well over a hundred years. No one has been able to definitively trace Appalachian ethnicity to common ancestors. This has provided many difficulties for traditional theories of ethnicity which search common origins. By focusing on relations of production rather than Appalachian ethnicity, neo-Marxist theory eliminates the search for Appalachian “origins.”

Haynes’ critique is valuable in that she highlights how the history of Appalachia has been falsely homogenized, and argues that this false racially pure regional identity was constructed because of modernization theorists’ need for a common ancestry. As she writes, “In order to promote a culture of poverty theory for a region, one must first locate a distinctive ethnic group. In a modernization framework, ethnicity is equated with common origins. Thus, scholars have attempted to trace the lineage of Appalachians to some common ancestral group (e.g. Scotch-Irish).” And so, in arguing against the constructed socio-spatial homogeneity of the region and the inherently flawed definition of “Appalachian Ethnicity,” Haynes promotes a neo-Marxist framework that instead primarily focuses primarily on the “relations of production.”

But in attempting to eliminate “the search for Appalachian “origins,” Haynes’ “empirical” approach cannot hold the significance of the “hillbilly” stereotype. That

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35 Haynes, Poverty in Central Appalachia: Underdevelopment and Exploitation, 41.
36 Ibid., 14.
is to say, while Haynes’ logic is useful for understanding that not all people in Appalachia are white, and that not all white people in Appalachia share a common ancestry, this does not mean that white people in Appalachia cannot be collectively *raced*. Because when one is *raced* in U.S. society it is most often not because of their particular ethnicity, but how they are placed within the racial hierarchy of the U.S. racial state as defined by pervasive societal stereotypes built upon skin color, language, accent, dress, behavioral norms, etc. In such terms I argue that the constructed, racialized “hillbilly” identity is *essential* in upholding the inherently exploitative capitalist relations of production in Appalachia. As Eudell outlines, just as the title “black middle-class” demonstrates how the generic black subject cannot be middle-class, the title “poor white” “implies that the generic white subject cannot be poor.”37 Thus conversely, the generic poor subject cannot be white. I argue that white poverty in Appalachia does not prove that poverty is “colorblind,” but rather that the long list of racial slurs targeted at poor white Appalachian Americans proves that poverty “colors.”

*Funding Poverty*

The dual ideological project that defined the racially coded, exclusively white “culture of poverty” as the problem of Appalachia, and promoted modernization by elites as the solution, was the determining logic by which the federal government allocated funds to the region during the War on Poverty. And as Katz writes, “In part, the War on Poverty seemed to its planners to require a separate federal agency

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37 Eudell, "After the Humanities? Or after the *Episteme*? Toward "a Humanism Made to the Measure of the World" 15.
because its projected budget was so low…. Although it was not clear what the
dimensions of the program would be, the sum of available money was so small that
his advisors realized, according to Capron “if you threw this into the existing
bureaucracy…. It was political suicide… it would be clear to everyone that it was
nothing, that it was just window dressing.” In such way, locating the OEO as an
independent government agency made the project at once structurally peripheral to
the federal budget and hyper-visible to the public.

Under the initial leadership of R. Sargent Shriver, the OEO became most well
known for creating programs such as VISTA, Job Corps, Head Start and the
Community Action Program. But, as Katz describes, Shriver had so little faith in the
ability of existing federal agencies to support effective anti-poverty programs that he
constructed many of his programs in isolation of other government departments. As
Katz writes,

He so distrusted the Department of Labor that he insisted Job Corps be run
from within the Office of Economic Opportunity…. By repeating the pattern
with every major OEO initiative, Shriver surrendered the possibility of
reforming departments and programs within the federal government…. Manpower programs, for instance, operated outside the Department of Labor;
Headstart never confronted “the educational system head-on.” Therefore,
OEO never accomplished any basic reform in the federal system.

By essentially working outside the system within it, Shriver’s OEO gave the Johnson
administration a place to publicize federal efforts to “eliminate poverty,” enabling the
militaristic rhetoric of “War,” while allocating only a fraction of the federal social

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38 Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*. 88.
39 Ibid., 89.
welfare budget to the cause and making no commitment to any alternative model advocating for the structural redistribution of wealth.\textsuperscript{40}

As Johnson said in defense of his titling the effort a “War,” “The military image carried with it connotations of victories and defeats that could prove misleading. But I wanted to rally the nation, to sound a call to arms which would stir people in the government, in private industry, and on the campuses to lend their talent to a massive effort to eliminate this evil.” As Katz writes, such rhetoric successfully “placed the administration in a moral position that opponent attacked only at great risk.”\textsuperscript{41}

And “stir the people” it did, yet often towards efforts structured for failure and paternalism. As Katz summarizes, of all of the contradictions of the War on Poverty, perhaps the greatest tragedy was the “translation of a structural analysis of poverty into a service-based strategy.” And such a translation is entirely dependant on the “culture of poverty” model. As Haynes outlines the logic, if “the cause of poverty is deviant or pathological behavior, the way to alleviate poverty is to change the behavior of the poor.”\textsuperscript{42} Thus, as Katz writes, “In the tradition of American liberalism, early poverty warriors defined reform as education, not redistribution, and focused their slim resources on the individual rehabilitation of poor people.”\textsuperscript{43} Caudill echoes Katz’s critique, in his description of the arrival of the first generation of poverty warriors to eastern Kentucky,

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 88-90.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{43} Katz, \textit{The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare}, 83.
Perhaps the strangest part of the great rediscovery of Appalachia lay in VISTA, a weird offshoot of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty…. It was patterned after the Peace Corps and was called Volunteers in Service to America – VISTA. It was based on the premise that men and women could go into areas where deprivation was acute and help the inhabitants rise up and cast off the shackles of want.

This was surely one of the most ill-conceived ventures ever launched by the United States government…. There was immense enthusiasm in the agency, but practically no realization of the difficulties their volunteers were being asked to confront.44

Caudill describes how the VISTA program allowed only for the individual rehabilitation of poor people by the individual actions of VISTA volunteers, creating the inherently flawed logic of the program that ultimately necessitated its preliminary demise in the “foremost battleground” of eastern Kentucky. As he writes, “To “oppose poverty” is an instruction that is maddeningly vague, and in the case of the VISTA workers everything was left to the individuals.” Yet among the first thing the VISTA volunteers learned was the fact that, “Each County was ruled by a czar into whose hands power had been devolving for a quarter of a century and who called the governor, the congressmen and the United States senators his friends.”45 This political reality was made all the more clear towards the end of the decade. As Appalachian residents, scholars and activists schooled VISTA volunteers in the entrenchment of regional power structures and corporate, absentee land ownership, causing some volunteers to step outside the clearly demarcated lines of individual, localized reform, “The national administration leaned swiftly and well that it could not send agents to the boondocks to incite unrest and reform without destroying itself.” And as VISTA volunteers became increasingly radicalized to agitate for

44 Caudill, The Watches of the Night, 25.
45 Ibid., 27.
greater changes, political elites realized their mistake and “by the end of 1967 VISTA was for all practical purposes a dead letter in eastern Kentucky.”46

The Appalachian Volunteers, or AVs, were another short lived federally funded organizing force in the region during the decade, organized by students at Berea College in central Kentucky. Yet after publishing a series of brochures that outlined the consolidation of power and land ownership in the region, naming the short list of corporate giants that controlled the overwhelming majority of the region’s natural resources as “Appalachia’s forty thieves,” the AVs were promptly interrogated by the Kentucky Un-American Activities Committee and accused of being Communists. Although no Communist ties were found, all state and federal funding was soon thereafter withdrawn from the project. By the end of the decade, while many volunteers stayed and remained involved in regional organizing efforts, they received no more federal stipends for their work.47

The War on Poverty quietly collapsed in 1972, and President Nixon officially dismantled the OEO in 1974. Yet as the federal government’s public opposition to poverty evaporated, the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC, which became the ARC), another outgrowth of the “War,” remained strong, and continues to this day. Formed by Kennedy in 1963, the commission was set up as a federal-state joint committee to create a “comprehensive program for the economic development of the Appalachian Region.”48 As Ellers outlines the intellectual foundations of the ARC, “Whereas the framers of the War on Poverty utilized

46 Ibid., 39. The program was later drastically re-structured and re-instituted in 1974.
47 Ibid., 41-2.
behavioral theory to design a strategy for assimilating mountain culture into mainstream culture, the ARC tapped the ideas of the economists and planners to bring the region’s lagging economy into line with national markets and expanding consumer services." Just as the “Culture of Poverty” model defined the terms of social aid within a monolithic white middle-class value system, the ARC determined the direction of funding for economic development within the terms of an increasingly technologically advanced market economy.

One of the chief objectives of the ARC was the development of a regional transportation network designed to connect Appalachian citizens to large population centers, in order to facilitate the urbanization of Appalachia through the ARC’s “growth center strategy.” As John Sweeney, the first executive director of the ARC, explained, the principle plan was to “concentrate all of the [ARC] spending for economic development in places where the potential for growth is greatest… ignore the pockets of poverty and unemployment scattered in inaccessible hollows all over the area… and build a network of roads so that the poor and unemployed can get out of their inaccessible hollows and commute to new jobs in or near the cities.” Thus the majority of federal funds granted to the region via the ARC were directed towards road building infrastructure projects.

Notably, throughout the nationwide War on Poverty, the support for transportation networks was more intense in Appalachia than anywhere else in the country. As Ellers writes, “Not only was Appalachia on the forefront lines for the EOA, but it was also the only American region to receive a special program from

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49 Eller, Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945, 178.
50 Ibid., 181.
infrastructure development.” And conveniently, the improved regional highway system built to help the rural poor commute from their “inaccessible hollows” to nearby cities was also hugely beneficial to the national mining corporations extracting coal from these same hollows, making it possible for them to export the region’s mineral wealth out of the poorest “pockets of poverty” even more rapidly. Thus rather than challenging the coal industry’s exploitation of the region, the ARC’s “growth center strategy” facilitated its continuation, expediting the very processes that made the region poor.

And in restricting the terms of economic development, they also defined its participants. As Williams writes, “Congress passed the Appalachian Regional Development Act in 1965 and the Appalachian Regional Commission was created. This opened the floodgates for almost a billion dollars in aid to the region – not a penny of which was earmarked for the black Appalachian; he did not exist.”

_Fighting Back in Appalachia_

Yet this socio-political history tells only a part of the story, and it should not be thought that no positive changes occurred in the region as an outcome of the war on poverty. Rather, in response to the contradictory logic of the “War,” as well as the increasingly pervasive environmentally destructive process of strip-mining throughout the region, largely due to the combined factors of more advanced mining

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51 Ibid., 88.
52 Turner and Cabbell, eds., _Blacks in Appalachia_, 203.
technology and the national energy crisis of the early 1970s, the 1960s and 1970s were a time of widespread organizing and activism in Appalachia, by residents from across the regions’ political and economic spectrums. During these revolutionary years, Appalachian citizens created new strategies and scholarship to oppose the processes of cultural domination, economic exploitation and environmental destruction.

Just as the Moynihan Report came under rapid fire from Civil Rights leaders throughout the nation, Appalachian activists and intellectuals built their own powerful counter-analyses to Weller and the school of thought promoting the “culture of poverty” model in Appalachia. During the 1960s, a new model emerged that located Appalachia as an internal colony existing within the borders of the mother country. First mentioned in Caudill’s Night Comes to the Cumberlands in 1962, by the middle of the decade the theory of internal colonialism was articulated throughout the region, most notably by the group of activists and intellectuals that established the Peoples’ Appalachian Research Collective (PARC), founded in opposition to the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission. The PARC started a journal, Peoples’ Appalachia, intended to “keep up a barrage of anti-ARC criticism and to provide alternative visions for redevelopment,” to counter the dominant narratives of failure and progress that became institutionalized during the war on poverty. The PARC adamantly opposed the ARC’s “emphasis on road building and its avoidance of the social issues laid bare by the War on Poverty.”

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In 1972, PARC founding members Helen Matthews Lewis, Sue Easterling Kobak and Linda Johnson presented the cornerstone text for the theory of internal colonization, “Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia, or Bury My Rifle at Big Stone Gap,” to the American Anthropological Association. In 1978, this essay was republished as the title essay in Colonialism in Modern America: An Appalachian Case, an anthology of essays by Appalachian scholars supporting the model. This critical, visionary anthology has since gone out-of-print. Lewis was the lead author of the title essay, and at the time was working as a staff member at the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee, a location famous for its radical labor and Civil Rights Movement organizing. Lewis modeled her theory of internal colonialism in Appalachia on Robert Blauner’s seminal text Racial Oppression in America, in which Blauner outlines his theory of the internal colonization of black Americans.

Lewis’ detailed analysis describes both the process of colonization in the region, and the patterns of resistance against the imposed systems of domination. Lewis outlines the process in four stages, providing an extensive examination of each.

The stages are defined as,

1. Gaining entry: invasion and securing of the area or resources
2. Establishing of control: removal of opposition and resistance to prevent expulsion of invaders
3. Education and conversion of the natives: change the values and social system of the colonized
4. Maintenance of control: political and social domination

55 Lewis, Johnson, and Askins, eds., Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case.
56 Blauner, Racial Oppression in America.
57 Lewis, Kobak, and Johnson, "Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia, or, Bury My Rifle at Big Stone Gap," 117.
In the second part of the essay titled, “The Church and Family Resists,” Lewis demonstrates how the organizing structures of family and religion protected individuals from degradation by the colonizers, and maintained an alternative value system that promoted “equality, non-competitiveness, and family-neighborhood solidarity.” Furthermore, Lewis suggests that these spaces of resistance must be central in the building of a regional movement. As Lewis writes, “These positive and viable aspects of the expressive church and the solitary family may be powerful allies in and the basis for a revitalization movement in Appalachia.”

Lewis’ essay became the key text for Appalachian activists and scholars expressing the need for an anti-colonial movement and the radical restructuring of U.S. society, and Lewis was not alone in her understanding of Appalachian culture as a necessary foundation for regional activism. Indeed this perspective was central to the core philosophy of the Appalachian Studies Association (ASA), created in 1977-78, by a group of scholars that fought to establish the discipline of Appalachian Studies in colleges throughout the region. This coalition published a remarkable body of work that documented and assisted Appalachia’s political struggles. Yet such a movement did not unfold without intense opposition directed at those involved. As historian John Williams describes, “Helen Lewis brought her new Ph.D. to East Tennessee State University (ETSU), only to be fired after one year for “nurturing radical students.” Despite this setback, Lewis went on to teach at new Appalachian studies programs throughout the region.

58 Ibid., 136.
59 Williams, Appalachia: A History, 363.
This intellectual movement was deeply connected to the artistic and literary traditions of Appalachia, and supported local efforts for positive cultural, multiracial representations of Appalachia. Appalshop, a multi-media arts and education center in Whitesburg, Kentucky, became an important regional hub that cultivated the intersection of arts and activism. Founded in 1969 as an economic development initiative of the War on Poverty, the history of Appalshop demonstrates how local residents took advantage of OEO funding to create lasting community-based projects. The program began as one of several OEO Community Film Workshops nationwide designed to train young people for jobs in the film and television industry. Yet because there was no established media industry in Appalachia at the time, rather than leaving the region to find industry jobs in the city, many of the teenagers involved decided to stay in eastern Kentucky, and founded their own documentary film collective. The collective changed its name to Appalshop and became a non-profit organization in the early 1970s, and continues its work today through its core philosophy of using the arts to “support communities’ efforts to achieve justice and equality and to solve their own problems in their own ways.”

This intellectual and cultural work supported, and was supported by, a massive land ownership study completed by the Appalachian Landownership Task Force, a coalition of approximately one hundred Appalachian activists and academics. Organized at the first ASA conference in 1977, the research was completed in 1980-81 in eighty counties throughout the mountainous regions of Alabama, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. The project was funded by

the ARC, and its upon completion, a 1,800-page report was delivered to the commission. The research revealed staggering rates of corporate ownership in coal producing counties, and documented precisely what many residents had known and been fighting for decades. As the document reads,

The largest, and most likely to be absentee, of Appalachia’s non-government owners are corporations. Altogether, corporations own 5,142,995 acres of the land surveyed, amounting to 20% of the landmass in the eighty counties. The corporate land is held by some 3,100 companies, with a relatively large average holding of 1,660 acres each. Of these 3,100 companies, the top 46 own 56% of all the corporate land in the sample. In 24 of the 80 counties, corporately owned land accounted for more the 50% of the surface acres surveyed.

Furthermore, the study carefully outlines the connection between corporate and absentee land ownership. As the report reads,

While much of Appalachia’s land and mineral wealth is thus corporately owned, little of it is held by local businesses. Of the just over five million corporate acres in the survey, 84% are absentee owned; 60% by out-of-state owners. For the mineral wealth of Appalachia, the relationship between corporatism and absenteeism increases. Of the 4.8 million acres of corporately owned mineral acres in the survey 89% are absentee owned; 62% by out-of-state corporations. These absentee owners are also likely to be the larger of Appalachia’s owners. Overall 46 of the top 50 owners in the survey are corporations – only two of them have their head office in the county in which their major holdings are found. While the average plot of land held by locally owned corporations is only 75 acres, it is 1,400 acres for the out-of-county corporations and 2,670 acres for the out-of-state corporations.

As the participants summarized their findings, “In general the study found ownership of land and minerals in rural Appalachia to be highly concentrated among a few absentee and corporate owners, resulting in little land being actually available or

62 Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, "Land Ownership Patterns and Their Impacts on Appalachian Communities: A Survey of 80 Counties," (Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, Highlander Research and Education Center, New Market, TN, 1981), 36.
63 Ibid.
Based on their findings the task force located corporate absentee land ownership as the root cause for all of the region’s problems:

The ownership patterns themselves tell only part of the story. The dominant ownership patterns are significant factors affecting community and economic development. These ownership patterns are a crucial and underlying element in explaining patterns of land use, inadequate local tax revenues and services, lack of economic development, loss of agricultural lands, lack of sufficient housing, and the development of energy.

Thus the members of the task force articulated their objective unequivocally: working towards meaningful positive change in Appalachia required challenging monopolized land ownership. The task force outlined a list of strategic recommendations to the ARC from “the premise that any policy action must be based upon broad public awareness of land ownership issues and must include broad citizen participation in making of decisions about land use.” As the authors wrote, “For too long the U.S. government has been an advocate of land reform in Third World countries, while ignoring the urgent need for land reform in the rural areas of this country. It is past time for public discussion of land reform options in Appalachia.”

Tragically, the political climate of the early 1980s proved fatal for the findings. With the new Reagan administration settling into the White House, the ARC had neither the intention nor the capacity to follow through with the study. As Ellers explains, “Determined to cut federal budgets and eliminate regional commissions, the new Republican president failed to include the ARC in his executive budget requests, and agency leaders abandoned the politically sensitive

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64 Ibid., 210.
65 Ibid., 211.
66 Ibid., 212.
study to rally for their own organization’s survival. With its very existence in jeopardy, the ARC ignored the recommendations of the 1,800-page report.”\textsuperscript{67} Thus despite the many triumphs of the intellectual, cultural and economic movement of Appalachian activists in the 1960s-70s, their greatest goal of all – to break down the system of monopolized absentee land ownership – was unattained. Consequently, the colonial structure of massive mineral extraction with minimal local ownership or local returns was left intact, and the corporate ownership of Central Appalachia remains true today.

\textit{The “Post-Coal” Crisis of Appalachia}

While the ARC’s rejection of the recommendations from the Appalachian Landownership Task Force demonstrates how regional processes of exploitation have remained constant despite widespread, organized opposition, the early 1980s also signaled the beginning of new changes in the Appalachian economy. The combined forces of a new wave of mechanization in the mining industry, the increased internationalization of U.S. factories in the global market, and the rapid decline of domestic social services all hit Central Appalachia at once, causing a severe recession in the mountains in the 1980s. New longwall mining equipment diminished the demand for miners in underground operations, and new mountaintop removal mining techniques diminished the demand for miners on aboveground operations. And as Eller details, “In 1981 and 1982 alone, the Appalachian region lost two and a half

\textsuperscript{67} Eller, \textit{Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945}, 200.
manufacturing jobs for every one it had gained in the 1970s.” As Eller summarizes the 1980s Appalachian recession,

The downturn in the Appalachian economy represented more than just another bust in the long boom-and-bust cycle that had shaped the history of the region for more than a century. The new unemployment was structural, and jobs in coal mining, primary metals, textiles, and other industries would never return. Appalachia was caught in the middle of a larger transformation in the national economy. The old Appalachian economy was based on extractive resources and mature industry, but the postindustrial revolution pushed low-wage manufacturing jobs to Asia and Latin America while coal production shifted to lower-cost mines in the American West.

These overlapping trends have continued to this day, and can be traced clearly in the dramatic decline of regional mining jobs. Between 1979-2006, the number of people working in the mining industry in Kentucky decreased over 60%, from 47,190 workers down to 17,959. Such a drastic reduction in the demand for labor in the mines all but destroyed the historical strength of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), at one time the most powerful mining union in the region. Today there are no more union mines in eastern Kentucky. And in addition to providing drastically fewer jobs, thus undermining mineworkers’ ability to lobby for fair contracts and safe working conditions, this new technology has enabled the industry to pursue extremely environmentally destructive and irreversible mining practices.

As Tom Butler and George Wuerthner describe the practice of Mountaintop removal mining in *Plundering Appalachia: The Tragedy of Mountaintop-Removal Coal Mining*,

68 Ibid., 212.
69 Ibid.
Mountaintop removal is strip mining on steroids – a radically destructive form of surface mining whereby coal companies bulldoze the forest, decapitate the peaks with explosives, shove the shattered rubble into adjacent valleys, and destroy the headwater streams that are the ecologically crucial lifeblood of Appalachia’s watersheds. This devastating assault of Appalachia is being waged by a handful of corporations intent on maximum profit at the expense of the region’s land and people. Their actions are laying waste to the oldest mountains in North America, a sinuous landscape cloaked in forest that is among the most biologically diverse on earth.71

Because of the incredible pervasiveness of this practice throughout the states of eastern Kentucky, West Virginia and southwestern Virginia, Butler and Wuerthner, and many others beside them, describe Appalachia as “a national sacrifice zone.” Yet while the practice has been performed on large scale in the industry since the 1990s, the first comprehensive scientific study on mountaintop removal coalmining sites and their adjacent valley fills was only just released, published in Science Magazine in January of 2010. And as the report summarizes the scientific studies on MTM/VF:

Mine-related contaminants persist in streams well below valley fills, forests are destroyed, headwater systems are lost, and biodiversity is reduced; all of these demonstrate that MTM/VF causes significant environmental damage despite regulatory requirements to minimize impacts. Current mitigation strategies are meant to compensate for lost stream habitat and functions but do not; water-quality degradation caused by mining activities is neither prevented nor corrected during reclamation or mitigation.

Clearly, current attempts to regulate MTM/VF practices are inadequate. Mining permits are being issued despite the preponderance of scientific evidence that impacts are pervasive and irreversible and that mitigation cannot compensate for losses.72

Such unavoidable statistics and scientific reports have increasingly forced residents from across the region’s political spectrum to grapple with the reality that coal will no

longer be the center of the Appalachian economy, causing many to refer to the present moment as the “post-coal crisis” of Appalachia.

Yet as the crisis of the region becomes even more acute, it has also become more polarized. Confronted with disappearing jobs and disappearing mountains, the local struggles for living-wage employment and environmental protection are often framed in opposition, and often by the industry itself. While on one end of the spectrum many environmental activists call for an end to all destructive forms of surface mining, on the other end industry supporters call for the approval of all mining permits in order to keep local jobs. And while many regional activists struggle to find ways to fight for both jobs and the environment at the same time, they often find themselves drowned out by a massive industry media campaign designed to undermine and silence alternative models for positive regional economic development. In response to growing local and national opposition to mountaintop removal coalmining (alternatively referred to as “mountaintop mining” (MTM) by industry supporters), major regional coal corporations have recently begun a highly visible “friends of coal” campaign, vigorously positioning themselves as pro-worker, and by extension necessarily pro-mountaintop removal coalmining.

Thus Central Appalachia today is a region in crisis and a region divided. And beginning in the 1980s, one of the major ongoing initiatives for new economic development, strongly backed by the coal industry as a way to demonstrate how surface and mountaintop removal mined land can benefit the region by providing flat land for new industries, has been to build more prisons in the coalfields.
While the 1980s signaled the beginning of the federal government’s radical shift away from the social programs of Johnson’s Great Society, and the War on Poverty assumed its place in the forgotten annals of U.S. history, Appalachia faded from the national spotlight as the Reagan administration quickly declared a new domestic war to the nation: the War on Drugs. Elected to the White House on the racially coded platform of “law and order” and “tough on crime” politics, Reagan’s presidency shifted the national media gaze away from Appalachia’s poor “inaccessible hollows” and onto urban America’s inner-city ghettos, and thus began what has since become the most massive incarceration and prison-building project in the history of the world.

Reagan officially declared his new War on Drugs in October 1982. Yet as Michelle Alexander summarizes, “At the time he declared this new war, less than 2 percent of the American public viewed drugs as the most important issue facing the nation. This fact was no deterrent to Reagan, for the drug war from the outset had little to do with public concern about drugs and much to do with public concern about race. By waging a war on drug users and dealers, Reagan made good on his promise to crack down on the racially defined “others” – the undeserving.” Rather than funding drug rehabilitation programs, federal funding for treatment and prevention was drastically reduced, while federal funding for law enforcement and prison expansion increased exponentially. For instance, between 1980-1984 alone, FBI

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antidrug funding escalated from $8 million to $95 million, while federal antidrug funding for the Department of Education decreased from $14 million to $3 million.\textsuperscript{74}

And so, at a moment when both urban and rural, black and white working-class communities were reeling from the effects of deindustrialization, mechanization, and globalization, the era of U.S. prison expansion began, gaining rapid momentum from a massive media campaign fueled by many of the very same major media outlets that just two decades earlier had broadcast the Appalachian “problem” to the nation. As Alexander recounts,

In June 1986, \textit{Newsweek} declared crack to be the biggest story since Vietnam/Watergate, and in August of that year, \textit{Time} magazine termed crack “the issue of the year.” Thousands of stories about the crack crisis flooded the airwaves and newsstands, and the stories had a clear racial subtext. The articles typically featured black “crack whores,” “crack babies,” and “gangbangers,” reinforcing already prevalent racial stereotypes of black women as irresponsible, selfish “welfare queens,” and black men as “predators” – part of an inferior and criminal subculture.\textsuperscript{75}

In such terms, while many of the media networks involved were the same in these two domestic wars, the narratives crafted were quite different. This new media campaign was equally paternalistic yet far less sympathetic, being both explicitly anti-welfare and anti-black, and deftly translated the “subculture of poverty” model into that of a racialized “criminal subculture,” effectively criminalizing entire black inner city geographies. Thus while deeply contradictory social and economic aid was determined as the solution for the white poor of Appalachia during the liberal administration of the 1960s, incarceration quickly became the solution for the black poor of urban America during the conservative backlash of the 1980s. Such a

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 51.
narrative enabled the enactment of racialized drug laws and enforcement practices that targeted inner city communities of color, leading to astronomical rates of incarceration and extreme racial disparities within prison walls.

In the late 1960s there were close to two hundred thousand people in prison.\footnote{Angela Y. Davis, \textit{Are Prisons Obsolete}? (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 11.} In the past half-century this number has increased to the 2.4 million people that are presently behind bars today.\footnote{"Bureau of Justice Statistics," Office of Justice Programs, http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/.} In the mid-1950s, black Americans made up approximately 30 percent of the total state and federal prison population, a statistic that was already over double the percentage of black Americans in the national population.\footnote{Marc Mauer, \textit{Race to Incarcerate} (New York: The New Press, 2007), 121.} Today the statistic hovers at 50 percent. As Loic Wacquant summarizes, “Indeed, in four short decades, the ethnic composition of the U.S. inmate population has reversed, turning over from 70 percent white at mid-century to nearly 70 percent black and Latino today, although ethnic patterns of criminal activity have not fundamentally changed during that period.”\footnote{Loic Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," \textit{Punishment \\& Society: The International Journal of Penology} 3(2001).} And as Marc Mauer states, “at the close of the twentieth century, race, crime, and the criminal justice system are inextricably linked…. Half of all prison inmates are now African American, and another 17 percent are Hispanic – percentages far out of proportion to their numbers in the general population.”\footnote{Mauer, \textit{Race to Incarcerate}, 119.} The majority of people incarcerated in the United States today are people of color, from urban communities.

At the same time, there has been a dramatic shift in \textit{where} new prisons are being built. According to the work of demographer Calvin L. Beale, “nonmetro
counties continue to acquire prisons at a rate dramatically out of proportion to the percentage of the Nation’s population that lives in such areas.” As Beale outlines, between 1980-91, 213 prisons opened in nonmetro counties. These new prison beds “held 53 percent of all prisoners confined in new facilities nationwide. By contrast, only 38 percent of inmates in older facilities were located in nonmetro places, and only 23 percent of the total U.S. population lived in nonmetro places.” Thus the very decade in which the War on Drugs targeted urban communities of color, sending record numbers of people of color to prison, the majority of new prison construction shifted from urban to rural geographies.  

This trend continued through the 1990s. According to the Population Reference Bureau, during this decade over half of all new prisons opened in nonmetro counties. By 1993, Beale reported that, “new nonmetro prisons amounted to 60 percent of the total, even though nonmetro areas now have only 20 percent of the U.S. population.” Beale noted that the percentage of new rural prisons would be much higher except that “more than 90 counties were transferred to metro status after 1990.” Furthermore, Beale observed that between 1990-1999, approximately one third of all rural prison construction nation-wide occurred in four of the most economically depressed regions in the country: the West Texas Plains, the Mississippi Delta, South Central Georgia, and the coalfield region of Appalachia.  

Beale’s article ended with the final resignation that “as long as the symbiosis continues between

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widespread need for additional jobs in rural locales and compelling State and Federal need to find places to put more prisons, the growth of a nonmetro penal economy should persist.”

In part this severe need in rural America was fueled by the fact that, throughout the 1980s, the federal push for new prison beds was coupled with a drastic decline in social services and government programs nationwide. As Guinier and Torres outline, stemming from the Reagan administration, “Tough on Crime policies shifted resources dramatically: between 1980 and 1993 federal spending on employment and training programs was cut nearly in half, while corrections spending increased by 521 percent.” And just as prison expansion continued through the 1990s into the new millennium, so too did the reallocation of federal funding from social welfare to mass incarceration. The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 (PRWORA) consolidated three federal-state welfare matching programs into one program titled Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and largely shifted oversight of welfare distribution from the federal to state and local level, with the highly publicized aim being to “end the dependency of needy families on government benefits.” The law required adult participants to work in exchange for benefits, imposed time limits on households receiving benefits, and made deep cuts in federal welfare expenditures by restricting eligibility for public assistance, the Food Stamps Program and Supplemental Security Income. And as Anne Bonds summarized in 2006, ten years after the passage of PRWORA,

84 Guinier and Torres, The Miner's Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy, 263.
“corrections expenditures are growing at a more rapid rate than all spending for Medicaid, higher education, and Aid to Families with Dependant Children.” 85

These structural changes in U.S. social policy are the foundation of a new state apparatus that, in the words of Loic Wacquant, is “a post-Keynesian state that replaces the social-welfare treatment of poverty by its penal management.” 86 Scholars Mike Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore also makes use of the Keynesian framework, suggesting that this new punishment paradigm is in part a reincarnation and extension of the past and present U.S. Military Industrial Complex. As Gilmore writes, it is a framework dependant on “the economic development and profit-generating potential that prisons promise, suggesting that military Keynesianism is giving way to, or complemented by, carceral Keynesianism.” 87 A growing body of literature charts the ways in which broad-scale national trends including the decline and devolution of social welfare, the criminalization of poverty, the War of Drugs, the emergence of “tough on crime” politics, and the hyper-surveillance of communities of color have all intersected with economic trends of globalization, privatization and market deregulation, in order to produce the largest prison system in the world, commonly referred to by many activists as the U.S. Prison Industrial Complex (PIC). As Anne Bonds summarizes, “This scholarship situates the increased enactment of hyperpunitive crime and welfare policy in relation to the restructuring of political and economic relationships under neoliberalism, broadly defined as a set of policies.

86 Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," 95.
practices, and sensibilities that promote market triumphalism and liberal individualism via the promotion of rational choice, unregulated markets, and unimpeded competition as well as the diminution of public welfare expenditures.”

And as Guinier and Torres articulate, the repercussions of national policies that criminalize poverty for profit unfold in different communities in very different ways. For instance, Guinier and Torres highlight the fact that of the 38 new prisons opened in New York State between 1982-2000, all were constructed in rural, majority-white, Republican senate districts. And while the Federal Bureau of Prisons claims that it has a policy of incarcerating people within 500 miles of their residency at the time of arrest, the loophole exists within the system where if all prisons within 500 miles of one’s home are full, then the BOP can send someone anywhere in the county. Thus by concentrating prison expansion in rural America, that has only 20% of the nation’s population, the government insures that it will repeatedly break its own policy. But this is fine, because this government policy is not in fact the law.

In 1976, Delbert Kaahanue Wakinekona was transferred from Hawaii State Prison to Folsom State Prison in California. Wakinekona challenged his out of state transfer as unconstitutional, leading to the 1981 Supreme Court case Wakinekona v. Olim M. In this case the courts upheld his out of state transfer, setting the legal

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89 Guinier and Torres, The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy, 265.
precedent for the distant relocation of incarcerated persons throughout the nation, with devastating repercussions. According to a recently released study by the Sentencing Project, in 2007 there were 1.7 million children in the U.S. with a parent in prison, 70% of whom were children of color. The same study reported that in 2004, 42.4% of parents in federal facilities were over 500 miles from their place of residence at arrest.  

Contemporary Rural Prison Scholarship

In the growing body of scholarship on U.S. mass incarceration, critical analysis of the effects of prison growth on rural America lags far behind that of scholarship focused on the repercussions of mass incarceration on urban America. As stated in a report published by the Justice Policy Center in Washington D.C. in 2004, “the prison construction boom has received relatively little attention. It is remarkable that a public undertaking as far-reaching as American prison expansion, which affects millions of incarcerated individuals, influences millions more family and community members, and consumes billions of public dollars, would receive so little empirical analysis and public scrutiny.”  

While the general lack of both rural and urban research displays the extent to which prison expansion continues to unfold beyond the gaze of the academic eye, since the Justice Policy Center made their

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statement in 2004, there has been a recent increase of scholarship on rural prison expansion.

As federal and state allocations for the construction of new prisons soared throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it became widely accepted knowledge that building new prisons in struggling rural communities creates broad scale economic growth. Primarily aimed to counter this paradigm, there has been a recent outpouring of scholarship revealing how economic growth rarely occurs to the extent anticipated in most new prison-hosting rural communities, and furthermore in many cases even proves to have a negative economic impact on local economies. In 2004, researchers from Washington and The Ohio State University published the first comprehensive report *The Prison Industry: Carceral Expansion and Employment in U.S. Counties, 1969-1994*. As the abstract of the report begins,

*Objectives.* Despite the interest that social scientists have displayed in the rising rate of incarceration, little attention has been devoted to understanding its consequences for local areas. This is an important omission because prison construction has become a component of state and local economic development schemes. Indeed there is widespread belief that prison construction provides significant economic benefits to local areas. *Methods.* We analyze data on all existing and new prisons in the United States since 1960 and examine the impact of these prisons on the pace of growth (as measured by public, private, and total employment growth) in U.S. counties from 1969 to 1994. To our knowledge, our study is the first comprehensive and longitudinal assessment of the impact of prison construction on local areas. *Results.* We find no evidence that prison expansion has stimulated economic growth. In fact, we provide evidence that prison construction has impeded economic growth in rural counties that have been growing at a slow pace.

Following this initial report, there continues to be a growing body of scholarship supporting this economic analysis of rural prison expansion. In 2007, scholars Amy

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K. Glasmeier and Tracey Farrigan published the report *The Economic Impacts of The Prison Development Boom on Persistently Poor Rural Places*. As the authors write, “with one notable exception, no ex post empirical studies exist of the economic effects of prison construction on rural counties.” And as they conclude, “Analysis suggests a limited economic effect on rural places in general” and ultimately that “there is little evidence that prison impacts were significant enough to foster structural economic change.”

Such reports provide crucial and exhaustive evidence for how the present penal economy is failing even the rural communities where it is promoted as a solution to poverty. And as the first report states, it remains true that “little attention has been devoted to understanding its consequences for local areas. This is an important omission because prison construction has become a component of state and local economic development schemes.” Yet in highlighting the need to study prison expansion *because* of the extent to which it has become central in the economic restructuring of rural America, much of the contemporary scholarship examining the “consequences for local areas” remains grounded in a reactive counter-analysis limited to a site-specific economic framework.

Not only does most of this recent “empirical” scholarship ignore the profound racial, social, political and environmental impacts of rural prison expansion, but it also fails to locate the intersections of these realities as a basis for multi-sited opposition to both mass incarceration and rural poverty. As the 2004 report

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concludes, “Despite sharp ideological and intellectual difference, the critics and advocates of the prison construction boom share the assumption that prisons can contribute to local growth, especially in hard-pressed local areas. This belief flies in the face of mounting evidence that state and local initiatives rarely have a significant impact on growth; this belief is also contradicted by our analysis.” While this report importantly notes the general failure of local development within the neoliberal state, implicit in the analysis is that it promotes a solely economic critique of prison expansion, a value-free non-controversial approach that demands respect by of the very fact that it remains disconnected from the “sharp ideological and intellectual differences” regarding the prison development boom.

Furthermore, the authors of the 2004 report use their research to argue against the accuracy of the model of “carceral Keynesianism” promoted by many radical anti-prison scholars. As the report reads,

> Even critics of the incarceration surge believe that prisons spur growth – but they lament that these economic benefits add momentum to building many more prisons than needed. Davis uses the term “carceral Keynesianism” when explaining the active efforts of small towns in California to house prisons…. they use this to raise doubts about the motives of those calling for still more prisons.

Yet I believe that it is inaccurate to state that most critics of rural prison expansion depend on the false assumption “that prisons spur growth,” because “highlighting economic motives helps to delegitimize runaway prison construction,” and consequently that carceral Keynesianism is a flawed model. While it is certainly true

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96 Ibid.: 41.
that many activists and scholars use the prisons-as-profit paradigm to argue against expansion on moral grounds, I believe that this argument is not mutually exclusive with the reality that prisons often do not actually help depressed rural economies. And in fact, radical anti-prison activists and scholars are increasingly including an analysis of how prisons do not help rural economies in their counter-arguments. The importance of the model of carceral Keynesianism is not the actual economic growth that prisons bring to depressed rural economies, but the fact that they remain a primary mechanism through which rural economic growth is promoted. Although the model is failing even those it is ostensibly intended to benefit, it is still the model in place. And furthermore, the fact that prisons are not providing economic development in the poorest rural regions in the county does not mean that prison expansion is not profit-driven. Rather, it demands a more careful consideration of who is profiting.

Anne Bonds’ recent work on prison expansion in rural counties throughout the Northwestern states of Oregon, Idaho and Montana provides new insight on how rural prison expansion upholds local and national power structures dependant on extreme economic inequality. As Bonds locates her groundbreaking work, “While a small body of research in geography documents the expansion of the punishment industry in rural areas, the region of the American Northwest has been relatively neglected within prison research and in analyses of poverty.” And as Bonds writes, “I contend that scripts about poverty in the Northwest reinforce neoliberal initiatives by

constructing the poverty experienced by some groups as criminalized and individualized, rather than systemic or structural. This framing absolves town officials from providing support for the poor and legitimates community boosters’ pursuit of economic development policies that have re-entrenched social and spacial inequalities.” Such analysis points to how in many majority-white rural counties that host prisons the “subculture of poverty” remains a dominant force upholding social and economic inequalities outside of the prison’s walls, even while the “subculture of crime” justifies disproportionately incarcerating people of color within them.98

Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s seminal work on prison expansion in California also documents the mutually destructive social, racial and economic repercussions of prison expansion for both urban and rural geographies. Gilmore locates the decline in regional agriculture, the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, and the shift to low-wage jobs in the service sector of the economy as fundamental changes in rural California resulting in increasing “surpluses of finance capital, land, labour and state capacity,” that enabled the state’s expansive prison building initiative. As Gilmore writes, “In my view, the expansion of prison constitutes a geographical solution to socio-economic problems, politically organized by the state which is itself in the process of radical restructuring.”99

Following in the footsteps of Bonds and Gilmore’s multi-sited, historically grounded work on U.S. prison expansion, and combining this with the specific

regional history of Central Appalachia, this project proposes a new framework by which to understand the present moment of radical restructuring in Central Appalachia – one of the most concentrated regions of new prisons in the country, yet a geography that remains remarkably absent from the present academic discourse on prison expansion.

Neocolonialism as a Relocation Project

Building from the works of Loic Wacquant and Michelle Alexander, I locate the U.S. prison regime within the continuum of “peculiar institutions” in U.S. history designed to exploit, dehumanize and disenfranchise black Americans. As Wacquant writes in “Deadly Symbiosis: When ghetto and prison meet and mesh,”

This article places the prison in the historical sequence of ‘peculiar institutions’ that have shouldered the task of defining and confining African Americans, alongside slavery, the Jim Crow regime, and the ghetto. The recent upsurge in black incarceration results from the crisis of the ghetto as device for caste control and the correlative need for a substitute apparatus for the containment of lower-class African Americans.100

And as Michelle Alexander writes in The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,

What has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the language used to justify it. In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don’t. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color “criminals” and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind…. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less

100 Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," 95.
respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it. As both Wacquant and Alexander articulate, while the structures of caste control and the words used to describe them have changed throughout U.S. history, the underlying racial logic that upholds the institutional control and systematic exclusion of black Americans remains intact. In such terms I argue that it is not flawed institutions that cause the historically reoccurring unfreedom of black Americans, but the governing western epistemological order of *Humanness* that defines blackness as the location of ontological *Otherness*.

As intellectual historian Sylvia Wynter traces the present *episteme* to the 1492 event that marked the symbolic beginning of the era of European colonial expansion,

The millenarian dream of Columbus’s “one sheepfold and one flock” had been based on the limits of a *propter nos* that had nonconsciously represented its own culture-specific Judeo-Christian and European statal *nos*, as if it were the *nos* of humankind in general. Others could therefore only be the lack of the *nos*, infidels or idolators. As this True Self was secularized into the first secular model of being “Man,” these others were to be transformed into its lack, that is, into *natives* and, most absolutely in the nineteenth century, into the nonwhite *native* and its extreme form of *Otherness*, the nigger.

As European explorers encountered nonwestern civilizations, the age of European expansion shattered pre-15th century feudal conceptions of the earth’s geography as being divided between habitable “temperate” zones existing under God’s grace, and uninhabitable “torrid” zones existing outside the realm of Christian humanity, thus incapable of sustaining human life. As Wynter describes this pre-colonial Judeo-Christian paradigm, the world was understood in “binary opposition… inscribed in an

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ostensibly unbridgeable separation between the *habitable* areas of the earth (which were within the redemptive grace of the Scholastics’ God and His only “partial providence for mankind”), and the *uninhabitable* areas of the earth (which were outside his grace).” 103 Such a worldview reflected pre-15th century European geocentric cosmogony that dictated the absolute dichotomy between the celestial spheres of the heavenly universe, the abode of the Christian God, and earth, the abode of fallen man. Yet as Copernicus’ heliocentric theory heralded the age of European scientific discovery, challenging the feudal European belief system that had enabled the divine right of kings, a new binary unfolded on the heels of the scientific revolution: rational Man verses the native *Other*. In such terms, as European explorers “discovered” non-Christian lands inhabited by non-Christian peoples, people and place were collapsed into one location of Conceptual Otherness - *Les damnés de la terre*, Frantz Fanon’s wretched of the earth. 104

As Wynter describes, after such encounters, “there could be no longer *habitable* and *uninhabitable*, inside the sheepfold, or *out*. All was now one sheepfold, and if not, was intended to be *made so*. 105 Thus a critical component of the *episteme* that defined the ontological otherness of non-Christian bodies and geographies was the potential it allowed for their redemption within the terms of a western Judeo-Christian epistemological order of being *human*. And so the age of imperialism unfolded across the globe, converting *savages* and controlling nature, ostensibly performed in the best interest of all.

103 Ibid., 21.
In such terms the first “peculiar institution” of African slavery founded the nation, performing a far greater function than simply a system of caste control for economic gain. As Eudell describes the cultural legacy of slavery and colonialism in the United States,

In fact, Blacks had to be thought of as less than fully human in order for their labor to be exploited, just as the indigenous peoples of the Americas had to be represented as irrational beings (and also less than completely human) in order for their lands to be expropriated. The logic of this assertion implies that the end of slavery does not have to be defined only as the transition from slave labor to wage labor. It can also be described in terms that understand slavery as a system of social relations—indeed, as a cultural system.  

It is the metaphysical negation of black humanness that makes such institutions “peculiar,” regardless of their particular mechanisms of control. Thus building from Eudell’s model, I argue that the historical continuity of “peculiar institutions” in the United States of America demonstrates the continuity of a cultural system that defines humanness exclusively within the terms of a western Judeo-Christian epistemological order, as defined by Jack E. Weller’s “Upper-middle Class (Professional)” value system.

Nowhere is this logic more visible than in the prison system, in Central Appalachia. Just as blacks “had to be thought of as less than fully human in order for their labor to be exploited” in the institution of slavery, people imprisoned today (a population that black American men are seven times more likely than white American men to become a part of) have to be thought of as less than fully human to fill cells in

the institution of the prison. At the same time, as Weller’s chart exemplifies, Appalachians (“hillbillies,” “rednecks,” “poor white trash,”) have to be represented as having an entirely separate and irrational value system in order for their lands to be expropriated by coal corporations and then destroyed and abandoned by destructive mining practices, for their poverty to be pathologized, and for the region to become a dumping ground for the nation’s newest, most undesirable growth industry – the prison system – which is articulated as the only way for the region to re-enter the global market economy, from the bottom up. This is not to say that these positions of exploitation are the same. They are not. Rather, it is to say that they occupy different places within the spectrum of the present cultural system from which neoliberal narratives of progress are built; a complex spectrum that remains hierarchically stratified by assigned racial categories, and in which black Americans remain at the bottom.

Yet I also believe that the prison system in Appalachia demonstrates how this most recent “peculiar institution” is different from any that came before it, thus demanding a new framework for analysis. As Alexander writes, “mass incarceration is designed to warehouse a population deemed disposable – unnecessary to the functioning of the new global economy – while earlier systems of control were designed to exploit and control black labor.”107 And so Alexander points to the key divergence between past and present manifestations of U.S. “peculiar institutions.” Yet while this new system indeed defines black bodies as “disposable,” in understanding how prisons have become central in the economic restructuring of

America, I argue that these “disposable” bodies remain central to the functioning of the new global economy. Rather than exploiting black labor, I argue that this new “peculiar institution” relies on exploiting the physical presence of black bodies in prison cells, simultaneously requiring their physical presence and conceptual erasure.

Following this logic I argue that it would be most accurate to understand the present U.S. prison regime as the federal government’s latest relocation project of the Conceptual Other, necessary for the continued functioning of the governing epistemological order. As Wacquant traces the crisis of surplus labor and declining social services for black Americans both inside and outside of prison walls,

This carceral mesh has been solidified by two sets of concurrent and interrelated changes: on the one end, sweeping economic and political forces have reshaped the structure and function of the urban ‘Black Belt’ of mid-century to make the ghetto more like a prison. On the other end, the ‘inmate society’ that inhabited the penitentiary system of the US during the postwar decades has broken down in ways that make the prison more like a ghetto.\(^\text{108}\)

Building from Wacquant’s “Deadly Symbiosis,” I place it next to demographer Calvin L. Beale’s proven prediction that “as long as the symbiosis continues between widespread need for additional jobs in rural locales and compelling State and Federal need to find places to put more prisons, the growth of a nonmetro penal economy should persist.”\(^\text{109}\) In considering these two symbioses at the same time I propose a further symbiosis: that the metaphorical “black hole” of the urban ghetto/prison is being systematically relocated to rural majority-white “pockets of poverty,” effectively re-entrenching a new system of American Apartheid that becomes most

visible in the most invisible places, laying the foundation for *neocolonialism as a relocation project*. As Guinier and Torres quote the sobering statistics, “Indeed we now incarcerate a higher percentage of black men, by a factor of six, than did the Botha government of South Africa, which was deliberately and legally racist. During the height of apartheid, 729 out of every 100,000 black men in South Africa were in prison; thanks primarily to the war on drugs, 4,617 out of every 100,000 black men in the United States are incarcerated.”

In systematically mass incarcerating people of color hundreds, if not thousands, of miles from home, this relocation project consolidates and conceals crisis by depositing “disposable” bodies in “disposable” lands. While this process of geographic relocation occurs in private, state and federal facilities, I argue that it is a federal relocation project in part because, as demonstrated by the war on drugs and the supreme court’s ruling in *Wakinekona v. Olim M*, it is federal laws that define both mass incarceration and systematic relocation as *legal*.

While this new relocation project surely differs in many ways from the classical model of the U.S. federal government’s relocation of American Indians to reservations, one crucial difference is that it only relocates individuals as opposed to extended family, community and tribal networks. This separation from family and community further denies the humanity of those incarcerated. As expressed in a letter to Amelia Kirby, founder of the *Holler to the Hood* radio show, in one of hundreds of letters sent to the station reporting human rights violations within nearby prison walls, written by a man incarcerated at the Red Onion supermax security state prison in Wise County, Virginia,

Dear Ms. Kirby,

This is the second prison in southwestern VA that I’ve been in. The first was Keen Mt. I’ve been locked up seven years. I was 19 then, I’m 25 now…. I’m real far away from home. That fact has all but destroyed my ties with family and friends. My relationships with women, the same way. They can’t get up here to see me, too far they say, so the relationships die out. It costs too much to call, they don’t want to say it, but it’s a burden to them. More and more, I lose contact with the outside world. Like myself, most of us that are in this prison are black. Most of the guards are white. Only two are three are black, but that doesn’t make a difference they all treat us the same. Yet there is a feeling of racism here in these mountain prisons, its hard not to see it. I deal with it everyday. But I don’t know if it’s more prejudice that racism. Prejudice in the fact that we’re being treated like since we’re locked up, we’re not human. That we’re not supposed to have family, girlfriends, or people that care about us….111

With unavoidable clarity, this letter demonstrates how Robert Blauner’s theory of the internal colonization of black Americans has become an internal relocation project of an internally colonized people.

At the same time, I argue that the process of prison site selection displays the transition from Helen Lewis’ model of colonialism in Appalachia to that of neocolonialism. Lewis’ 1972 landmark essay is titled “Family, Religion and Colonialism in Central Appalachia, or Bury My Rifle at Big Stone Gap.” Big Stone Gap is the name of a valley that runs through Wise County, Virginia. The Red Onion supermax state prison opened in Wise County, in the valley of Big Stone Gap, in August 1998. Less than a year later, in April 2009, the Wallens Ridge supermax state prison also opened in Big Stone Gap. Together these two super maximum-security prisons presently incarcerate approximately two thousand people in the valley of Big Stone Gap – the very geography in which Helen Lewis lived, and thus located her...

111 Letter by Anonymous, to Amelia Kirby.
work, which was based upon Robert Blauner’s theories of internal colonization. And so we must consider what has happened in Wise County, Virginia since 1972.

The total rejection of the demands of the Appalachian Landownership Task Force, and the following decades of exponentially increased mineral extraction and further consolidation of landownership, demonstrate how the colonial structure of the massive, corporate, absentee ownership of Appalachia prevails today. Yet as the coal industry continues to decimate Appalachian land, extracting more coal in less time and with less labor, the crisis of surplus labor has become critical throughout the region, mirroring trends throughout rural America. Against such a backdrop, rural counties nationwide are being placed in competition with one another for scarce new industrial development. And new prisons have quickly become one of the more commonly offered options.

As scholar Jeanie Thies writes, “Today, it is not uncommon for announcements of plans to construct new prisons to set off intense bidding wars as economically troubled towns vie with one another to be chosen as the prison site.”¹¹² Such a reality displays how it is useful to understand rural prison expansion as a part of the greater trend of localized economic restructuring within the neoliberal framework that places struggling communities in competition with one another for undesirable industries. Yet while such a framework promotes prisons as “recession-proof industries” that will rehabilitate failing rural economies into the greater capitalist market “for a long time to come,” the very nature of the market-friendly selection process insures that the paradigm of prisons as rural poverty reform won’t work to end, or even minimize,

rural poverty. As Tracy Huling reports, “the competition for prison ‘development projects’ has become fierce and political. In order to be considered competitive in the bidding wars for public prisons, rural counties and small towns give up a lot to gain what they hope will be more: offering financial assistance and concessions such as donated land, upgraded sewer and water systems, housing subsidies, and, in the case of private prisons, property and other tax abatements.”113 Thus rather than challenging the colonial exploitation of Central Appalachia, this new “development project” has merely redesigned it.

As Kwame Nkrumah outlines the classical definition of neocolonialism,

In place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neocolonialism…. Neocolonialism, like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries…. The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of the less developed parts of the world. Investment under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and poor countries of the world.114

In many ways the neocolonial rule of Central Appalachia surely deviates from this classical model. Most obviously, Central Appalachia is not indebted to the IMF or the World Bank. Yet this definition is also strikingly applicable. Building from Nkrumah’s model, I argue that U.S. investment in rural prison expansion maintains a mutually destructive framework that upholds the massive consolidation of wealth and landownership in Appalachia, perpetuating and deepening patterns of structural unemployment, low pay and poor working conditions for those on the outside, while caging thousands of people within, often hundreds if not thousands of miles from

113 Huling, "Building a Prison Economy in Rural America," 2.
114 Kwame Nkrumah, Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism (USA: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1966).
home. It is thus a framework of internal neocolonialism that exports the social
conflict of “affluent America” to invisible internal geographies, and further increases
the gap between rich and poor geographies within the United States of America.

But in bringing together the arguments of internal neocolonialism, and the
internal relocation project of an internally colonized people, these overlapping models
describe a particularly bizarre, Orwellian unfolding of events, in that those living
under neocolonial rule in Appalachia are simultaneously being put in the position of
being the neocolonizer. Thus these two distinct positions of constructed marginality
are framed in absolute, hierarchical opposition. The Otter Creek Correctional Facility
in Wheelwright, Kentucky, demonstrates this reality.

Wheelwright is a company town, founded by the Elk Horn Coal Company in
1916. It is in Floyd County, the very county NBC film crews travelled to in 1964 to
“document” and exploit the region’s most extreme poverty. Elk Horn Coal has long
since left, leaving behind rows of identical company houses to mark what was once a
booming mountain metropolis. Of the 3,140 counties listed in the U.S. Bureau of the
Census, Floyd County is currently ranked as the 54th poorest. In 2000, 31.2% of the
population of the county was living below the poverty line, and the per capita income
for the city of Wheelwright was $5,367.115 Between 1980 and 2005, while mining

115 U.S. Bureau of the Census, Floyd County, Kentucky, Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights,
http://factfinder.census.gov/.
jobs decreased in the county by 82%, the amount of surface-mined land grew to over 20,000 acres.\textsuperscript{116}

In the mid-1990s, during these years of radical change in the mining industry, the Otter Creek Correctional Facility, a private prison owned by the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), was built in Wheelwright. The prison sits inside a cavity on the topside of a mountain just above downtown Wheelwright. The cavity used to be the entrance to an underground deep mine. After the mine shutdown the land was used as a garbage dump. After the garbage dump closed the prison was built. In the words of Kristi Kendall, a woman who was incarcerated in the Otter Creek prison for three years, “the men took out what they wanted and threw back what they didn’t.”\textsuperscript{117} And between 2005-2009, approximately one third of the women at the 650-bed facility were sent to the prison from Hawaii, because of a contract between the Corrections Corporation of America and the Department of Corrections in Hawaii.\textsuperscript{118}

As a part of the contract, the Hawaiian woman incarcerated at Otter Creek were permitted to celebrate Kamehameha day, a public holiday in the state of Hawaii that honors Kamehameha the Great, the monarch who first united the eight major islands to form the Kingdom of Hawaii. As Kendall described the event as she attended it,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{117} Kristi Kendall, in discussion with the author, August 1, 2009.
\textsuperscript{118} The Hawaiian women were sent home in the fall of 2009 because of numerous unresolved allegations of sexual abuse. “Hawaii/KY: 128 women from Hawaii now at CCA- Otter Creek will return to HI after guards accused of sexually assaulting 23 women including seven from Hawaii,” The Real Cost of Prisons Weblog, posted August 17, 2009, http://www.uslaw.com/law_blogs/The+Real+Cost+of+Prisons+Weblog.
\end{flushright}
Every year, I think it’s in June, they celebrate Kamehameha day, and as part of their contract the Hawaiian inmates are allowed to celebrate it in the prison. And they do. They spend months and months and months practicing dances, and they actually teach classes and let the Kentucky inmates come and learn the dances as well and be involved in their program…. And so we all went, and we’re sitting out on the ball field, sitting in neat orderly fashion in rows, and I happened to look up on top of the buildings, and they’re officers up there, in their SORT gear. SORT team is basically the emergency response team – they come in to do an institutional shake down, or if there’s a riot or something like that, there’s a special group of officers that are trained to deal with those things… They’re dressed in all black fatigues, in riot gear. So I look up there and there’s an officer, there’s a few up there, and there’s a guy roaming around with a gun. I found out later it was tear gas, or pepper spray…. It was just – they [the Hawaiians] were here for this beautiful celebration of their King, and here they [the officers] are with a gun.119

Thus Kendall describes a stunning picture of colonial power directed at native Hawaiians on top of a mined-out mountain in eastern Kentucky, in the year 2008.

SORT stands for the Special Operation Response Team, the team of correctional officers trained to deal with the most threatening and hostile situations within prison walls. And so, as an outward manifestation of the Hawaiian cultural system, the Kamehameha Day celebration was interpreted: as an inherently threatening and hostile event, in need of the most extreme form of policing.

Yet the officers on top of the buildings in SORT gear enforcing this system of violent colonial rule were making little over the minimum wage. Starting pay at Otter Creek is just $8.25 an hour.120 In Floyd County, the poverty level wage for one married adult, who has one child, is set at $7.81.121 Thus some of the officers at Otter

119 Kendall, discussion.
Creek were making less than $1 over the poverty level county wage for a family of three. Being private, the Otter Creek facility demands the lowest qualifications for employment, and thus pays some of the lowest correctional officer salaries in the state of Kentucky. In order to apply for a job at the facility there are two basic requirements: one must be eighteen years of age, and have a GED. Therefore the Otter Creek prison is known throughout the region as a place where the most inexperienced new guards often begin their careers – a career path most often chosen simply because it is the only one being presented. Due to the rapid decline in mining jobs in the county, the Otter Creek Correctional Facility is now the largest employer in the city of Wheelwright. As the logo painted on the wall in the lobby of the Otter Creek Correctional Facility summarizes the options in the state of Kentucky:

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122 Mike Dixon (head coordinator of the Criminal Justice Program at the Big Sandy Community and Technical College), in discussion with the author August 10, 2009.
123 Photograph by the author, July 2009.
The iconic coalminer’s helmet, pick and shovel, underneath the state of Kentucky, locked up from east to west. And so the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) defines the past, present and future of the state of Kentucky: prisons and coal.

With this historical and geographical perspective, I argue that the symbiosis of neocolonialism as a relocation project demands that the ideological project of both prisons and rural progress be re-examined within the same anti-colonial framework. Because in Central Appalachia, the narrative upholding the construction of new prisons is three-fold: prisons are built to “reform” individual “criminal deviants” into the greater social order, prisons are built to “rehabilitate” individual failing rural economies into the global capitalist market, and prisons are built to “reclaim” individual pieces of land destroyed by destructive surface and mountaintop removal coal mining. Yet all functions are articulated within the terms of David P. Weller’s 1960s chart, “Some Contrasting Value Orientations”: prisons are built as an unfortunate yet necessary means to mold both people and place into a singular definition of “success,” as defined by Weller’s “Upper-middle Class (Professional)” value system.

Yet in offering such individualized redemption, prisons are catastrophically failing thousands of citizens in the most need in both rural and urban geographies. Thus I believe that the paradigm of prison expansion reveals a fundamental paradox in the current model for the progress of Appalachia, and indeed, for the nation as a whole. The promotion of prisons as a solution to rural poverty is the latest event on the path towards Appalachian “success” that requires the region to urbanize, assuming that this is the best and only path towards progress. Yet in order to do so,
the model has become increasingly dependant on the very “peculiar institution” that depends on the structural crisis of urban America. *The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* has become *Prison Progress*…
Prison Progress...

An aerial shot of the U.S. Penitentiary — Big Sandy, which is roughly 16 months away from opening. The high-security federal prison will house 560 high-security inmates in the central part of the facility. A satellite camp on the outer perimeter will be occupied by 128 low-security inmates who will maintain the grounds. said BOP site activation coordinator Catherine Litchfield.

BOP officials project 152 ‘new hires’ at U.S. Penitentiary — Big Sandy

BY GARY BALL
DIRECTOR

BBY: — A formal ceremony at McDowell Regional Hospital is expected to be held at the Department of Justice’s Museum at Prisons, Monday evening at Shadok Lake High School.

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Announced yesterday, the appointment of high-security staff to the prison will take place in the central part of the institution. Each rank of the 152 new positions at the federal prison will be responsible for maintaining the grounds.

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Chapter Three  
Prison Progress in Eastern Kentucky

Approximately six years ago, at the dawn of the new millennium, a group of community leaders came together in the Letcher County seat of Whitesburg, Kentucky, in search of new ways to improve their community. Since 1980, the total population of the county had decreased by –20%, and the total number of mining jobs had decreased by –43.5%. The per capita income was $11,984, just over half the national average of $21,587, and 31.8% of the population was living below the poverty line, almost triple the national average of 12.4%. These community elites formed the Letcher County Planning Commission, a volunteer coalition that remains active today. The members of the commission are some of the richest and most powerful people in the county, including the CEOs of the two Whitesburg banks, the owner of the region’s largest petroleum-supply business, the head of the Whitesburg Hospital, the head of the county health clinic, and the superintendent of schools. Although it includes no elected officials, instead positioning itself as “a tool for the county government” it is supported by nearly all of them, including the Whitesburg Judge-Executive and Mayor. During their first meetings, the commission members established their core goals: to increase the number of good paying jobs in Letcher County, to improve the educational opportunities available, and to reduce outmigration by finding ways for young people to stay in the community. Their

principle plan towards achieving these ends continues to be that of working with federal and state officials to bring a new 1,400-bed federal prison to town. 126

The first major breakthrough for the project came in 2006, when Congressman Harold “Hal” Rogers (R-KY), secured $5 million in the Bureau of Prisons’ budget “specifically to fund a study on the feasibility of locating a facility in Letcher County.” 127 In June of 2008, Rogers announced that plans were moving forward, and that the Federal Bureau of Prisons had awarded a contract for an initial site selection study to the Louis Berger Group, Incorporated. In the following months, representatives from the private firm quietly traveled to Letcher County to begin their site selection study and “held several dinner meetings with the planning group to talk about what the county has to offer in the way of infrastructure, schools, medical facilities, and other support necessary to service a large penitentiary.” 128 By the end of the summer six potential sites had been located, and all were on formerly mined land. 129

In July of 2008, I interviewed Reverend Elwood Cornett, one of the two cochairman of the planning commission since its inception. A lifelong Letcher County resident and Old Regular Baptist minister, Cornett is a dedicated community member and respected spiritual leader in the county. In our first conversation, I asked Cornett, how did this process begin? As he explained,

128 Ibid.
129 Bridget Lyles (Site Selection Specialist, Design and Construction Branch, Federal Bureau of Prisons), phone interview with the author, July 2009.
We got our group of community leaders together and sat down and thought, what should this planning commission be about? We developed a mission statement. We had [Congressmen] Hal Rodgers’ aid from Kentucky, named Bob Mitchell, to meet with us one day, and said to him, we’re getting our heads together, we need help, what can we get going for our people?

As a matter of fact, he was the one who asked, would you consider a Federal prison? And I’d have to admit, my first reaction was, I wouldn’t be interested in that. But then as we began to do research on that whole idea, we found out that people just don’t escape from these federal prisons…. It also interested us that this prison would provide about 400 good paying jobs, and that would mean an awful lot to the economy, particularly of our younger folks here in Letcher county.130

Cornett described to me the crucial chronology in which the prison was first presented to the planning commission from the state and federal level as the most viable possibility for immediate community development. But as the commission began to understand the project in these terms, and became convinced that “people just don’t escape,” getting the prison became its primary agenda. When I asked Cornett if there were any other projects the commission was working on, he replied,

Well, as I say, you can run fast in every direction and not get anywhere. Once we decided that this was something the commission wanted to make happen for this community, we made this the number one thing we are working on. And I personally was very influential in that. I believe we need to focus all our efforts on this while we can.131

If the Letcher Federal Correctional Institution (FCI Letcher) is built, it will be the fourth new federal prison located in the eastern Kentucky coalfields since 1992. And, as was the case with each of the three new federal prisons already constructed, Congressman Rogers continues to play a central role in the acquisition process for FCI Letcher.

130 Cornett, discussion.
131 Ibid.
A New Public Works Program That Isn’t Public and Doesn’t Work

Harold “Hal” Rogers is currently serving his 15th consecutive term in the United States House of Representatives representing the Fifth Congressional District of Kentucky. The Fifth District is made up of the 29 counties in the southern and eastern part of the state. Of these 29 counties, 22 are on the list of the 100 poorest counties in the nation, and the district-wide average poverty rate is 26.1%. On the Well Being Index, a national measurement of wealth, health and happiness, it is ranked 435th out of 436 districts. The district remains the poorest part of the state, and one of the persistently poorest regions in the country. It is also one of the whitest Congressional Districts in the nation. While there are communities of color in certain counties, in 2005 the district-wide average population was reportedly 98.5% white, and had the number one “white rank” of all congressional districts nationwide.

First elected to congress in 1980, Rogers has become the longest serving Kentucky Republican in a federal office. Much of Rogers’ enduring support is due to his impressive record as a member of the House Appropriations Committee, which he has been a member of since his second term in Congress. As a senior member of this committee Rogers has continuously fought for federal funding to develop regional transportation systems, to bring in new industries and to improve the education system in his district. By the late 1980s, Rogers set his sights on bringing home some of the biggest, most expensive federally funded projects the government had to offer:

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134 "Congressional Districts of the 109th Congress of the United States, Selected Rankings."
new prisons. The first to come was the Manchester Federal Correctional Institution (FCI Manchester), a 1,300-bed federal prison with an adjacent 300-bed work camp, which opened in Clay County on November 5, 1992. When the Republicans gained the majority of Congress in 1995, Rogers became chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Federal Judiciary. With this new appointment he also became a member of the “College of Cardinals,” the exclusive group of thirteen subcommittee chairmen who oversee the $900 billion appropriations budget that funds the nation’s government programs.135

On October 7, 1998, Rogers wrote a report to the people of his district, titled “Creating Jobs and Opportunity for the People of Southern and Eastern Kentucky,” which was published in local newspapers throughout the region. As the report read,

If there is one thing the people of southern and eastern Kentucky appreciate it’s the value of a good paying job. For generations, too many of our people have packed their bags to find a job to support themselves and their families. But time and effort are reversing that sad tradition. We are now creating new jobs at home, restroking an economy that can change the face of our region for generations to come.

I have been working with the U.S. Bureau of Prisons to build two more prison facilities in our region, which are in addition to the prison we secured for Manchester in 1991. We have already broken ground in the Big Sandy region for one of the facilities, and it will pump millions of dollars into the surrounding counties and employ approximately 400 people at an average salary of $32,000. A proposed facility for the McCreary County area would create another 300-400 jobs.136

The United States Penitentiary Big Sandy (USP-Big Sandy) opened in Martin County on October 6, 2003.\textsuperscript{137} The United States Penitentiary McCreary (USP-McCreary) opened in McCreary County on April 5, 2004.\textsuperscript{138} And if all goes according to plan, the target year for the completion of the proposed Letcher Federal Correctional Institution (FCI-Letcher) is 2013.\textsuperscript{139}

In line with his agenda of building more prisons to create more jobs in eastern Kentucky, while serving as chairman of the subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary between 1995-2000, Rogers was instrumental in writing some of the harshest anti-crime appropriations bills ever created in the history of Congress. His congressional voting record also displays his commitment to building and filling new prison beds. In 1994 he voted for more prisons, more enforcement, and an effective death penalty. That same year he voted against replacing the death penalty with life imprisonment. In 1995 he voted for making death penalty appeals harder, and in 1996 he voted against maintaining right of Habeas Corpus in death penalty appeals. In 1999 he voted for more prosecution and sentencing for juvenile crime, and in 2000 he voted against funding alternative sentencing programs instead of more prisons.\textsuperscript{140} In sum, Congressman Rogers’ plan for the future of eastern Kentucky could not more clearly demonstrate the reality of Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres’ explanation that one crucial “explanation for the high rates of incarceration of black and brown young men is the economic boon that prison-building has brought to

\textsuperscript{137} "Prison Set to Open," \textit{Mountain Citizen}, September 24 2003.
\textsuperscript{139} P. Waterfall, "Anticipated New Construction Capacity by Fiscal Year," (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2008).
\textsuperscript{140} "U.S. Congressman Hal Rogers," http://halrogers.house.gov/.
depressed rural areas. Prison construction has become – next to the military – our society’s major public works program.”

By consistently earmarking congressional funding towards building new federal prisons in the fifth district of Kentucky, Congressman Rogers’ agenda is one of promoting prisons as a solution to poverty in one of the poorest, whitest districts in the nation. Yet while this may be Rogers’ plan for winning support in his district through his role on the House Appropriations committee, the Federal Bureau of Prisons adamantly and publicly denies that it is a federal job creation program. As Rev. Elwood Cornett explained to me, “The BOP has told us on numerous occasions that they are not a job source for economically struggling communities. Their goal is to promote public safety.”

While Congressman Rogers’ plan is to use prison construction as a means of economic development, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) aims primarily to minimize its own internal costs, and is admittedly neutral in terms of site location. This official position of neutrality is critical on multiple levels. First, the BOP’s neutrality functions to obscure the present apocalyptic national paradigm of prisons as rural poverty reform, making it more difficult for critics to denounce rural prison expansion on the moral grounds that it is fueled by economic motives. At the same time, it creates the framework in which rural prison expansion is not a public works program with the explicit federal agenda of bringing jobs to the poorest rural districts in the nation. Rather, it is a federal public works program that the poorest rural

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142 Cornett, discussion.
districts in the nation must compete with one another for within the “free” market. As Cornett further explained to me regarding the visit in 2008 from representatives of Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., the private firm contracted by the BOP to complete the site selection study in Letcher County,

Representatives from the Louis Berger group came to the county and we showed them around. It has been an uphill battle with the BOP. The Bureau does not want to bring a prison here. It would be much easier for them to build it somewhere else. But we deserve to have those federal facilities with federal benefits here in Appalachia.

So the commission has been working to prove to the bureau that this would be a good place for this prison. We gave a very detailed presentation to the people from the Louis Berger group while they were here last summer, about our workforce, our healthcare, our hospitals, our school system, our transportation, to convince them that Letcher County could support having this prison. Because they needed to make sure that people will be willing to move here, and would want to send their kids to school here, and that the hospital could provide the care needed.143

Cornett’s account reveals how in order for Letcher Countians to get the federal jobs with federal benefits that they desperately need, they must fight for them, by working to bring the least desirable sort of federal facility to town. Implicit in this work is that it demands that community leaders simultaneously advertise their community’s potential to be exploited by articulating its economic condition of poverty (an extraordinarily high unemployment rate), while denying the social consequences of poverty (promoting the county’s deteriorating infrastructure, education, healthcare systems, etc.), in order to present a cheap and readily available local labor force and a high quality living standard for experienced, transferring BOP employees (who inevitably take the highest paid positions). Furthermore, all of the six proposed sites

143 Cornett, discussion.
have been mined out, and most of them were strip-jobs.\textsuperscript{144} Thus the land itself is available and vacant only because of destructive corporate mining practices. By excluding the very real and devastating effects of poverty and environmental destruction on the county’s population, such as its extremely high rates of cancer, infant mortality, obesity, heart disease, and drug addiction, as well as extremely limited access to quality healthcare and education, the leaders of the Letcher County Planning Commission did not articulate the immediate social needs of the community.\textsuperscript{145} Rather, in order to make a good impression on the private firm contracted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the commission disguised the very existence of this social need. In such a way, they were essentially advertising their poverty and their exploited land to the federal government itself – in order to get a prison.

While the work of the Letcher County Planning Commission demonstrates how local elites deny the structural causes and consequences of poverty in their community in order to win the bid, such analysis remains omnipresent in the public debate. To chart the unfolding of the prison acquisition and construction process in full, I turn to the case of McCreary County, Kentucky, home of USP-McCreary since 2004.

\textsuperscript{144} “Strip-Job” refers to surface mining practices that remove the top layer of earth from the land. Bridget Lyles (site selection specialist, Design and Construction Branch, Federal Bureau of Prisons), phone interview with the author, July 2009.

\textsuperscript{145} Dr. Paul R. Epstein of the Harvard Medical School released a report in March 2010, indicating that because of the coal industry, Kentucky has the highest mortality rate in the nation. Erik Reece, “Coal Dependency Damaging State’s Health,” \textit{Lexington Herald-Leader}, March 11 2010.
McCreary County, Kentucky

McCreary County is on the southern border of Kentucky, in the southwestern foothills of the Appalachian Mountain range. The topography consists primarily of rolling hills, softer than the dramatic mountainous landscape that runs up the state’s eastern border. For the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, McCreary County was “company owned” by the Stearns Coal and Timber Company. The Stearns Company owned and operated all eighteen of the county’s underground mines, as well as vast amounts of the forest land, entirely monopolizing the two local industries of coal and timber. In the 1970s, as the extremely environmentally destructive practice of surface strip mining took off in the industry throughout Central Appalachia, underground mining operations became increasingly rare. By the mid-1970s, all eighteen of the underground mines in McCreary County had closed. And, largely due to a lack of easily accessible surface level coal seams in the county, no new mines opened up. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, there were 322 miners in McCreary County in 1960. By 1980, that number had dropped to 31.146

During these years the local economy struggled to shift its reliance on the mines to the service sector, manufacturing, and retail trade. Manufacturing jobs primarily in textile and leather fabrication became the new biggest employer. While the service sector provided a limited number of careers with secure salaries and good benefits mostly in education and healthcare, the vast majority of the available work

was to be found in low-wage, unskilled and often unstable positions. By 1990, McCreary County had the lowest per capita income level in the state of $5,153, and a staggering 45.5% of the population was living below the poverty line.147

Thus when nationwide welfare reform came to McCreary County in the fall of 1996, in the words of one local official “We feared for the worst.” The Kentucky Transitional Assistance Program (K-TAP) became the state’s TANF program, and was administered entirely by the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children. According to researchers Kathleen Pickering, Mark H. Harvey, Gene F. Summers and David Mushinski, co-authors of *Welfare Reform in Persistent Rural Poverty* (2006), “The goal of the welfare aspect of the K-Tap program was to ensure that participants who were “work ready” obtained unsubsidized employment and that those not ready for work developed skills to enable them to work “as soon as possible.” Yet the since the K-TAP program “did not include job creation as one of its goals,” in places like McCreary County the program primarily functioned by forcing people to either leave the county to find work, or to become a part of the low-wage, unskilled often part-time local workforce, receiving few or no employee benefits. In such a way, from October of 1996 to December of 2002, the number of welfare caseloads in McCreary County declined from 742 to 345. As one K-TAP caseworker in nearby Owsley County, eastern Kentucky explained, of those who found work in the area, “many have obtained jobs with the school system, with local nursing homes as certified

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nursing assistants, some are working in factories. I have some who are cashiers at our local [retail] businesses – convenience store, grocery store, Dollar Store.”  

By the late-1990s, McCreary County was so poor that it was about to cease to exist all together. As Stephanie Tucker, the McCreary County Occupational Tax Administrator, explained the situation of the county in the years leading up to the prison:

I think it was slowly sinking, drowning – going under the water for the last time. And, I think the prison was needed, it was necessary. [A way to] get out from under the water, so to say… to get up for a breath of air….

[The county government] they were heavily burdened with the money. And the way I understand it is the state had come in and said, we cannot continue to keep – you know I don’t know the words, but to keep us up, the county. To support us in whatever ways that the state does that. And if they couldn’t start doing it themselves, then the county was going to be split back between the three counties surrounding us, the way it was formed in the first place – between Wayne, Pulaski and Whitely, that’s how McCreary County was formed. That was what I heard. The state came in and said, that’s it, we’re done. You find some form of revenue so that you can pay your own bills, or however it works, or that’s it.  

Such a statement reveals how, as PRWORA transferred the major oversight of welfare distribution from the federal to state level, and cut back on social programs nationwide, it became increasingly left up to small economically struggling counties to “start doing it themselves,” or drown.

And so, in a desperate attempt to save McCreary County from total dissolution, local officials formed a “steering committee” led by county resident Jim Johnson, board member of the McCreary Chamber of Commerce, in order to make

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149Stephanie Tucker (McCreary County Occupational Tax Administrator), in discussion with the author, August 5, 2009.
plans for new economic development in the county. Soon the committee began working closely with Congressman Hal Rogers to bring a prison to town. The first article appeared in the local paper on March 10, 1998, titled “McCreary sites being surveyed for $100 million federal prison.” As the newspaper reported,

As currently envisioned, a federal penitentiary in McCreary County would have a tremendous economic impact. “It will require between 400 and 500 full-time employees. Entry level salaries will start at about $32,000 per year with full federal benefits,” [McCreary County Deputy Judge-Executive] Murphy observed. “We are looking at something that will be about a third the size of the Georgetown Toyota plant.” In addition to the direct economic impact of 500 new federal civil service jobs, an institution of the size envisioned would have substantial indirect impact in the county retail and service sector, according to Murphy.150

Thus at the very moment in which the residents of McCreary County were confronted with the devolution and increasingly punitive structure of national welfare reform, struggled to find even minimum-wage employment opportunities to meet the welfare-to-work structure of K-TAP, and feared for the very survival of their county, the United States Penitentiary McCreary was presented to the community from the federal level as a massive economic development project that would bring in hundreds of new jobs with high salaries and good benefits – but only if the county could fulfill the necessary requirements. The article went on to quote the following list:

According to the Department of Justice site selection criteria provided to the The McCreary County Record:

“The site should:
-include a minimum of 250 acres of relatively flat buildable land…. 
-be available at minimal cost to the government and include both surface and mineral rights,

“-be free from environmental difficulties, including protected
“wetlands areas,” significant archeological or historical resources,
habitats of threatened or endangered species, farmland areas and prime
agricultural land. It should not be located within a flood plain area,
“-be located within 50 miles of a large population center to ensure the
availability of community resources for the facility, such as staff
housing, goods and services, etc.
“-have adequate public utility services to the site,
“-have adequate fire protection services nearby, with a public-service
fire company preferred,
“-have an accredited full service hospital recognized and licensed by
the state within one hour’s driving time,
“-be within close proximity to interstate highway systems and public
transportation, preferably with commercial ground and air service
nearby,
“-be within proximity to higher education facilities, with accredited
colleges or universities and a wide variety of technical schools,
“-have community support, including endorsement by local officials
and Members of Congress.151

And so the framework was set: if the county could meet the criteria of the list as
ddictated by the U.S. Department of Justice, they would get a new $100 million dollar
prison. Although the requirements were strict, the pay-off appeared huge. The
annual starting salary of $32,000 was over three times the County’s 1990 median
household income of $10,598, and over six times the per capita income of $5,153.

But county officials were well aware that it would not come without work. As
the newspaper commented on the list of requirements, “The last point is important.”
It would have to be a community effort. In fact, the county had already learned this
the hard way. In the early 1990s McCreary officials had tried to bring a different
prison to the county, but lost the bid, and the prison went elsewhere.152 But this time,
the county had the support of Congressman Hal Rogers. And on April 1, 1998,

151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
McCreary County received a “hearty endorsement in its quest for a $100 million federal prison from the Kentucky State Senate,” and the state senate wrote a resolution in support of the proposal to the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Washington, D.C. As the document stated,

A RESOLUTION supporting the construction of a high security federal prison in McCreary County and urging the Federal Bureau of Prisons to review potential sites for this construction.

WHEREAS, the Federal Bureau of Prisons is engaged in a continuing search for potential sites for new institutions and has demonstrated a strong desire to locate a maximum-minimum security prison facility in McCreary County; and

WHEREAS, local officials and members of Congress have expressed strong approval for this prison facility; and among community organizations, the McCreary County Chamber of Commerce unanimously supports this proposed facility that will create many needed new jobs and a potential for new businesses and economic growth in the community, and is committed to helping in anyway necessary to make this project a success; the McCreary County Educational Development Foundation Inc. has expressed full support for the facility and has every intention to provide such education opportunities as may be required to insure its success; the McCreary County Industrial Development Corporation is committed to providing such resources and support as deemed necessary; and the McCreary County Women’s Club has demonstrated its full support of this proposed facility as a welcomed opportunity for the community.

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved by the Senate of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

Section 1. This honorable body fully supports the construction of a high security federal institution in McCreary County and urges the Federal Bureau of Prisons to review potential sites for this institution and to give its strong consideration to this proposed facility in McCreary County.

Section 2. The Clerk of the Senate is hereby directed to transmit a copies of this Resolution to Dr. Kathleen M. Hawk, Director, United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 320 First Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20534…

By pledging the unanimous support of the McCreary County government, business and civic leaders, the state senate resolution exhibits the extent to which bringing the

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prison to McCreary became a County-State joint effort. Although the state was on the brink of dissolving McCreary County all together, once the local steering committee and Congressmen Rogers had the proposal for the prison, the state quickly pledged its support for the new plan of economic development. And in sending the document directly to Kathleen M. Hawk, the acting director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, the resolution displays the state’s commitment towards helping McCreary County meet the last requirement on the list from the U.S. Department of Justice, by making it evident that the prison had “community support, including endorsement by local officials and Members of Congress.”

Yet in pledging community support, the date of the resolution also exhibits the extent to which non-elite community members were entirely excluded from the process. When this resolution was passed on April 1, 1998, the prison already had the full support of the county government and the state senate, Congressman Hal Rogers was working closely with BOP officials to move forward with the plans, five potential sites had already been selected within the county, and the BOP had already hired a private firm to complete the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a federal document published to determine the feasibility of the project. But the first public hearing on the proposal did not occur in McCreary County until almost two months later.
The Public Process

On the evening of May 21, 1998, representatives from both the Federal Bureau of Prisons and Louis Berger & Associates, Inc. (the private firm hired to complete the Environmental Impact Statements), hosted a public hearing in the McCreary Central High School auditorium. The meeting began with statements from the visiting representatives, and then was opened up for a public comment period. The first to speak was David J. Dorworth, Chief of the Site Selection & Environmental Review Branch of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. As Dorworth told the 175 people in attendance,

The proposal to build a Federal facility will have significant economic impact. The project costs could range from ninety to a hundred and ten, perhaps more, million dollars in project costs. The construction time could be two (2) years or more, could employ several hundred people during the actual construction of the facility. Once the facility is open, it will have an operating budget in the range of $25,000,000.00 a year… and 80% of that money will be spent locally on salaries, purchases of goods and services, and utilities. There will also be substantial job creation as a result of the opening of the facility.154

Such comments underline the contradictory logic of the BOP’s site selection process: although they publicly claim that they are “they are not a job source for economically struggling communities,” the fundamental way they promote themselves to “economically struggling communities” is by offering jobs and economic development. In such a way, the BOP does not supply jobs; it sells the idea of them to the most desperate bidder. This hypocrisy is blatantly evident in both their public presentations and official documentation. In the BOP’s Environmental Impact

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Statement (made public by law during the selection process), under the subject heading “Economic Characteristics,” the document reads as follows:

1. Economic Characteristics
   a. Types of Economic Impacts

   The Proposed project would stimulate the regional economy during both the construction and operational phases. Economic impacts would result from material purchases in the region, construction and operational payrolls, and related indirect and induced spending, or “multiplier effects.” In assessing the economic impacts of the project, it is important to recognize that economic benefits associated with the construction phase would occur for a relatively limited time during the actual construction. Economic activity generated during the operational phase, on the other hand, would continue throughout the life of the facility. It is also important to note that economic impacts could affect the demographic characteristics of the area, with resultant impacts on the local housing market, school enrollments and other community services. These secondary impacts are discussed below.\(^{155}\)

The section continues on for several pages to anticipate every single way in which the prison would impact the local economy during both its construction phase and long-term operation.

Thirty-nine citizens spoke at the public hearing that night, and thirty-eight spoke in favor of bringing USP McCreary to town. The last speaker of the night was Jimmie W. Greene, the County Judge-Executive of McCreary County. As Greene summarized,

Like many of those who have spoken this evening, we had to leave after High School in order to find employment and I went into the Air Force. Been back and been very active since that time, and every day for the past 20 years since I’ve been in public service, I meet people and they’re coming in and saying “Jimmie, we need jobs.” That’s all I’ve heard for the past 27 years… But wouldn’t it be nice if we can be born here, we can go to school here, we can marry here, we can raise our family here, get a job here, and retire here at an early age. We have everything you need for this Federal prison. We have the

\(^{155}\) Ibid., IV-19.
infrastructure. You’ve heard what our people have told you this evening. We need you and we believe that you need us. We welcome you and we stand ready to help you in this endeavor.\textsuperscript{156}

Like the leaders on the Letcher County Planning Commission, Greene’s statement reveals how, in order to attract the BOP in the selection process, in order to get jobs, local officials felt compelled to deny the pervasive consequences that decades of chronic poverty had had on the community. McCreary County did not have the infrastructure to support a new 1,300-bed prison; it did not even have the infrastructure to support its own population. The centralized sewage system was so limited that it did not include many households on the outskirts of the county, and so many residents made do with “straight-pipe” sewage – a homemade system for draining raw sewage into nearby streams or the ground. Likewise, many residents in the county were not connected to public water lines. And, most dire of all, McCreary County did not even have a hospital. And so the contradictory logic unfolded in which county officials advertised the community to the BOP as having the infrastructure to support the prison, while BOP officials advertised the prison to the community as a way to get desperately needed new infrastructure. Yet neither party was concerned with the inconsistency, because it was also a logic that was mutually beneficial. As Greene summarized, “We need you and we believe that you need us.” The details would come later.

Yet while the first public hearing made it appear that the prison had almost the unanimous support of the local community, this was far from the reality, and became evident in the following months. After the May hearing, Louis Berger & Associates,

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 67-68.
Inc. went on to complete the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). As Bob Nardi, the Project Manager for the firm, explained at the hearing,

Both site-specific topics and issues of local and regional interests will be addressed in the EIS. Topics will include topography, geology, soils, cultural resources, biological resources, traffic, air quality, noise conditions, impacts to local and regional land use plans, utility services, public services, the affect on the economy and other aspects of developing such a facility.157

The DEIS was the first government document regarding the prison that was made available to the public early in 1999, and initiated a comment period in which concerned citizens could send letters to the BOP. Between January and June of 1999, the BOP received two hundred and ten written comments. Many residents who were reluctant to speak out at the public hearing wrote letters of opposition. As county resident James H. Duncan wrote in a letter to the BOP,

I feel intimidated when trying to reason with political leaders who deny that the problem exists. Consequently, I did not attend the public meeting concerning the new prison. I seriously doubt that I will attend any future meetings where these same officials preside. However, I feel that this prison proposal is being promoted by a select few of two hundred or so who have a vested interest in seeing a project of this size come to the county. The average citizens wishes haven’t been considered in this decision. At no time has the proposal been put to the public for a vote, and I suspect the vast majority of voters are against the project.158

Of the 194 letters that expressed an opinion either in support or opposition of the prison, 152 supported the prison, and 42 did not. Furthermore, one of the letters written in opposition included a petition with 447 signatures on it. As the petition read, “We the following citizens of McCreary Co. do hereby oppose the construction of a Federal Penitentiary here in our county. We show our opposition with our

157 Ibid., 18.
158 Ibid., document 9.
signatures on this petition.”\textsuperscript{159} There were no petitions sent in support of the prison. Including these signatures, of the total 641 citizens who expressed an opinion during this time in the process, 76% opposed the prison.

On March 25, 1999, representatives from the BOP and Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., returned to McCreary County to host the second and final public hearing. It was again hosted at the McCreary Central High School, with more than 100 citizens in attendance. As the local newspaper reported, “Of those present at the hearing, 24 people spoke. The majority – 19 – welcomed the prison with open arms because of the potential economic boom they expect. Four citizens opposed the project, and one voiced concerns. But the overwhelming sentiment was positive.” Such statistics further display how the public, visible and vocal support for the prison overpowered the private reservations many citizens had, but were hesitant to openly express. Moreover, the newspaper article itself, titled “Support for prison is overwhelming,” inline with the majority of the local reporting on the prison, perpetuated the illusion of community solidarity for the proposal and entirely limited the conversation to an economic sphere.\textsuperscript{160} Yet the letters and public comments to the BOP reveal the complexity of the debate beneath the surface.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., document 74.
\textsuperscript{160} "Support for Prison Is Overwelming," McCreary County Record, March 30 1999.
Those in Favor

Every single McCreary County elected official that went on record supported the prison, as did almost all high ranking local business owners and civic leaders, including the President and Executive Vice President of the McCreary National Bank, board members from the McCreary County Chamber of Commerce, the director of the McCreary Campus of Somerset Community College, the President of the McCreary County Sportman’s Club, and the head of the County Educational Committee. Yet local elites were not the only ones in favor of the prison, and the expressions of support from elites and non-elites alike generally centered on the same basic hopes for the future of the county. Such letters reveal how the prison was widely perceived with devastating accuracy as the only major option being presented by both the federal and state government to lessen the county’s deepening poverty in the midst of a rapidly changing global economy, and thus as the only way for the county to “progress” into the new millennium. As McCreary County resident Katy Lynn Gilreath wrote,

I think we should not stand in the way of progress for our county. Indeed the federal government’s plans to build a prison has gained momentum. They predict a payroll of $17 million would be an enormous economic boost for our county, and I agree.\textsuperscript{161}

In addition to bringing in jobs, the prison was understood as a way to improve the county’s severely lacking infrastructure, especially its access to medical facilities, by making it more likely to receive federal grants, and as a way to create second-tier

\textsuperscript{161} United States Penitentiary, McCreary County, Kentucky: Final Environmental Impact Statement, document 52.
economic development. As Regal Bruner, an employee of McCreary County Sheriff’s Department, wrote,

I’m in favor of a federal Prison being built in McCreary Co., KY. I feel the economic benefits to McCreary County would be enhanced by having more jobs and collateral benefits such as better roads, improved water and sewage in the county, possible expansion of the airport facility, possible federal grants to upgrade police protection, fire protection, and ambulance service. I feel the benefits for outweigh the liabilities in the construction of a Federal prison.162

And as McCreary County resident Kathy Taylor wrote,

Maybe once it gets here factories and other businesses would move in. Also maybe someday we can work on getting a hospital or clinic located in our county. People complain cause we don’t have anything but then they complain when we try to get something too. We have criminals running loose in our county so what’s the difference if we have a prison, at least they will be locked up.163

Taylor’s reluctant support further underlines how beyond the prison, nothing else was on the horizon, so many citizens felt disinclined to oppose it. Furthermore Taylor’s letter importantly highlights how many citizens supporting the prison did not assume that the people inside would only be invisible outsiders, and displays how it is incorrect to assume that rural prison expansion is entirely or primarily fueled and upheld by the racism of poor whites towards people of color. While some letters did express fear of the people that the prison would bring in to the community, Taylor’s letter displays the tragic resignation that things were so bad in the county on the outside, that she assumed that many of those who would wind up locked inside would be from McCreary County.

162 Ibid., document 202.
163 Ibid., document 200.
In hoping that the prison would bring in new jobs, support local business, increase county real estate values, and even help the local tourism industry, many citizens articulated how they hoped the prison would be a way for young people to stay in the community. As McCreary County resident Starling E. Perry wrote,

I think this prison would be the best thing for McCreary County since the Stearns coal and lumber co. came here in 1903. It would be the best thing the economy has ever seen here. Me and my wife are 100% for the prison…. I am 73 years old. It won’t help me. But my grandchildren it will help in the future. Thank you, thank you.164

And as McCreary County high school teacher Stuart Shepard commented at the final public hearing,

I’m a schoolteacher here in McCreary Central High School. I teach Social Studies. To me, I felt like I’ve lied to my kids in telling them you know that the greatest thing in this world is to give them an education, and then we lose the best, they go on out of the county. We don’t have nothing here for them. The jobs that we have is fast food restaurants, grocery stores, minimum wage jobs, and to me, in order to give them an honest chance, I mean, we need jobs like the prison coming in…. we need to embrace together and try to work and make things better for our youth, because I want our youth to stay here, because we’ve got some great kids. I hate to see them leaving here. We just need to work together. Appreciate it.165

Such a statement reveals the extent to which employees in the public school system publicly supported the prison, and promoted it as good future career option for gifted young people. Not only did teachers speak out in favor of the prison, but also the head of the County Educational Committee was a strong supporter of it, and all of the public hearings regarding the prison were held in the McCreary County high school auditorium. And so while Shepard felt that he “lied” in telling his kids “that the greatest thing in this world is to give them an education” while knowing that the vast

164 Ibid., document 39.
165 Ibid., document 41.
majority of available work in the county consisted of minimum-wage, unskilled labor, by advocating for the prison Shepard taught his students a different lesson: that the best chance they had for success was by participating in the building of a prison dependant economy. And so many high school students came to understand the prison in exactly these terms. As Ashley Corder wrote,

I am a junior at McCreary Central High School. I will graduate next spring. After graduation I plan to attend college and pursue a career in education. I feel that the prison will have a positive effect on the economical status of the community which will allow me to continue living in McCreary County, in which I grew up and have come to love.166

Within this framework, citizens repeatedly articulated building the prison as a way to both replace the Stearns Coal and Timber Co., the local force responsible for the county’s historically constructed poverty, and to save it from the effects of NAFTA, the symbolic marker of the neoliberal future. As McCreary County resident J.C. Egnew stated at the final public hearing,

When we first moved here, coal and timber were king. They were going along pretty good, although we still needed a lot of jobs. Coal and timber today unfortunately for us are gone. We can point our fingers in a lot of directions but it’s gone. I’m in what you would call the light manufacturing business. Cutting and sewing. And unfortunately, our industry is under siege as well. As many of you have heard NAFTA has created a giant succulent sound and a lot of jobs have gone south across the border, and for our neighbors in Colombia, Kentucky, Russell County, and a lot of those places, and as much as we would like things to stay like they are in a lot of ways, it just isn’t a fact of life. A fact of life is that if we look up and see what’s around us right now, and what’s providing the jobs, aside from teaching school, working for public service utilities and things like that, our private sector is going to undergo a major change, and our private sector needs more employers in this county…. There’s a lot of people that moved away from here that given a reasonable chance to earn a living would move back here and have done so, but this is a unique opportunity that’s coming our way and it’s

166 Ibid., document 204.
one that I would ask to reach out and grab for my children and for my grandchildren and for the future of our county.\textsuperscript{167}

And so as the prison safely assumed its place in the chronology of regional exploitation and single-industry dependency, the necessarily exploitative nature of the “industry” itself was not questioned. In such a way the prison was reconciled with past, present and future systems of multi-sited exploitation, enabling the bar to gain support for the prison to be set incredibly low. As demonstrated in a letter written by Lisa L. Forman, a student at the McCreary Campus of Somerset Community College,

I believe the prison will be a great improvement for the economy of McCreary County. Even if it is a few hundred minimum wage jobs available, that is more of a choice for jobs in this area. The prison will probably bring in more businesses and maybe a desperately needed hospital in this area.”\textsuperscript{168}

Forman’s letter articulates how many citizens understood McCreary County as having no lobbying power whatsoever in the greater market economy, and thus as having no choice but to take whatever it could get, however poor the option. Such a framework naturalized the fact that the community had to petition the federal government for desperately needed jobs and services, rather than being specifically targeted as a region in need. As McCreary County resident Wayne Phillips wrote,

McCreary County is at a point in its economy that it must pursue every potential job opportunity for our citizens. This prison could be a major step in the right direction. Hopefully the increase of job opportunities will encourage other developments giving our local economy a much needed boost…. It is unfortunate that our county has a tremendous workforce but limited opportunities for good job markets like the federal prison provides.\textsuperscript{169}

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\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., II 16-18. \\
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., document 40. \\
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., document 46.
\end{flushright}
In part, these letters themselves performed the function of petitioning the government – every single one was addressed to the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Prisons, 320 First Street, N.W., Washington D.C., 20534.170

Ultimately, while lacking a structural critique of the ways in which poverty and wealth are mutually reproduced, and how definitions of crime are historically located and continuously reconstructed, the dominant narrative supporting the prison presented its own infallible logic within the neoliberal paradigm. Unlike sewing factories, prisons cannot be internationally outsourced. And unlike the coal and timber industry, they are dependant on a resource that will, assumedly, never run out. Without any alternative plan, it was a logic that proved impossible to defeat on a local level. Yet many citizens tried nonetheless.

Those Opposed

Some of the opposition was a not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) response with racial undertones. But the vast majority of the opposition focused on a desire to protect the county’s national and state forest and limited agricultural land, and to preserve the county’s history while not repeating past mistakes. The proposed sites represented a lose-lose-lose-lose-lose situation; none of them could have possibly met the site selection criteria defined by the U.S. Department of Justice. Of the five selected sites, three were in the Daniel Boone National Forest, one was in the state forest, and one was on private prime agricultural farmland. The National Park

170 Ibid.
Service and the National Forest Service already owned 80% of the land in McCreary County. This fact meant that the county already had a very small property tax base, there was very little agricultural land available for production, and the national park was viewed as an asset for promoting tourism. Many citizens did not want the prison to be built in the national or state forest because it would hurt the environment and the struggling tourism industry. But they also knew that if it were built on the farmland it would permanently decrease the amount of available agricultural land and the county’s property tax base. Because of this list of bad options, many citizens from across the state and the nation expressed outrage over the closed nature of the site selection process. As Jim Benson of Heartwood, a regional organization that works to protect forest land throughout the eastern United States, wrote in a letter to the BOP,

We would first like to know why we were not contacted for scoping.\(^\text{171}\) This clearly violated NEPA.\(^\text{172}\) We are on the mailing list for all actions on the Daniel Boone National Forest. We have also been told many times that we would be contacted for all projects. The Forest Service is also well aware that we file lawsuits and administrative appeals all the time. We prepare extensive comments on projects all the time. Heartwood and Kentucky Heartwood are certainly the most active groups on projects in the Daniel Boone National Forest…. There is simply no excuse for not contacting us. Likewise, why were we not sent a DEIS? We had to find out about this from non-government sources and ask for a copy of the DIES. There is no excuse for this. We request that the DEIS be withdrawn and legally adequate scoping be conducted. We would also point out that your defiance of the Freedom of Information Act (i.e., refusal to provide an electronic copy of the DEIS) has greatly hindered our ability to comment on the DEIS.\(^\text{173}\)

\(^{171}\) “Scoping” refers to the initial site selection process, completed before the first public hearing held on May 21, 1998.

\(^{172}\) NEPA refers to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

\(^{173}\) Ibid., document 66.
The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) claimed that the prison would have no adverse affect on any of the proposed sites. Yet it clearly lacked an adequate review of endangered species habitats, and no one on the Daniel Boone National Forest mailing list was notified, including major state and national forest preservation organizations such as Heartwood. As Keith Cay of Port Royal, northern Kentucky, wrote to the BOP,

To claim that such a facility wouldn’t adversely affect any of the proposed sites is to put it bluntly, ridiculous. Such claims were made in the Bureau’s DEIS statement…. Finally I would like to point out that the choosing of all five sites was done without input from concerned people on the Daniel Boone Forest mailing list.174

And as Christopher Durfour of Irvine, Kentucky wrote,

Based on information I have received, I believe that all four of the sites [on forest lands] chosen are unacceptable due to the simple fact that they would adversely affect endangered species habitat. The first three sites (all within the National Forest) contain wetlands and host the federally endangered Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Site four directly borders on a section of forest that also hosts the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker. Please reject these four sites.175

While much of the opposition from people outside of McCreary County centered on the total lack of communication from the federal government, much of the opposition from McCreary County residents centered on the pervasive corruption of local politics. As a letter submitted anonymously to the BOP read,

There are plenty of people in McCreary County, Kentucky who do not want your prison to come here. We, unlike our pathetic judge-executive Jimmie W. Green, do not buy your tales of prosperity. We are a small town and we don’t have a lot, but one thing we don’t need is a rotten stinking bunch of crooks. We have enough of them, namely, Mr. Greene and his cronies. It is purely stupid to promote this county as a tourist attraction, then propose to build a

174 Ibid., document 62.
175 Ibid., document 14.
federal prison in its midst…. The only way I would ever be for the prison is if you would put Jimmie Greene, Bruce Murphy, David Ross, and a few more local crooks in it, better yet, how about under it? WE DO NOT WANT THE PRISON! We see through your hype and know it will not do much to help the average citizen, if any one else. 176

Such a statement displays how while federal and state officials promoted the prison as a way to save the county, many citizens knew it would primarily benefit county elites, and maintain local hierarchies of power based on extreme economic and political inequality. A complete distrust and resentment of local elected representatives was echoed repeatedly throughout the letters written to the BOP. 177 Many citizens felt misrepresented by the “special interest groups who stand to make money,” felt that they were being kept “in the dark” about the reality of the project, and felt suppressed by the local press. Many were angered by their exclusion from both the site selection “scoping” period and final decision-making process, and questioned why such a countywide issue did not require a countywide vote. Such comments support Jeffrey Reiman’s “Pyrrhic defeat theory” of how the U.S. criminal justice system succeeds in failing to reduce crime. As Reiman writes,

The failure to reduce crime substantially broadcasts a potent ideological message to the American people, a message that benefits and protects the powerful and privileged in our society by legitimating the present social order with its disparities of wealth and privilege, and by diverting public discontent and opposition away from the rich and powerful and onto the poor and powerless. To provide this benefit, however, not just any failure will do. It is necessary that the failure of the criminal justice system take a particular shape. It must fail in the fight against crime while making it look as if serious crime and thus the real danger to society are the work of the poor…. The criminal justice system refuses to label and treat as crime a large number of acts of the

176 Ibid., document 38.
177 McCreary County Citizens Dorothy Stanley, Edwinia Watters, Jimmy D. Stephens, Trecia Richmond and Bill Richmond were also among the county’s residents that wrote powerful letters to the BOP opposing the prison because of their total distrust of their elected officials. Ibid., document 36, 10, 51, 79.
rich that produce as much or more damage to life and limb as the crimes of the poor.\(^{178}\)

In promoting prisons as a way to create economic stability and maintain social order, rural prison expansion indeed relies on definitions of crime that target the poor and protect the rich, thus naturalizing categories of corrupt authority. Yet it also demands an extension of Reimann’s theory, in that the paradigm of rural prison expansion requires it to appear that building prisons in rural America helps the rural poor, yet simultaneously condones (or rather, necessitates) the fraudulent actions of the “local crooks” running the county government. And while many local citizens oppose such authority, rural prison expansion upholds and protects both local and national power structures, and furthermore frames the struggles of the poor in different geographies in opposition, often along racial lines. As Flonnie Perry of McCreary County wrote in a letter to James B. Jones, the Deputy Assistant Director of the BOP,

Dear Mr. Jones,

I am writing to you to let you know how I feel about this prison coming in McCreary County, Ky. I am a parent. I have a 14 year old daughter. I am really worried about this prison. I am also afraid of this prison. So are a lot of other people and parents. I have never saw a prison. There are other people have never saw a prison. Mr. Jones, we don’t need a prison around our kids. Yes I have went to Judge Jimmie W. Green and he said that we watch too much T.V. Mr. Jones we hear it on the news about prisoners breaking out of prison and I am really afraid so are a lot of other people. But Judge Jimmie W. Greene just don’t understand just how afraid we really are. Mr. Jones why can’t we have a hospital or a park?\(^{179}\)

Perry’s letter demonstrates with devastating clarity both the pervasiveness of media stereotypes of predatory, criminal identity, and the local government’s total disregard


\(^{179}\) United States Penitentiary, Mccreary County, Kentucky : Final Environmental Impact Statement, document 2.
for Perry’s input regarding her own community. It also displays how local elites needed to assure the community that it was the *people* inside the prison that were dangerous, not the prison itself.

But while some citizens expressed their fear, other citizens opposed the prison on behalf of those who would be locked inside. Some worried about how the lack of public transportation would inhibit families from visiting a prison in such a remote rural region, while others reported overt racism on behalf of residents and the county law enforcement. As Earl R. Wilson, of Louisville, Kentucky, wrote to the BOP,

> This is probably a done-deal and you all are just going through the motions. I would think that our representatives and senators would have stopped this... This would have a negative impact of the environment. How would families get to visit prisoners? No public transportation exists and few if any motels or restaurants are in the area. Why trash rural areas. Inner cities are dying and people that live there need jobs. Why not build the prison in downtown Washington, D.C., or some other large metropolitan area. Urban areas already have public transportation, airports, bus and train stations. They already have hotels, restaurants and motels for the families to use while visiting prisoners.\(^{180}\)

And as McCreary County resident Sunshine Taylor wrote,

> There is one thing that I worry about mostly if the prison happens and that is the different races, mainly blacks that will be brought into the county. I myself am not prejudice I am just afraid of what some people in this county would do to them. We have had this problem before and the law did nothing and the black family became friends with our family and they ended up having to leave. This is where our law enforcement needs to get better if they can.\(^{181}\)

\(^{180}\) Ibid., document 59.
\(^{181}\) Ibid., document 76.
Furthermore, McCreary County resident and local historian Robert E. Stephens wrote several long letters to the BOP, tracing the historical continuity of systems of oppression in the region. As he wrote in response to the DEIS,

This document, in this writer’s opinion, looks only at the present society of this region, and fails to take into consideration our future and our past… Our leadership has created an immense “snow job,” dealing out of sight of the people. First of all let us look at the past. In the 1870’s the Commonwealth decided to build a stockade at Greenwood. The idea was to send state prisoners here to work in the mines. The led to a confrontation between the local citizenry and the Louisville Legion, who came by train to suppress a rebellious community, whose only objective was to keep jobs, (the mining of coal) for themselves. It was another failed state government issue, leading to detrimental and unwanted effects on the local inhabitants of McCreary County.

… The cultural resources being considered are the events at five widely separated sites and make no mention of the effect on the people of the area. In each case the impact document reads, “No historical significance.” Again, our people have lived from the beginning along streams and on the hilltops above them. We once called these hilltop ridges “Flatwoods,” where investigators now build their case to establish a prison. These flatwoods are prime agricultural land and development of them into a federal prison violates the state’s policy of limiting industrial development on such valuable lands.\footnote{Ibid., document 22.}

As Stephens’ letter details, in the 1870s elites attempted to make McCreary County a site of the post-emancipation convict-lease system, but the effort resulted in a rebellion in Greenwood, Kentucky, lead by McCreary miners who wanted to keep their jobs. In making the parallel to mutually destructive systems of exploitation of the past, Stephens further called for parallel resistance in the present. As his letter reads, “McCrearians need to stop this fiasco now, not after the fact, as our ancestors had to do at Greenwood in the 1870s.”\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, Stephens’ letter underlines the absurdity of the federal governments’ declaration that all of the proposed sites
were of “no historical significance,” since historical significance cannot be determined by those who do not know the history.

Stephens wrote a second letter connecting the contemporary struggles of those incarcerated with those desperate for work, locating both within a global capitalist system based on exploitation and cultural domination. As he outlined,

Most prisoners are poor people forced into their predicament, when jobs were taken to Mexico, South America, Taiwan, China, Japan, etc. The prison inmates, to a great extent are the result of lost jobs for our people. People who once were paid $8.00 an hour, lost their jobs when capitalists found they could get the job done for $2.00 an hour in third world countries, and lack of money forced many Americans into the prison system. These prisons pay nothing or only a few cents to produce materials that take the place of items previously made by local companies, now fast becoming endangered or extinct in their own right. What is being done to stop this trend? Won’t the federal prison contribute to further loss of jobs?

…. There is a tremendous inequity in the sentencing of drug offenders. Is the Department of Justice and the Department of Prisons seeking an equitable change for sentencing Crack offenders and Cocaine offenders in order to bring equity in punishment for violations of federal laws? The answer is not more prisons. Do we need new prisons or new laws? The latter this writer believes.

Must we sacrifice our heritage in order to accommodate the capitalist and Special interest groups? “A lost heritage for a changing people” is again being implemented, as we drive another nail into the coffin of the past…. The local papers should publish the thoughts of our people, not just the decisions of our governments, and this has usually been the case…. If we get to the point where we can’t SPEAK, WRITE and THINK, then we will automatically reap the whirlwind…. Involved in McCreary County is a CLASH between FREEDOM and AUTHORITARIANISM, and here the latter is winning. The victims of authoritarianism will be the Poor people of McCreary County.184

Despite all of these serious concerns, the BOP swiftly went forward in publishing the Final Environmental Impact Statement and selected site four in Pine Knot,

184 Ibid., document 177.
McCreary County: a 480-acre working farm owned by David Ross. As Ross was quoted in the local press regarding the decision, “I have 384 head of cattle, not including 25 new calves. I always thought I would spend my retirement here on the farm. I guess that might change, now. They just don’t make farms like this anymore, at least not in McCreary County.”

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**EXHIBIT III-29**

**PLANT SPECIES OBSERVED ON SITE NO. 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wildflowers, Ferns, Allies, Grasses, Sedges and Rushes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Acalypha rhomboidea</em></td>
<td>Three-seeded Mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Agrimonia sp.</em></td>
<td>Agrimony species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Athyrium felix-femina</em></td>
<td>Lady Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bidens frondosa</em></td>
<td>Devil’s Beggar-ticks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Boehmeria cylindrica</em></td>
<td>False Nettle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Carex sp.</em></td>
<td>Sedge species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Chasmanthium laxum</em></td>
<td>Slender Spike Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Chelone glabra</em></td>
<td>Turtlehead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cyperus sp.</em></td>
<td>Flat-sedge species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eupatorium fistulosum</em></td>
<td>Hollow-stem Joe-pye-weed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eupatorium serotinum</em></td>
<td>Late Eupatorium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eupatorium perfoliatum</em></td>
<td>Boneset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Heuchera villosa</em></td>
<td>Maple-leaved Alum-root</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Juncus effusus</em></td>
<td>Soft Rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Leersia virginica</em></td>
<td>White Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lobelia cardinalis</em></td>
<td>Cardinal Flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lycopus virgincus</em></td>
<td>Virginia Water-horehound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Microstegium vimineum</em></td>
<td>Stilt Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Osmunda regalis</em></td>
<td>Royal Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Osmunda cinnamomea</em></td>
<td>Cinnamon Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Panicum sp.</em></td>
<td>Panic grass species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phylolacca americana</em></td>
<td>Pokeweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Poa palustris</em></td>
<td>Fowl Meadow Grass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Polygonum hydropiper</em></td>
<td>Water-pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Polygonum sagittaria</em></td>
<td>Arrow-leaved Tearthumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Polygonum persicaria</em></td>
<td>Lady’s Thumb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Polystichum acrostichoides</em></td>
<td>Christmas Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Rhynchospora capitellata</em></td>
<td>Small-headed Beaked Rush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Scirpus sp.</em></td>
<td>Bulrush species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Smilax rotundifolia</em></td>
<td>Common Cathrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Solidago rugosa</em></td>
<td>Wrinkle-leaf Goldenrod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Thelypteris noveboracensis</em></td>
<td>New York Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tridens flavus</em></td>
<td>Purpletop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Typha latifolia</em></td>
<td>Broad-leaved Cat-tail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vernonia gigantea</em></td>
<td>Tall Ironweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vernonia noveboracensis</em></td>
<td>New York Ironweed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Woodwardia areolata</em></td>
<td>Netted Chain Fern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXHIBIT III-31
WILDLIFE OBSERVED ON SITE NO. 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birds</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Agelaius phoeniceus</em></td>
<td>Red-winged Blackbird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Anas platyrhynchos</em></td>
<td>Mallard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Buteo jamaicensis</em></td>
<td>Red-tailed Hawk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Casmerodius albus</em></td>
<td>Great Egret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Charadrius vociferus</em></td>
<td>Killdeer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Colaptes auratus</em></td>
<td>Northern Flicker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Corvus brachyrhynchos</em></td>
<td>American Crow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Cyanocitta cristata</em></td>
<td>Blue Jay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dendroica magnolia</em></td>
<td>Magnolia Warbler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dendroica pinus</em></td>
<td>Pine Warbler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Dendroica palmarum</em></td>
<td>Palm Warbler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Mimus polyglottos</em></td>
<td>Northern Mockingbird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Passerulus sandwichensis</em></td>
<td>Savannah Sparrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Podilymbus podiceps</em></td>
<td>Pied-billed Grebe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Poecetes gramineus</em></td>
<td>Vesper Sparrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sayornis phoebe</em></td>
<td>Eastern Phoebe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sialia sialis</em></td>
<td>Eastern Bluebird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sitta carolinensis</em></td>
<td>White-breasted Nuthatch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Spizella passerina</em></td>
<td>Chipping Sparrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sturnella magna</em></td>
<td>Eastern Meadowlark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sturnus vulgaris</em></td>
<td>European Starling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mammals</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Neotoma magister</em></td>
<td>Allegheny Woodrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Butterflies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Atalopedes campestris</em></td>
<td>Sachem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Boloria bellona</em></td>
<td>Meadow Fritillary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Colias eurytheme</em></td>
<td>Orange Sulphur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Colias philodice</em></td>
<td>Clouded Sulphur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Danaus plexippus</em></td>
<td>Monarch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Euptoieta claudia</em></td>
<td>Variegated Fritillary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Eureme lisa</em></td>
<td>Little Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Everes comynas</em></td>
<td>Eastern Tailed Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Junonia coenia</em></td>
<td>Buckeye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phoebis sennae</em></td>
<td>Cloudless Sulphur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phyciodes tharos</em></td>
<td>Pearl Crescent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Building a Prison Infrastructure

On July 8, 1999, barely three months after the final public hearing, fifty representatives from some of the nation’s largest contractors met with seven representatives from the BOP in the McCreary Fiscal Courtroom, to discuss the bidding process for the construction contract.\textsuperscript{187} And by the first week of October that fall, the BOP issued an official “Record of Decision” to construct the prison.\textsuperscript{188} On September 27, 1999, the local newspaper reported the following:

Representatives of several government agencies met in McCreary County earlier this month to discuss funding for local infrastructure improvements to support the $100 million Pine Knot prison project. The penitentiary project is expected to have widespread implications for the county. Better water and sewage service, improved roads and an expanded airport are all in the planning stage to prepare for the prison.…

To speed up the infrastructure development process, [Federal Bureau of Prisons Public Utility Specialist] Schwab promised that the Bureau of Prisons would deliver more than $1 million to fund the design phase of the sewer project, while funding is secured for the remaining water and sewer projects.…

Water and sewage projects to supply the prison are expected to cost $11.9 million. Representatives from the Department of Local Government, Rural Development, Economic Development Administration and Lake Cumberland Area Development discussed who could provide funds and the probable amount of the funds from each agency.…

In a separate meeting it was reported that there are indications that the airport will undergo major construction to make it accessible to small jets. Proposed road improvements include widening 1 ½ miles of Bethel Road from KY 92

\textsuperscript{186} United States Penitentiary, McCreary County, Kentucky: Final Environmental Impact Statement, III-64-7.
\textsuperscript{187} Ken Shmidheiser, "Potential Prison Bidders Flock to McCreary," McCreary County Record, July 13 1999.
\textsuperscript{188} Ken Shmidheiser, "$100 Million Prison Becomes Reality," McCreary County Record, October 5 1999.
to the prison site. This project is complicated by the necessity to acquire property from the numerous residents along the road.189

And so the infrastructure improvements began, taking residents’ land by eminent domain along the way, and demonstrating both the falseness of Judge Greene’s claim that the county already had the necessary infrastructure, and the reality that securing the prison immediately improved the county’s access to federal and state funding. The BOP demanded that the county drastically enlarge its sewage system and double the capacity of its 1.5 million gallon-per-day water system. And so, as a part of the process, many households gained access to the county sewage and water systems for the first time. As McCreary County Water Superintendent Steven Owens stated proudly when process began, “The day that water is available to every household in the county is drawing closer everyday.”190 The new plant promised to bring water to 225 homes in the western and southeastern parts of the county that had never before received water from the county’s public water supply.191

Yet of the $11.9 million total projected cost, the BOP only pledged to provide a fraction of the funds. The rest would have to come from federal grants and loans, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) state-federal development agency, and the county’s own cash strapped budget. But all of the sudden, the money was easy to find. The ARC and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Rural Development approved the majority of the grants and loans to provide sewage service to the prison. And once the BOP signed its official “Record of Decision” (ROD) to

189 Paula Vann, "Bop May Help Fund Sewer " McCreary County Record, September 27 1999.
191 ———, "$5.9 Million Water Plant Going up near Big Creek," McCreary Record, July 17 2001.
build the prison in October of 1999, it took less than three years for the county to secure $7.3 million for a new water treatment plant and to complete its construction.

One of the first grants for the water treatment center came from the United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). As Rep. Hal Rogers stated in response to the EDA grant,

> We are putting the pieces of the infrastructure puzzle together in McCreary County for this important federal prison project – this major grant for improvements to the water system is the latest piece of that puzzle to be put into place. The McCreary County Water District will build 70,000 linear feet of water line, a booster pumping station, a one million gallon elevate storage tank and will also expand the capacity of the water treatment plant by another half-million gallons a day. We’re making sure that the infrastructure of this area is prepared when the prison construction is complete.\(^{192}\)

In total, the $7.3 million broke down as follows:

- USDA Rural Development Loan: $2,500,000
- U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Utilities Service RUS Grant: $1,690,000
- The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Grant: $2,325,000
- United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant: $701,000 (down from the initial pledge of $1.5 million)
- McCreary County Water District: $100,000.\(^{193}\)

The brand new water facility had an opening dedication on October 22, 2002, and fourteen white, male, local and state officials attended the ceremony. As McCreary County Judge-Executive Jimmie Greene was quoted in the local paper,

> “This is the realization of a dream we’ve been nurturing for many years. This plant will serve not only the prison but the people who have needed water for many years.”

\(^{192}\) Janie Slaven, "Water Flowing in McCreary – as $7.3 Million Water Plant Opens, County Gets Another $483,000 Grant," *McCreary Record*, October 29 2002.

\(^{193}\) Ibid.
The local paper also reported that, “[USDA Rural Development State Director] Slone, a native of Knott County, told the group that he knew the importance of good safe water and while much work is left to get water in eastern Kentucky, this project is a significant step forward.”

But as plans for new multi-million dollar infrastructure projects sped forward with the approval of county, state and BOP officials, and the Ross farm was condemned for construction, another topic did not enter the public sphere until much later: what it would take for unemployed and underemployed McCreary Countians to get a job at the federal facility, and furthermore, what that job would be like. And with the exception of a handful of letters from concerned citizens, the fate of those to be held within did not enter the public discourse at all.

*The Job Application Process*

Throughout the selection and construction process of USP McCreary, BOP officials and the local press repeatedly quoted the following statistics: the prison would house approximately 1,300 “inmates” and require approximately 400-426 employees (or, as it is advertised in some communities even more explicitly, “one job for every three inmates”), and 60 percent of 400-plus staff would be new hires.

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194 Ibid.
But not until over a year after the construction had begun did it become clear what the federal job requirements were for becoming a new hire.

On October 30, 2001, the newspaper published a front-page article with a full-page aerial photograph of the construction site, titled “Prison construction 72 percent complete.” As the article reported, “Now that construction on the new $120 million federal penitentiary in McCreary County is nearly three-quarters complete, federal officials are launching a search for potential employees and vendors…. To prepare for the October 2002 opening, officials with the U.S. Department of Justice’s Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is hosting two seminars for those interested in either working at, or servicing, the new facility.” The first “job information seminar” was held in the McCreary Central High School auditorium on November 6, 2001, 6 to 8 p.m.196

And for the first time, the needed qualifications for receiving the cash prize of a job paying “$37,000 a year with full federal benefits,” became discouragingly apparent. All applicants would be drug-tested and put through an extensive background check that would go back seven years or to their 16th birthday. All new hires would have to have a perfectly clean credit history and no criminal record. All new hires would have to be younger than 37 years of age (mandated by the law requiring retirement at age 57, and the BOP’s policy of 20 years of service for earning retirement benefits). There would be a rigorous physical exam, an interview process, and a required out-of-state training program. County residents would be given no

preference in the hiring process, and a college degree and previous institutional experience was “highly recommended.” The only citizens given preferential status during the application process would be U.S. Armed Services veterans.¹⁹⁷

In short, it was a list of requirements that automatically eliminated the overwhelming majority of the county’s unemployed and underemployed population. The most concerning requirement for many residents was the drug test. Eastern Kentucky has one of the highest rates of prescription and illegal drug abuse in the nation. It is considered one of the epicenters of the nation’s growing prescription pill epidemic, fueling a massive informal economy of domestic prescription drug trafficking across state lines throughout the country. In 2009 the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) reported that legal opioid painkillers presently cause more overdose deaths a year than the highly criminalized drugs of cocaine and heroin combined. And Kentucky leads the nation in prescription drug use for non-medical purposes. In 2008 alone there were 485 reported deaths in Kentucky from prescription drug overdoses.¹⁹⁸ Kentucky also has one of the highest rates of illegal drug abuse in the U.S., principally in the form of methamphetamines. Between 1998 and 2004, the number of meth labs discovered in Kentucky increased from 19 to 579. In 2006, the state was ranked as having 3rd highest number of meth labs nationwide.¹⁹⁹

Many trace the root of the region’s staggering rates of prescription abuse to a history of workers’ lack of protection in the mining industry, and a lack of adequate healthcare in the region. As Appalachian activist and scholar Rich Kirby describes,

Now that the union is a thing of the past, and workers have no protection, they can be fired for any reason or no reason; getting hurt would be a good way to lose your job. Someone facing that prospect could take a pill and keep working ... It’s more complicated than that, of course. When I first came to eastern Kentucky as an adult in 1970 and was working with Eula Hall at what became the Mud Creek Clinic, it seemed that every third person was doped up on "nerve pills." I think that doctors were prescribing them for anything or everything or nothing at all, as a way to "treat" a lot of people in a short time. Many, many people had Medicaid for which there was a set fee per patient, so seeing a lot of people in a short time = big bucks, more so as some of the doctors owned pharmacies. That's still going on.¹⁰⁰

This complex and continuing pattern, compounded with decades of structural unemployment and poverty has caused the region’s drug epidemic to reach new, catastrophic proportions in recent years. A 2009 report released by Kentucky’s Justice and Public Safety Cabinet revealed that since 2005, the number of prescriptions dispensed per resident rose in 118 of the state’s 120 counties.

And counties in the rural, eastern coalfield region of the state have been hit the hardest of all. In Whitley County, Kentucky, between 2005-2007 the number of Oxycodone prescriptions rose from 13,971 to 20,388 – a nearly 45% increase in two years. By 2007 Whitley County had the highest percentage of residents with Xanax and Oxycodone prescriptions in the state. For the 38,000 residents in the county, the study reported that 152,000 prescriptions for controlled substances were issued – an average of more than four prescriptions per person. Whitley County is in the southeast corner of the state, directly adjacent to McCreary County to the east. Laurel

¹⁰⁰ Rich Kirby, email exchange with the author, October 2009.
County borders McCreary County to the north, and in 2005 was ranked as one of the top ten counties in the state with the highest number of meth labs. McCreary County is dead center in an area battling astounding rates of drug abuse.\textsuperscript{201}

And passing the drug test was only a part of the background check. Potential applicants had to have a spotless credit history, the assumption being that people with a history of credit debt are more likely to accept bribes from those who are incarcerated.\textsuperscript{202} But in a county where over a third of the population was living below the poverty line, credit debt was hardly uncommon. Furthermore, eastern Kentucky has one of the nation’s lowest levels of educational achievement. According to the 2000 Bureau of the Census, only 52.6% of the population in McCreary County had a high school Diploma or higher, compared to the national average of 80.4%, and only 6.7% had a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, compared to the national average of 24.4%.\textsuperscript{203} And almost no one had the “previous institutional experience” of working in a prison.

In sum, the BOP had picked a county with one of the highest rates of poverty and drug abuse, and lowest levels of educational attainment in the nation; the collective population of McCreary County could not have been less qualified for the federal jobs. Yet while this was all news to the majority of the county’s population, it was not news to the BOP. In fact, included in the Final Environmental Impact Statement necessary for the federal approval of the prison was a chapter titled

\textsuperscript{201} Potter, "Prescription Drug Abuse Ravages a State's Youth: Kentucky Officials See an ‘Epidemic’: Officials Say Drugs Coming from Florida." Sulfridge, "Prescription Pills at the Root of Wpd’s Work Load."
\textsuperscript{202} Ronnie Hickman (staff writer for the Mountain Citizen), in discussion with the author, July 2010.
\textsuperscript{203} U.S. Bureau of the Census, McCreary County Kentucky, Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights.
“Community and Regional Characteristics,” with charts of the county’s unemployment trends and per capita income 1970-1990, comprised of data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Although McCreary County residents did not know what the job requirements were until very late in the process, The BOP knew of their lack of their qualification for them from the very beginning.

And so they covered their tracks. In the first public hearing on the proposal, right after David J. Dorworth, Chief of the Site Selection & Environmental Review Branch of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, gave his opening statement ending with the line, “there will also be substantial job creation as a result of the opening of the facility,” he went on to explain,

The Bureau of Prisons will bring in about 40% of those positions, and the reason we do that is we don’t like to open prisons with new or inexperienced people. We prefer to have people that know what they’re doing, especially when you’re operating a high security facility like we’re proposing here. That leaves the balance, 60%, for local people to compete for. And I don’t want to mislead anyone by implying or suggesting that there’s a guarantee that the 60% of those jobs will got to people within the region or commuting area of within the county. The number of jobs will be a function of the readiness of the community to compete for those particular jobs.204

So while Dorworth made it clear at the very first public hearing that community members would have to compete for the approximately 240 jobs that would be new hires, he did not say was what the terms of the competition would be. And so the prison was proposed – as a federal jobs creation program with no guarantee of jobs. Hiring began early in 2003. Ten months later, by the end of October, only 40 of the

204 United States Penitentiary, Mccreary County, Kentucky: Final Environmental Impact Statement, II 8.
new hires were from the “local area,” a region that extended far beyond the borders of McCreary County.  

Opening Day

On April 6, 2004, Federal Bureau of Prisons Director Harley Lappin traveled from Washington, D.C. to McCreary County, to cut the ribbon, alongside Congressman Hal Rogers, in the official Dedication Ceremony for the completed USP-McCreary. During the construction phase of the prison, the cost of the project increased from $100 million to $130 million, and the number of prison beds in the new facility increased from the initial prediction of 1,300 to 1,536. As Lappin told the crowd of community members at the event, “we look forward to working with you into the next century.” As Jim Johnson, chairman of the local steering committee for USP-McCreary, stated, “From the very beginning, the prison has been a symbol of hope and opportunity for McCreary County. Did we want the prison here? You bet we did. Are we happy to see it open? You bet we are. The best is yet to come as more citizens are hired and our businesses are able to sell more goods.” And as Congressman Hal Rogers summarized, “A lot of communities don’t want a prison but obviously there was interest [here], this community and this county were hungry for jobs. All of last century, we lost population. We saw economic deterioration take place. With the 2000 census, for the first time in around 100 years, we’re gaining

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population… We’re keeping young people here. We’re seeing a whole new middle
class develop where one has been absent.”

What Congressmen Rogers did not say was that a part of the reason that the
population of eastern Kentucky increased on the 2000 census was because of the
thousands of people from all over the country caged within the region’s newest prison
cells – and that it was these invisible, incarcerated bodies that would hypothetically
enable “a whole new middle class” to “develop” in McCreary County. And again,
although this was never said out loud, it was written down in the U.S. Department of
Justice, Federal Bureau of Prison’s Final Environmental Impact statement. As the
document reads in Chapter IV, “Environmental Consequences: Impacts and
Mitigations,” section B., “Community and Regional Characteristics,” subheading 2,
“Demographic Characteristics,” letter d., “Addition of Inmates to the Resident
Population,”

Inmates are considered residents of the area in which they are housed and are
counted as such by the U.S. Census. Available evidence indicates that,
generally, families of inmates do not relocate to the area of incarceration upon
release; rather, inmates return to their home communities. Therefore, the
direct impact of the inmates upon population totals is limited to the number
actually housed in the facility.

As Guinier and Torres document the repercussions of this federal policy, “Not only
do federal funds now go to communities that once shunned prisons, but political clout
travels in that direction as well. Although they cannot vote, the bodies of these Black

206 Janie Slaven,”Pine Knot Penitentiary Dedicated, Inmates Will Arrive Soon,” McCreary County
Record, April 4 2004.
207 United States Penitentiary, McCreary County, Kentucky: Final Environmental Impact Statement, I
and Latino inmates are counted in the redistricting process, which is based solely on census enumeration, to enhance the political power of these districts.”

And so it was that the physical presence and conceptual erasure of these incarcerated bodies became necessary on every level for the “progress” of McCreary County “into the next century”: to bring in new jobs, support local businesses, increase real estate values, improve the educational system, build new infrastructure, create “a whole new middle class,” increase the region’s political leverage in the democratic process and, lastly, to disappear upon release.

Mountain Citizen, April 8 2002.

Cooperation
The Key To Progress!

DR. LON LAFFERTY AND CONGRESSMAN HAL ROGERS!
The perfect team for Martin County’s future!

209 Mountain Citizen, April 8 2002.
Chapter Four
When the prisoners work, so does the system

Starting in July of 2004, 1,536 people from all over the country were shipped to McCreary County and disappeared behind the concrete walls of USP-McCreary.

In August of 2009, five years after the opening of USP-McCreary, I traveled to Whitley City, the county seat McCreary, curious to hear what local citizens thought about the prison since its construction. What was also not said at the dedication ceremony was what the final count was for how many McCreary County residents had been hired to work at the prison, or how many local businesses had signed contracts with the prison. Rather, as steering committee chairman Jim Johnson assured the community, “the best is yet to come as more citizens are hired and our businesses are able to sell more goods.” And so I wanted to know. Had the promised progress come?

1. Economic Characteristics
   a. Types of Economic Impacts

One of the first things I heard repeated again and again was the small number of jobs held by local residents. As Paula Vann, a newspaper reporter for the McCreary County Record told me straightforwardly, “The economic impact so far hasn’t been all that great…. ‘Cause when they first came in we had very few people that were qualified to work for the Bureau of Prisons.”

Beth Gibson, secretary for

210 Paula Vann (staff writer, McCreary County Record), in discussion with the author, August 2009.
the *McCreary County Record* echoed Vann’s assessment, explaining, “There was a lot that couldn’t get the job because of the requirements, cause they’re stiff requirements when you work in the prison system. It’s a stiff application. I think people were frustrated when they found out how hard it was to get a job.”

And when I asked Nina Bradley, manager of a restaurant and coffee shop on Main St., how many McCreary residents did she think did get jobs at the prison, Bradley explained,

> Well I don’t know, I couldn’t say for sure, but I know that’s it’s not very many. It’s not very many at all. And I did even know several people who were qualified to get jobs at the prison and have not been able to. They didn’t get preference. Because people who already work for the federal government, who are already established in a prison somewhere else, chose to transfer here and work in the prison here.

Not only were the vast majority of the positions filled by transfers from other states, but also, these transfers took the highest paid positions. Like many federal institutions, many employees were offered higher salaries if they transferred to the new facility, and so almost all of the highest paying, supervisory positions went to the BOP’s longtime employees. Furthermore, most these transfers did not choose to live in McCreary County. As Gibson elaborated, “I can name ten people [from McCreary County] that got a job. Most of them [transfers] go to Williamsburg, Somerset, Russell Springs, and live there.”

Even the McCreary County Judge-Executive voiced his disappointment. Blaine Phillips replaced Jimmie Greene as McCreary County Judge-Executive, taking office in January of 2003. As Phillips recalled, “one of my first official duties was

211 Beth Gibson (secretary, McCreary County Record), in discussion with the author, August 2009.
212 Nina Bradley (manager, Macciato Coffee Shop), in discussion with the author, August 2009.
213 Gibson, discussion.
the grand opening of the prison, they had just finished the construction of it.” The front page picture in the newspaper on the day following the dedication ceremony of USP-McCreary shows Blaine Phillips standing shoulder to shoulder with steering committee chairman Jim Johnson and Congressman Hal Rogers, smiling at the photographers as they cut the ribbon for the new prison. But five years later, Phillips spoke candidly about the minimal impact the prison has had. As he explained, “of the 300 and something employees that work at the prison, I don’t think we have over 25 or thirty local people that are working there. And the others, they don’t even live here. They drive from Pulaski County and Whitley County, they don’t chose to live here. It was not what they were telling us at first.”

In such a way, as Phillips and Bradley both articulated, not only did the prison fail to provide individual county residents with jobs; it had barely any second-tier economic impact in the county. As Bradley further explained,

They thought it would generate a lot of money for the county and I didn’t think that it would, because we’re just really small, and we’re poor, and I assumed that people from other states would not want to live in such a rural area, and that they would move into a county close by with more to offer, and that’s what’s happened. I’d say that at least 80% of the positions have been filled by people not from the area. There’s a lady who frequents the shop here and she comes in a lot, and she’s from Seattle, her husband works at the prison, and they moved here from Washington and they’re just one of the very few that actually bought a home and live in McCreary County. They moved mostly I think to Pulaski County. There’s a lot of them who park at one of the big Baptist churches up there in Pulaski county right of the highway, I see there cars sitting there all the time, and I know that they are bused or vaned to the prison, so they don’t even have to drive to McCreary County, they can get a ride. They come to their job, they work, and they go back to Pulaski County. We don’t see them around town….

214 Blaine Phillips (McCreary County Judge-Executive), in discussion with the author, August 2009.
And another thing is, the federal government doesn’t pay taxes. So the property they built that prison on used to have a tax base. As soon as they built the prison – no more taxes. And of course our county has a really small tax base anyways. So it took a big chunk out of our land tax base. It really did not generate as much money for the county and for the local businesses as they let on like it would when they first told us about it. Most of the jobs that are higher up are transfers. The beginning jobs, correctional officers, are the ones that open up.  

And as Phillips reiterated,

And then really too, it’s not turned around the economy as you would think. The people, at first they’ll entice you and say that you know, motels will fill up whenever there’s people coming to visit or that people will move closer – that’s not the case. It’s such a confined thing, that’s not really the case. So it’s really not had the economic impact that we thought it would have. And another thing too, it’s tax exemptible. There’s no federal dollars on it - There’s no taxes that they pay on the facility at all! And they took 300 or 400 acres from a private person who was paying county property taxes on it, and we don’t even receive that on it….  

It is a confined area. They have their food there, they have their medical field there. They have just everything within the area, so you don’t have much of an input out into the area…. And honestly we’ve had about three or four wardens since I’ve been in office. The wardens don’t last a long time down there…. Let me tell you, for the economical impact of it, it’s not been what I fully expected….  

Because transferring BOP employees took the majority of the positions, including almost all of the highest paid positions (every single one of the four prison Wardens in the past five years was from outside of the county), and did not chose to live in the county, USP-McCreary had barely any primary or secondary economic impact on the county. These employees did not buy local real estate, did not spend their salaries at local businesses, and did not put their children in the McCreary County school system. Rather, they chose to live in the nearby cities that had “more to offer.” As Gibson explained, “Most of them go to Williamsburg, Somerset, Russell Springs, and

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215 Bradley, discussion.
216 Phillips, discussion.
live there.” Williamsburg is the largest city in neighboring Whitley County. Somerset is the largest city in neighboring Pulaski County. Russell Springs is the largest city in nearby Russell County. And so the BOP workers are commuters, driving in to work from the highway systems surrounding the county, coming and going often at the irregular hours of nighttime or midday shift changes, having virtually no interaction with the local community at all. In fact, as Bradley explained, the pattern of commuting was so standard that “they are bused or vaned to the prison, so they don’t even have to drive to McCreary County, they can get a ride.” Due to a lack of public transportation to McCreary County, a private bus service was organized to help the workers make the long trek to and from the prison each day.

As Bradley summarized, “They come to their job, they work, and they go back to Pulaski County. We don’t see them around town.” If anyone were to see them around town, it would be Nina Bradley. Bradley’s restaurant coffee shop, the only one in Whitley City, is located in the middle of Main St., right across the street from the McCreary County Courthouse. Bradley clearly knows the county inside and out, and notices newcomers. I say this because she immediately noticed me. The minute I walked into the coffee shop and ordered a cup of coffee, she asked me why I was there. As she explained to me, “I’m sorry to be nosy, I’m just curious why you’re here. We don’t see a lot of outsiders around here.” And so our conversation began.

Furthermore, as both Bradley and Phillips explained with frustration, the federal government does not pay local taxes. As Phillips expressed, “a lot of people felt like they should have used their own federal lands for it, but they did chose to buy
private lands.” Although 80% of McCreary County is forestland, and the majority of that land is federally owned, the government chose to buy the private Ross family farm for the prison site, and thus the county receives no more property taxes from the land. And as far as supplier contracts went, as Phillips explained, “It is a confined area. They have their food there, they have their medical field there. They have just everything within the area, so you don’t have much of an input out into the area.” The BOP did not sign contracts with local businesses. Rather, it contracted with major nationwide corporations. Finally, as Phillips stated, “they’ll entice you and say that you know, motels will fill up whenever there’s people coming to visit or that people will move closer – that’s not the case.” This is particular sort of “enticement,” I heard echoed many times by hopeful Letcher county officials as well, and demands its own analysis.

2. Demographic Characteristics
   d. Addition of Inmates to the Resident Population

   As James Wiley Craft, the Mayor of Whitesburg, the county seat of Letcher, explained to me what he though the prison would do for the community,

   Oh, the pay and the jobs it will create, it just, it will have an untold economic. As well as an increase in the population of the county, and all the things that will come with that. There will also, I think, be another motel for the families that come in to visit the inmates, so I think the impact is just gonna be fantastic... All those people will have to buy food here, and buy gas here….”

217 James Wiley Craft (Mayor of Whitesburg, Kentucky), in discussion with the author, July 2008.
And so the families of incarcerated persons are reduced to potential economic assets for the county in exactly the same terms that incarcerated persons are.

Originally many residents worried not only about bringing in “inmates,” but also, in the words of R.C. Day of Letcher County, “the kinds of families that those inmates would have.”218 As Beth Gibson recalled of the atmosphere in McCreary County surrounding the proposal, “There was a lot of negativity. They was worried about bringing negative people into the community because they were families of prisoners, and they thought that because they was families of prisoners that made them bad people also.”219 And as Nina Bradley confirmed, “There was a lot of folks that was against it because they thought that families of prisoners would be coming in, and that they wouldn’t be… they thought the crime rate would go up. There was a lot of people afraid of that.”220 Such comments underline how throughout the public discourse the family members of incarcerated persons were criminalized, as crime was articulated as biological and thus hereditary. But, as Judge Phillips explained, “At first the public opinions swayed, you know, they didn’t know if they wanted it or not. But we were enticed by the economic part of it, the job opportunity part of it, so of course that weighed out, and so they motioned it to go ahead and have the prison here.”221 Once their presence became rationalized as having a potential positive economic impact on the local economy, “that weighed out,” and their inherent criminality, while still assumed, became tolerable.

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218 R.C. Day (retired postmaster of Whitesburg, Kentucky), in discussion with the author, July 2008.
219 Gibson, discussion.
220 Bradley, discussion.
221 Phillips, discussion.
This represents yet another paradox in how the BOP presents prisons to majority-white rural communities. As Rev. Elwood Cornett, co-chairman of the Letcher County Planning commission explained to me, “our research indicates that the families of those in the prison do not move to the community.”222 Most of their research comes from the BOP itself. And indeed, the BOP does publicly makes this claim. As previously quoted, the EIS for USP-McCreary reads, “available evidence indicates that, generally, families of inmates do not relocate to the area of incarceration….” In such terms, BOP officials are quick to assure community leaders that the families of incarcerated people won’t relocate, conscious that this is a major point of opposition to the prison. But at the same time, as Phillips explained, “they’ll entice you and say that you know, motels will fill up whenever there’s people coming to visit or that people will move closer.” And so, in trying to simultaneously convince community leaders that visiting family members will have absolutely no presence in the community, but will spend lots of money in the community, they completely contradict themselves. But again, community leaders desperate for economic development often do not interrogate the contradiction. Rather, local elites assure the community that “bad people” won’t move in, but they will “buy gas.” And so, just like the incarcerated persons themselves, both the physical presence and conceptual erasure of these visiting families is a fundamental component of how prisons are promoted in Central Appalachian communities. Although they exist outside of the prison’s walls, these families must also be invisibilized, dehumanized and criminalized in the public discourse.

222 Cornett, discussion.
And tragically, what the BOP reports for the most part it is true: family members rarely visit or move to the rural places where their loved ones are incarcerated, especially in Central Appalachia. But what the EIS document does not state is the reason that these families don’t have more of a presence in rural prison-hosting counties. While the BOP may set up a private transportation service to get workers to the prison, the same service does not exist for families. And since there is no public transportation to the McCrea County, let alone to the prison itself, the only way to get there is by private vehicle. And because the massive build up of prisons in rural America insures that the U.S. Department of Justice will repeatedly break its own policy stating that people will be incarcerated within 500 miles of their place of residence at arrest, often these families are hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away. They simply can’t afford to get there. And furthermore, since people are transferred through the system so frequently, it is very rare that the families move to where their loved ones are incarcerated, because at any moment that person could be moved across the country.

One would perhaps assume that the BOP would not want to advertise the fact that it routinely breaks its own policy and separates people from their families and home communities by hundreds, if not thousands, of miles. But in fact, in the process of site selection, this injustice is highlighted in order to make rural communities feel more comfortable with the idea of having a prison come to town. I believe this reality further underlines how the U.S. prison regime functions by categorizing incarcerated people, and particularly incarcerated black men who embody the archetypal criminal in U.S. society, as not fully human, in that the logic of the system actively prevents
them from maintaining the family and community ties that are a basic necessity for human survival, and then promotes this arrangement to naturalize the project of prison expansion to majority-white rural communities.

While such a structure creates an obvious crisis for family members needing to see their loved ones, as Judge Phillips explained, it also didn’t benefit McCreary County. Essentially, McCreary County was so poor that it was hoping that these visiting families would help support its local businesses. But many of these families are so poor and so far away that they cannot even get to McCreary County in the first place, let alone spend money there.

B. Community and Regional Characteristics
5. Community Services and Facilities

Judge Phillips’ frustration with the prison did not end with this list of unfulfilled economic promises. Just three months before the opening dedication of the prison on April 6, 2004, the county budget was about to go completely broke. As the newspaper reported on December 30, 2003,

As Judge-Executive Blaine Phillips finishes his first year in office, the county is on the brink of several changes. On one hand, the Phillips administration is working toward improvements such as the construction of an industrial park, extension of water lines into outlying communities and expansion of the public sewer system. But the addition of new services and maintenance of existing ones is still hindered by a problem that has always plagued the county – money, or lack of it. One option that appears to be gaining momentum is the implementation of a one percent occupational tax. Phillips estimates that the county can get through March all right if spending continues as is but will
be completely broke by May – a month shy of the fiscal year’s end on June 30 – unless some way is found to generate more funds.223

Because the goal of the new multi-million dollar county infrastructure projects was to get services to the prison, they did not provide public water and sewage lines to all households in the county. Furthermore Phillips was unable to continue extending these services because, once the needs of the prison had been met, there was no more money. In fact, the county budget was so broke that the only thing Phillips could do was to propose the institution of a one percent occupational payroll tax for all workers in the county. The budget had already been cut by $100,000 compared to the previous year’s budget, and Phillips was worried that they would have to start cutting basic services. As he was quoted in the paper at the time, “No one wants to deal with the word TAX but sometimes it’s a necessity. If we want a better ambulance service and a better jail, I think our magistrates need to look at a payroll tax. In our role as public servants, if the money is not there, we’ll have to cut services out or find a way to fund them.”224 And the only way Phillips could find to fund them was to tax McCreary Countians, 32.2% of whom were living below the poverty line in 2000.225

As the article continued, “Judge Phillips intends to propose a payroll tax taking one cent out of every dollar earned in McCreary County. According to the Kentucky Department for Local Government, wages earned in McCreary County for 2002 totaled $63,272,000 – which would have generated $632,720 for the county had an occupational tax been in place.” In order to gain support for the proposal, Phillips

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224 Ibid.
225 U.S. Bureau of the Census, McCreary County Kentucky, Census 2000 Demographic Profile Highlights.
outlined exactly how the predicted $632,720 in revenue would be spent: on improving roads, extending public water and sewage lines, funding the local ambulance service, improving the conditions of the county jail, creating a new county park, searching for future economic development projects, paying the salary for an administrator of the tax, and funding senior citizen and youth activities.226

Incredibly, in the very same newspaper issue, December 30, 2003, there was an article announcing that Congressman Rogers had just secured “$163 million in funding for law enforcement and economic development efforts in southern and eastern Kentucky,” in the fiscal year 2004 Omnibus Appropriations bill, which had just been approved by the U.S. House of Representatives the previous week. And $42 million of the total was set aside just for McCreary County – but solely for the operation of USP-McCreary. Furthermore, the article outlined how another $32 million of the total was secured specifically for the “continued operations” of the Federal Corrections Institution in Manchester, the new federal prison in Clay County, Kentucky. Thus, of the total $163 million that Rogers secured in Congress for improving eastern Kentucky, 45% of the funds were allocated for operating prisons.227

And so, as the county budget teetered on the brink of bankruptcy, still unable to provide basic water and sewage services to all of its residents, all of the federal funds earmarked specifically for development in McCreary County were channeled exclusively towards operating the prison, which has virtually no economic impact on

226 Slaven, "Judge Considers Payroll Tax."
227 "Rogers Secures Funding for USP-McCreary," McCreary County Record, December 30 2003.
the County. The $42 million that Rogers had set aside for the operation of USP-McCreary was over 66 times greater than the $632,720 Phillips hoped to collect from McCreary County residents to fund the basic services necessary to keep their county afloat for one more year.

Phillips’ last resort proposal was highly controversial, and sparked a four-month long heated debate in the community. And ironically, the citizens most adamantly opposed to the new tax were the BOP employees and union members who had just transferred to the region to work in USP-McCreary, but chose not live within the county limits. The fiscal court officially approved the payroll tax on Tuesday, April 13, 2004 – exactly one week after the official dedication ceremony of USP-McCreary on Tuesday, April 6. As the local paper reported,

A four-month battle ended Tuesday with final approval of the occupational tax squeaking into law with a 3-2 fiscal court vote. The oft-times heated discussion leading up to the vote was marked by the presence of some two dozen federal penitentiary employees who expressed their opposition to the proposed tax. Fred Frandle, a union leader at USP-McCreary, got things rolling by stating the union’s belief that the tax is anti-business. And as Phillips explained to me five years later, not only was passing the tax a battle against the BOP workers, but it remains an ongoing struggle to collect the tax from them. As he explained,

The [BOP] employees do not want to pay the local occupational tax. And according to them they do not have to pay the local occupational tax because there’s not 500 of them. And so, we have an ordinance that they have to come in once a year to pay this, well I don’t think all of them do. And there’s a heavy turnover of employees there. I think they have maybe a 6-month no tolerance, you can come in and we hire you, and if there’s something wrong

228 Janie Slaven, "Split Court Passes 1% Payroll Tax; Taxpayers Will Begin Paying July 1," McCreary County Record, April 20 2004.
within one month you are gone. And so there’s no way that the county can receive anything [from those months of their] pay wages….

The prison does not like that [occupational tax]. They do not want to pay local taxes at all, to be honest…. Our prison workers that do come in in February – our ordinance says that they must come in in February to pay their occupational tax – they will argue that if they took a three-week vacation, or they were away, they don’t want to pay it for those weeks, and so, there’s been some problems with it. Our occupational tax collector will tell you how much their employees have fought paying that. It’s been a struggle…. If you work with our school system or our other employers, they have to pay it. And these people don’t….

They get out of it because they do not automatically take it from their salary. Their policy is that they do not automatically deduct it. If you had five hundred federal employers they would automatically deduct it. But they do not here. Nor do they in Manchester, nor do they in any other facility that I’m aware of, unless they have the 500, and most of them do not…. and I cannot tell you just how many they have working there, but I do know for a fact that they do not all pay it. And it is a complete struggle. And I actually want to turn it over to the county attorney to help us collect it from some of them.229

While the occupational tax is automatically taken from the paycheck of city and county employees, it is not automatically deducted from the BOP employees’ paychecks, because of a federal policy requiring that in order for this to happen there must be at least 500 federal workers within the county limits. So it is left up to the BOP employees to come in to the McCreary County courthouse once a year in February to file the taxes, in one lump sum from their annual salary. Yet because BOP employees constantly relocate to different facilities throughout the nation, if they work at the prison for any amount of time within a year but then leave before February, it is entirely left up to Stephanie Tucker, McCreary County’s sole occupational tax collector, to track them down. But not only is it nearly impossible to find BOP employees once they have left the county, even getting them to file their taxes while they are still at USP-McCreary is, as Phillips explained, a “complete

229 Phillips, discussion.
struggle.” To make sure I understood just how difficult this has been for the county, Phillips insisted that I go down to the basement of the McCreary County Courthouse, to Tucker’s office, to hear her explanation of the process. And so I went downstairs and asked Tucker, what has been your experience with collecting the occupational tax from the workers at USP-McCreary?

It’s been very difficult. It was a big fight before I was ever hired. The fiscal court had to go through all the motions of discussing it, you know deciding if they wanted to put it into action. And the prison was just coming in at that time, and there was plenty of workers over there, being transported in from other states, and they were in uproar over it, and coming in and complaining about it, at that time, before it was ever even implemented. So they were hot before it ever got started.

And once it was, I was in office, and they had to come in and do what they had to do, then I started taking the heat. You know, it transferred from fiscal court and all of them to me. They wanted to, I guess, continue complaining, and I was just the scapegoat. They would come in and say things like, unfair taxation, get up on a soapbox and go on…. The first year I was new, didn’t know how I wanted to do all this, I left my door open, and this office was completely full, two hundred people at any given time, standing all in here and all out in the hall, all day long, and they had a field day. I should’ve left the door shut. Because in a crowd people are braver, they’ll voice they’re opinion easier. And so I shut the door, and that upset them. I had a sign on my door that I’d printed that said “Occupational Tax.” The sign ended up being written on with some foul stuff. And I thought that was just, uncalled for.230

The initial opposition to the tax on behalf of the BOP transfer employees was so intense that it verged on a riot in the basement of the McCreary County Courthouse. Furthermore, as Tucker estimated, annually at least a third of the prison workers never pay the tax or are late. And once they are gone (and many workers routinely transfer every three years in order to get a pay raises), the only way Tucker can reach them, short of contacting the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Prisons

230 Stephanie Tucker (occupational tax collector, McCreary County), in discussion with the author, August 2009.
in Washington, D.C., is by getting their information from the prison employees that are still working at USP-McCreary, the majority of whom are strongly opposed to the local tax. As Tucker explained,

It’s difficult because of confidentiality, and the government, especially for Bureau of Prisons workers, they don’t give out addresses freely. So they send me the list of names and I can only contact them through their place of employment.... In this past year 150 of the 350 did not file their occupational taxes on time. It changes from year to year because they have a lot of turnover. Because many employees, to get their pay raises, they transfer every three years. And that’s another problem for me, is they might be there for three years and the they’re gone in the middle of the year and then I don’t hear from them, I send all the paperwork to their last address and it comes back to me, and I have no way of contacting them or finding them.... They could work up till July, and then be transferred to another prison facility, and just disappear....

Furthermore, Stephanie Tucker’s salary comes entirely from the revenue of occupational tax. So while the majority of the revenue, and thus Tucker’s paycheck, comes from McCreary County workers, the majority of Tucker’s time is spent trying to get BOP federal workers to pay the tax. When I asked Tucker, how much of your work here is taken up by trying to get the tax from the prison employees? She replied, “Well I would say that’s the biggest part of it. I mean that’s probably the most time consuming part.” So not only does USP-McCreary not pay what it owes to the county in terms of local taxes, but it is costing McCreary Countians a significant amount of money to pay Stephanie Tucker to try to get it. And the reason that Tucker must spend enormous amounts of time seeking out payments from each individual federal employee is because McCreary County is so small that it has never had 500

\[\text{IIbid.}\]
federal positions, the required number for the tax to be automatically deducted from workers’ paychecks.

Stephanie Tucker’s solitary uphill battle in the basement of the McCreary County Courthouse reveals much of the economic reality of how the paradigm of prisons-as-poverty-reform actually functions for rural communities in Central Appalachia. But furthermore, I believe her struggle emphasizes how a critical geographic analysis of prison expansion must be both micro and macro in scale. As the case in McCreary County shows, while new prisons in eastern Kentucky are not supporting the counties where they are located, they are supporting nearby urban population centers. Thus any economic analysis on the effects of rural prison development must extend beyond specific county limits, because the vast majority of the economic impact flows beyond county borders. In such terms, I argue that federal prison construction in eastern Kentucky must be understood as perpetuating the pattern of regional development first designed by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in the 1960s that increases the extreme economic disparity between urban and rural places in Central Appalachia.

Revisiting the ARC “Growth Center Strategy”

To recall the words of John Sweeney, the first executive director of the ARC, the principle plan of the commission was to “concentrate all of the [ARC] spending for economic development in places where the potential for growth is greatest… ignore the pockets of poverty and unemployment scattered in inaccessible hollows all
over the area… and build a network of roads so that the poor and unemployed can get out of their inaccessible hollows and commute to new jobs in or near the cities.”

And it is this very network of roads along which the majority of the USP-McCreary employees commute to and from work each day. In 1994, the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center released a study outlining how Sweeney’s policy had impacted the region in the past thirty years:

The study revealed that rates of poverty were higher than the national average across eastern Kentucky, but distress was more severe in the ten interior counties than in peripheral counties along Interstates 64 and 75 and in coal-producing counties along the state’s eastern border. The peripheral counties contained growth centers, such as Pikeville, Prestonsburg, Paintsville, Hazard, Harlan, London, Corbin, Richmond, and Winchester, where poverty was high but less pervasive. The group of ten interior counties, stretching from Morgan in the north to McCreary in the south, was overwhelmingly rural and contained some of the highest concentrations of America’s persistently poor people. Although the extremes of poverty had been ameliorated, little had changed on a comparative basis in the counties since the 1960s…. In these poorest of poor communities, only one in three citizens had completed high school, nine out of ten children in female-headed households lived below the poverty level, and 26 percents of residents lived in trailers, compared with 1 percent of people in the state as a whole.

As Eller further summarizes, the study revealed how a major reason that these interior counties remained the “poorest of poor” was because of the ARC’s “growth center strategy,” by which, between 1965-1990, these rural counties “received fewer ARC investments for community development than had their more populous and politically powerful neighbors.” Thus Eller argues that, by the mid-1990s, “Conditions in Kentucky reflected the loss of momentum in the effort to bring economic growth to Appalachia, but they also reflected the mounting disparity between rural places and

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233 Ibid., 214.
urban places and between traditional communities and more modern communities within the region.”

Building from this understanding, while on one hand federal prison expansion in eastern Kentucky is deepening the already acute spatial inequality in the region, I also argue that, due to the very nature of the institution, the model of “development” has shifted. It is no longer that the persistently poorest, more “traditional” places in Appalachian are being ignored by federal and ARC funding. Rather, as the infrastructure projects for USP-McCreary reveal, they are being specifically targeted as places to channel enormous amounts of funding for the astronomically expensive project of building new prisons. Yet because the vast majority of federal and ARC funding for these communities is only going towards building new prisons, these small rural counties are crumbling to pieces right outside of the prisons’ modern, prefabricated concrete walls and razor wire “kill fences.” In creating such a consolidated crisis, this pattern of development also perpetuates Sweeney’s commuter model for the urbanization of Appalachia – except that the commuters are driving along the new regional highway systems in the reverse direction. By systematically locating new prisons in the very “pockets of poverty” that have been both historically exploited by corporate interests and neglected by federal and state funding, the very roads built “so that the poor and unemployed can get out of their inaccessible hollows and commute to new jobs in or near the cities,” serve the opposite purpose. Rather, the vast majority of the poor and unemployed of McCreary County cannot get jobs at

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234 Ibid., 215.
235 USP McCreary is surrounded by electric “kill fences.”
the new prison in their own backyard, while BOP workers commute home each night to the surrounding nearby cities. As Tucker explained, “They have no intentions of ever retiring here, spending their life here, settling down here, they’re just here for a few years, in their opinion they’re just in and out, and they feel like their losing their gross wages. Most of them live fifty to sixty miles away….”\(^{236}\)

While Tucker explained the present situation in McCreary County, Phillips predicted that the pattern would only continue in the years to come. I asked, do you think the prison will become more of an economic support for the community in the future?

Well I personally don’t, and I’ll tell you why. McCreary is a rural county, and that’s why, a lot of these places they seek out rural counties. But it has not been the godsend thing that we thought it would be…. A lot of these people coming in, and they are high paying jobs, 50, 60 70-thousand, and they chose to live in a larger city north of us…. Because they really like the standard of living there better than they do here. The majority of the people will not live in the county. They’ll live in the cities, where there’s malls and activities and things going on. ‘Cause you have people moving here say, from Phoenix, Arizona, and they’re gonna sell there house in Phoenix, Arizona for $200,000.00, and so they’re gonna come to your community, and see what you have and some of them will snub their noses up to it because it’s not up to their standards are, and so I’m sure they would go a nearby city. And it will help the economy in those larger cities because those people will pay property taxes, those people will pay utility taxes, those people will pay city taxes to where they live.\(^{237}\)

Thus in understanding the construction of USP-McCreary as further evidence for Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s explanation of prison expansion as “a geographical solution that purports to solve social problems by extensively and repeatedly removing people

\(^{236}\) Tucker, discussion.
\(^{237}\) Phillips, discussion.
from disordered, deindustrialized milieus and depositing them somewhere else,” I further argue that Phillips’ analysis points to how prison expansion is also intensifying the internal geographic crisis of “somewhere else,” in that it upholds the unequal model for regional development that perpetuates persistent pockets of rural poverty – the very places in Central Appalachia where prisons are built.

*Drugs and Prison Dependency*

Although the exact figure of McCreary residents who got a job at USP-McCreary is unattainable (since opening, USP-McCreary no longer releases any information about its staff, even to the local press), every citizen I spoke with predicted the number as being abysmally low. Most people just weren’t “qualified” for the job. The irony of ineligibility is profound. While the majority of federal convictions are for drug-related crimes, the biggest disqualifier for local residents hoping to get the federal job was not being able to pass the drug test. So, many McCreary Countians were unable to get a job guarding people who had committed drug-related offenses because they were on drugs – yet the most prevalent drugs in McCreary County are both less criminal and more lethal than many of the drugs that land people behind bars. But such a reality is hardly surprising given the history of the United States’ racialized drug laws, and the fact that the users of both Opioid prescription pills and Methamphetamines are predominantly white.

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239 Beth Davies (director, the Pennington Gap Addiction Education Center), in discussion with the author, July 2008.
But for a region already battling a history of drug abuse, as the recent statistics show, the rates of abuse in the area have skyrocketed in the past five years. While the conclusion is nothing new, the University of Kentucky’s Center on Drug and Alcohol Research recently released a comprehensive study concluding that, “Being unemployed… consistently predicted relapse” and furthermore that, “Stable employment interrupts addiction patterns and unemployment has proven to be a stronger predictor of relapse than the severity of a client’s addiction.”

Clearly the stable unemployment of McCreary Countians is a part of the perpetuation of these deadly trends. And it is young people who are the most affected. As Beth Lewis Maze, Chief Circuit Judge for the 21st Judicial Circuit in Kentucky, explained, "It's an epidemic and I'm afraid we're losing a whole generation. These pain medications are so highly addictive that these young people are digging themselves a very deep hole." And in the words of Lynn Kissick, who lost her daughter to an overdose of painkillers in Morehead, Kentucky, "Something needs to be done, because it's killing our kids everyday. People need to stand up and take notice. Our kids are dying. They're dying because of these drugs."

As the fatality rates have risen, so have the criminal convictions. A survey administered by the National Association of Counties revealed that between 2003-2005, Kentucky was one of five states in which meth arrests doubled. And as the Kentucky Justice and Public Safety Cabinet reported in September 2009, the total number of statewide arrests for drug offenses increased 29.8% between 2005 and

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241 Potter, "Prescription Drug Abuse Ravages a State's Youth: Kentucky Officials See an ‘Epidemic’: Officials Say Drugs Coming from Florida."
Although federal prisons in eastern Kentucky are built on the assumption that those inside will be invisible outsiders, increasingly, the people disappearing behind these new prison walls are people from the region. As Trey Narramore, a former Correctional Officer at the Red Onion State Prison in Wise County, Virginia, explained the complexity of being from the area, and assigned the task of guarding both outsiders and insiders, inside:

There was an inmate from our area coming over there, so I asked to be moved – not to work in that in that pod. It was nothing to him, but it was for the situation. It wasn’t just for my protection; it was for his protection too. Because if those other inmates saw that I was buddy buddy with him, who’s to say that they wouldn’t hurt him later?

Not only are prisons externally promoted to rural communities as primarily incarcerating invisible outsiders, but also, in order for the prison to properly function internally, it requires that the people guarding and being guarded are not neighbors – because then they might be friends, or at least, fellow citizens.

Yet the people in the region who suffer consequences from prison expansion are not only the ones with convictions. Beth Davies is the director of the Pennington Gap Addiction Education Center, an outpatient drug rehabilitation center in Pennington Gap, Virginia. Pennington Gap is in Lee County, Virginia, the southwestern most county in the state, in the heart of the Central Appalachian Mountains where the Kentucky and Virginia state borders meet. The United States Penitentiary Lee (USP Lee) opened in Lee County in 2001. Lee County is adjacent

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Wise County, Virginia, home of the Red Onion state prison and the Wallens Ridge state prison. Pennington Gap is surrounded by prisons. As Beth Davies described,

The emotional affects on the officers can be just devastating. And we have had an increase in fact in domestic violence, in broken marriages, and an increase actually, in the drug addiction. And because of my work, I’m privy to a lot of that, and know many of the officers. The emotional scars have been very difficult. 244

As Beth Davies confronts daily, the collateral consequences of incarcerating people extend into communities far beyond prison walls. And as she explained, she has known many correctional officers who developed drug addictions while working at the prison. But in the southwestern corner of Virginia, there is far greater access to prison beds, either to sleep in them or to guard them, then to drug rehabilitation services.

And so, the people inside who have a conviction are not the only ones who have an addiction. As Kristi Kendall detailed regarding her experience at the Otter Creek Correctional Facility in Wheelwright, Kentucky,

I knew guards absolutely were on pills. Some of them would bring them in. There was this one guy there who was so out of his mind on methadone, I mean, he would come in so wasted, and he would be hyped up on something and come and get me and be like, Kristi let’s go clean this! And just like clean and zip around. And I was like, man, you gotta put the cocaine down or something. I mean, damn, I’m not on it, and I can’t keep up with you… There was one guy who would work our dorm at night, and I thought he was on pills, and he would sleep through most of his shift.245

And as Kendall observed, while the majority of convictions are for drug-related crimes, the majority of treatment is drug-related.

244 Davies, discussion.
245 Kendall, discussion.
People are absolutely overmedicated. It’s that way at a lot of prisons. People are zombies. And it’s so sad to see, you know, when they call like this dorm, their time to go to pill call, people who barely move all day will *sprint* to go stand in line to get their pills. It’s like they’re perpetuating that whole addiction.

I went and visited one of my friends recently, and it was – pills, pills, everywhere. And I was just like, in *shock*. I was like, wow, this is really the whole eastern Kentucky experience… Pills, pills, pills everywhere, everywhere. Absolutely everywhere…

And so Kendall articulated the prevalence of drugs “everywhere”: officers being under the influence of drugs while on the job, drugs being brought into the prison illegally by officers, drugs being distributed to incarcerated people as treatment, and drugs being “absolutely everywhere” once she got out.

In such terrifying terms, the omnipresence of drugs must also be understood as contributing to the criminalization of the rural geographies that exist outside of prison walls. In the summer of 2009, a man overdosed at the head of a hollow in Pike County, Kentucky, far back on a small road running up a valley between two mountains. His friends dialed 911, and an ambulance arrived along the main highway. But the ambulance driver waited at the bottom of the small road until a police escort arrived, and only then did the ambulance drive up the hollow to find the man and bring him to the closest hospital in critical condition. Thus the drug epidemic in the “pockets of poverty” of rural Appalachia, like the war on drugs in the “black holes” of urban America, is increasingly criminalizing entire rural communities of poor white people.

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246 Kendall, discussion.
Following Reimann’s hypothesis, such criminalization of marginalized space succeeds in that it fails “in the fight against crime while making it look as if serious crime and thus the real danger to society are the work of the poor.” By making drug use in marginalized geographies hyper-visible and hyper-criminal (although not equally criminal as U.S. drug laws demonstrate), this paradigm does not ask why so many people are using and selling drugs. It does not ask this question because it cannot ask it. Because perhaps the skyrocketing drug trade has to do with the fact that many poor people rely on a criminal, informal economy because of their increasing exclusion from the legal, formal economy that requires their “condition” of poverty. That is to say, this paradigm cannot consider why the canary’s lungs are failing. And thus, as long as this question cannot be asked, it will remain the canary’s own fault. And the majority of federal and state funding will continue to be channeled into expanding the number of police officers and prison beds in America, as opposed to treatment programs and quality healthcare.

Although Central Appalachia has the lowest average life expectancy nationwide, to this day there is no hospital in McCreary County. The federal government spent $130 million to build a 1,536-bed prison “for” the county, yet the largest healthcare facility in McCreary County remains a 60-bed clinic.

Reforming Deviancy

USP-McCreary is just a few miles away from the clinic. Within its walls, under current U.S. laws, all physically able incarcerated persons who do not pose a “security risk” are required to work, either for the government owned corporation Federal Prison Industries, Inc. (FPI), also known as UNICOR, or for the general maintenance and operation of the facility. As Kathleen M. Hawk, the serving Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons, reported to the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Crime in 1996:

Within the Bureau of Prisons, all sentenced inmates who are medically able are required to work. While most of these inmates perform work necessary to operate and maintain the prisons, approximately one-quarter of them, one-quarter of the sentenced inmates, work in Federal Prison Industries.

The Federal Prison Industries work program replaces idleness with very meaningful, constructive work. It contributes directly to the safe management of the crowded prisons we are running. FPI is a program which teaches good work ethics and good job skills, and we also have extensive research that has already proven that FPI improves an inmate’s chances upon release of being crime-free, employed and earning higher wages, and for all of these reasons FPI, in our estimation, is the most valuable correction program that we have within the Bureau of Prisons. Some are concerned about FPI’s expansion, and it is very important to remember that FPI’s growth is driven exclusively by the growth of the Federal inmate population.248

From the time that Hawk made this statement in 1996, to the end of the fiscal year in 2008, the gross annual revenue of UNICOR grew approximately from $459 million to $854.3 million. Yet, as Hawk articulated, this increase in revenue is justified by the fact that it is “driven exclusively by the growth of the Federal inmate population.”

Nationwide, UNICOR has over 100 factories in federal prisons, which produce over

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175 different kinds of goods and services. As compensation for this mandatory labor, the people incarcerated inside of USP-McCreary are paid wages ranging from 23 cents to $1.15 an hour. All persons that have court-ordered “financial obligations” are required to relinquish at least half of their UNICOR wages towards repaying these debts.\textsuperscript{249} As the UNICOR website further explains,

\textit{FPI is, first and foremost, a correctional program. The whole impetus behind Federal Prison Industries is not about business, but instead, about inmate release preparation…. helping offenders acquire the skills necessary to successfully make that transition from prison to law-abiding, contributing members of society. The production of items and provision of services are merely by-products of those efforts.}\textsuperscript{250}

At USP-McCreary, the largest UNICOR position is that of data-entry for governmental agencies.\textsuperscript{251} Yet data-entry is not “meaningful, constructive” work, nor is it a skill, and upon release from USP-McCreary, given their criminal record, all previous UNICOR workers will be permanently disqualified from ever holding a position \textit{at} a government agency. Yet, if they are unable to find work, all previously convicted drug offenders will be banned from receiving any federal financial aid to go back to school. Furthermore, since the passage of PRWORA in 1996, the majority of people released from USP-McCreary face a lifetime ban on cash assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, public housing, Section 8 vouchers, and various other forms of assistance. And against such odds, if they are a parent, as the Sentencing Project reports unless they are able to “maintain stable households,” they will never regain

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\textsuperscript{249} Ibid., 5-6. \\
\textsuperscript{250} ibid. \textit{About FPI Inmate Programs,} UNICOR, http://www.unicor.gov/about/about_fpi_programs/?navlocation=InmateProgram. \\
\textsuperscript{251} Janie Slaven, "1,400 Tour New Penitentiary; Usp to Be Activated in June.," \textit{McCreary County Record}, April 13 2004.
\end{flushright}
custody of their children. Yet their ability to participate in the political process to change any of these policies is severely limited. As Wacquant outlines,

> Convicts are banned from political participation via ‘criminal disenfranchisement’ practiced on a scale and with a vigor unimagined in any other country. All but four members of the Union deny the vote to mentally competent adults held in detention facilities; 39 states forbid convicts placed on probation from exercising their political rights and 32 states also interdict parolees. In 14 states, ex-felons are barred from voting even when they are no longer under criminal justice supervision – for life in ten of these states.

And ultimately, if they have nowhere to go home to and no money, they will have to find a way to get out of McCreary County, Kentucky, because there is no homeless shelter in McCreary County. But there is no public transportation system in McCreary County to get out on. But if any employee or volunteer from USP-McCreary aids them in any way outside of the prison’s walls, they risk losing their job or volunteer status. And so USP-McCreary is justified as a place to reform and rehabilitate “criminal deviants” into the present social order. As the motto of UNICOR proudly explains, when the prisoners work, so does the system.

And it achieves far more than the massive growth of UNICOR’s bottom line. Perhaps it would even be useful to trust UNICOR’s explanation that, “The production of items and provision of services are merely by-products of those efforts.” Indeed, “The whole impetus behind Federal Prison Industries is not about business, but instead, about inmate release preparation.... helping offenders acquire the skills necessary to successfully make that transition from prison to law-abiding,

254 Kendall, discussion.
contributing members of society.”²⁵⁵ Yet in observing the total structural failure of “those efforts” towards individual reform, I argue that, in the words of Loic Wacquant, we must re-consider “those efforts” as fulfilling the “extra-penological function of the criminal justice system as instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups.” In such terms, the immediate corporate profit made from this management is merely a by-product.

Building from Wacquant’s understanding, I further argue that in Central Appalachia we must consider the “extra-penological function of the criminal justice system as instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups” that exist both inside and outside of the prison’s walls. The ethic of individual, localized reform and rehabilitation is failing both McCreary County and all of the people inside of USP-McCreary. And it will continue to fail them, because it is an ideological project that defines progress within the terms of a social and economic order that requires the category of their exclusion. To recall Piven and Cloward’s critique of welfare reform, written in the 1970s,

The key to an understanding of relief-giving is in the functions it serves for the larger economic and political order, for relief is a secondary and supportive institution. Historical evidence suggests that relief arrangements are initiated or expanded during the occasional outbreak of civil disorder produced by mass unemployment, and are then abolished or contracted when political stability is restored.”²⁵⁶

In Chapter 1, I argued that the history of the war on poverty in Appalachia demonstrates this analysis. Half a century later, prisons have replaced welfare as a primary mechanism of “relief-giving” in Central Appalachia. Yet although the

²⁵⁵ “About FPI Inmate Programs.”
²⁵⁶ Piven and Cloward, Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare, xiii.
medium of “relief” has shifted, “the function it serves for the larger economic and political order” remains the same. But, unlike the growing and shrinking welfare rolls of the 1960s and 70s, the number of beds in USP-McCreary will not change. The “peculiar institution” of this particular “relief-arrangement” is intended to be permanent. In such terms, I argue that the symbiosis that exports the metaphorical “black hole” of the urban ghetto/prison to rural majority-white “pockets of poverty,” while catastrophically failing both internal geographies, has so far succeeded in preventing the “outbreak of civil disorder produced by mass unemployment” for two crucial reasons (among many).

How The System Works

The first reason is that prisons are by definition institutions that frame people in opposition. As Kristi Kendall explained the process employed at the Otter Creek Correctional Facility when the Hawaiian women first arrived in eastern Kentucky,

At first they had them completed separated from us. Morning rec they would have one side of the yard and we would have the other, and then at evening rec they would switch, and we would have opposite sides of the yard. And when they took them out to go to the dining room, they would all go as a group, and we weren’t allowed out on the yard. If they caught us trying to communicate with them they yelled at us and all of that. Because they were anticipating this, almost like race war or something. But they were the ones that were causing the division it wasn’t us, because we were so open to meeting them and learning about them, and just meeting these people that were so different from us.257

And so Kendall describes the total racial and geographic segregation that was enforced inside the walls of Otter Creek Correctional Facility – the facility that she was sentenced to for three years to be Corrected. And, as former Correctional officer

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257 Kendall, discussion.
Trey Narramore explained, prisons require the total separation of the categories of the guard and the guarded. As Michelle Brown writes, “Historically, prisoners and prison workers are necessarily divided by power and function. The prison then epitomizes what it is to position people in fundamentally unequal structures.”

Prisons place prisoners against prisoners, and guards against prisoners.

Building from these two premises, and returning to my argument that the prison system functions as “an instrument for the management of dispossessed and dishonored groups” that exist both inside and outside of the prison’s walls, I propose a third division: that prison expansion in Central Appalachia frames the struggles against rural white poverty and the mass incarceration of urban people of color in total opposition and complete geographic isolation. Below is an excerpt from my conversation with Reverend Elwood Cornett, co-chairman of the Letcher County Planning Commission:

SR: If this prison doesn’t end up getting built here, what will the Letcher County Planning Commission work on next?

EC: It would be a real blow if this didn’t happen. We’ve been working on this for a long time. Because of transportation barriers and community barriers, I don’t know what our other options would be. I know these people, and I know what we need.

SR: Do you think that bringing this prison here will be enough to provide all of those things for this community?

EC: Yes, I think that is possible. You see we do not have a diverse economy here. In rural places like this it is hard to have that diversity. Right now coal is the center of our economy, but the coal industry is in trouble – my nephew won’t be able to have a career in coal. We need a new economic engine, a little machine in the middle that will trigger all other kinds of business. And right now we’ve got coal, but it won’t last. We need a new engine to keep everything else running around it – the hospitals, the funeral home, the

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grocery stores, the gas stations, tourism. And I don’t just mean the kind of tourism that is rich folks coming and looking at poor folks. But things like having a theater in town… Yes, I think this prison could provide those things for this community.

SR: Are you worried that it won’t last? A lot of states are shutting down prisons because they are costing too much to keep open, and because drug laws are changing and sentences are being reduced….

EC: That is a worry to me. But when I look around the country, so many of the federal institutions are more than fifty years old. So I think if they were to shut down facilities they would shut down the older facilities first. So as a newer prison, I think this would be more recession proof.

Cornett is a community elder, and he has worked his entire adult life trying to improve Letcher County, Kentucky. But beyond the proposal for the 1,400-bed Federal Correctional Institution Letcher (FCI Letcher), Cornett concedes, “I don’t know what our other options would be.” It is not out of fear or hatred or racism that Cornett hopes that the prison will come to Letcher County and be a new “recession proof” “economic engine.” It is for his nephew. And so, keenly aware of the kinds of development that exploit Appalachian culture, “the kind of tourism that is rich folks coming and looking at poor folks,” the best option presented to the planning commission by the federal government was an “industry” that exploits the very existence of everyone held inside. Thus, in Cornett’s struggle to get his people out of poverty, he needs people from somewhere else to keep going to prison. A somewhere else far away – a place from which Letcher County only exists abstractly, as a far away somewhere else.

Importantly, this division creates yet another division. Prisons divide the rural communities that have been targeted to become prison-host towns. As Cornett warned me in my inquiry, 259

259 Cornett, discussion.
This is not a game to play, or just something to look in to. This is a real situation, and we can’t have someone out there from the outside throw a rock in the gears to keep this from happening.…. It is only divisive if we have people coming in and stirring things up. But we can’t have that, because we must be unified if this is going to happen. I am sorry, I don’t mean to be so mean to such a nice young lady. But you must understand this situation.260

As Cornett advised me, “I know these people, and I know what we need.” And of course Cornett is right, he does know Letcher County better than I do. And it is for precisely this reason that it will do no good for “outsiders” to visibly oppose the possible construction of FCI Letcher in Letcher County. Such actions would only undermine the efforts of the many people in Letcher County who do “understand the situation,” and who are not “from the outside.” Long before I ever came to town, Whitesburg residents Amelia Kirby and Nick Szuberla founded the Holler to the Hood radio show and the Thousand Kites Project, “a community-based performance, web, video and radio project centered on the United States prison system.”261 Just like in McCreary County, the Letcher County Planning Commission requires the illusion of community support for the prison that simply does not exist.

But by the same measure, the citizens of Letcher County cannot be left alone in their battle to oppose the possibility of FCI Letcher. Because as Cornett told me in our interview, as I tried to understand his vision for his community, “You’ve got to understand. The fatality rate is higher in the mines than in the prison industry.”262 When careers are considered by comparing fatality rates, any job is better than no job at all – even if is a job that requires the metaphysical fatality of every single person locked up inside. Without any plausible alternative for positive community

260 Ibid.
262 Cornett, discussion.
development, as the process of prison progress in McCreary County demonstrates, even strong and organized local opposition, if acting alone, is doomed for failure.

In such terms it must be noted that in the ongoing process of promoting the prison to the residents of Letcher County, only one of the two co-chairmen of the commission is visible to the public. It is Elwood Cornett, the Old Regular Baptist minister, a longtime dedicated community activist and religious leader. Cornett is the one I was directed to speak with about the work of the commission, and Cornett is the one who is always quoted in the local press about the latest events regarding the proposal. Reverend Elwood Cornett is the public figurehead of the project. The second co-chairman leading the commission is Don Childers, is one of the richest and most distrusted men in Letcher County.

Don Childers is the president of Childers Oil Inc., a wholesale petroleum-supply business that provides oil to many regional mining and trucking companies. He also owns a chain of 45 convenience stores, and restaurant in Whitesburg. Don Childers is one of the largest employers in Letcher County. But in April of 2009, Childers Oil was put under criminal investigations and faced environmental sanctions and lawsuits for polluting town’s water. On two separate occasions, petroleum spills located as coming from his operation caused such high levels of contaminants in the public water supply that the Whitesburg water plant was forced to shut down twice in four months, leaving more than 7,500 Letcher County residents – as well as all businesses, schools, the county hospital, health clinic and nursing home – without
clean water for days.\textsuperscript{263}

But, although Childers did not respond to the local press regarding the allegations, Childers’ daughter, Missy Childers, contends that the process is, as the \textit{Lexington-Herald Leader} reported, “not necessary - the company was already doing everything the state asked of it, and [Missy Childers] maintains that it is not at fault.” Furthermore, Missy Childers told the newspaper it should be remembered that her father has long been a “political fighter” for the future of Letcher County, and has fought hard against “measures that he saw as harming business in Letcher County.”

In 1999, this effort was demonstrated in his public opposition to the Letcher County Judge-Executive Carroll Smith’s numerous attempts to raise the county minimum wage from $5.15 to $7.50 an hour.\textsuperscript{264} Carroll Smith’s campaign to raise the minimum wage was based on a study conducted by the University of Kentucky in Letcher County, that determined that living wage in Letcher County was $11 an hour. Raising the minimum wage from $5.15 to $7.50 an hour would effectively be raising the minimum wage \textit{to} the poverty line.\textsuperscript{265}

Carroll Smith was the Republican Judge-Executive of Letcher County for thirteen years, from 1993-2006. While Judge, Carroll questioned Childers’ monopolization of the County, and also actively opposed out-of-state gas companies that continue to illegally condemn citizen’s land for drilling purposes, laying down gas lines, roads and wells on private property. Essentially the only thing that Carroll could do to oppose these companies was to prohibit them from crossing county roads

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
with gas lines, which he did, which infuriated out-of-state drilling companies. Thus, in the 2006 election for county judge, several different private companies channeled funds into a counter-campaign to get Carroll Smith out of office. They all supported the campaign of Jim Ward, who ran as the Democratic opponent to Carroll Smith. Before running for Judge-Executive, Jim Ward served as one of the five magistrates on the Letcher County Fiscal Court. Throughout his tenure on the fiscal court, Ward consistently voted against Smith’s efforts to raise the countywide minimum wage to the poverty level.266

In the 2006 election, Democrat Jim Ward received $300,000 in campaign contributions. Republican Carroll Smith received $5,450. The Kentucky Registry of Campaign Finance is required by law to make campaign-funding sources publicly available. Three of the principle sources of funding for Ward’s campaign were Childers Oil Company Inc., the Cumberland Resources Corporation, and the Equitable Resources Corporation (EQT).267

The Cumberland Resources Corporation is a private coal company. At the time of the 2006 election, it was based out of Abingdon, Virginia. Ward received a check from the corporations’ acting senior vice president of operations. Just recently, on March 16, 2010, the Massey Energy Company (MEE) signed a deal to buy Cumberland Resources Corporation for $960 million in cash and stock.268 The Massey Energy Company is the fourth largest coal producer in the United States, and

266 Ibid.
the largest coal operation in Central Appalachia.

The Equitable Resources Corporation (EQT) is a private gas company that has its corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia. It claims to own or maintain the drilling rights of 3.4 million acres of land in the Appalachian basin, and is one of the largest private companies in the new movement towards the massive extraction of gas reserves from the Appalachian coalfields. Jim Ward received a $1,000 contribution from the “Equitable Resources Inc. Political Involvement Committee,” sent from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ward also received six additional “individual” donations of $1,000 from six different EQT employees. This list included David Spigelmyer of Cranberry, Pennsylvania, the Director of Communications at EQT; David Porges of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Vice President of EQT; and Joseph O’Brien of Andover, Massachusetts, the President of EQT.269

Most of all, Jim Ward received donations from himself. Since “individual” donors were limited to contributing $1,000 to the campaign, much of the corporate money was sent directly to Jim Ward, who could then contribute as much as he wanted to his own campaign, thus entirely disguising the actual source of the funds. And so, with a campaign budget over fifty times larger than his opponents’, Ward ran a massive smear campaign from many of the local media outlets in Letcher County. A major tactic of the smear campaign was the claim that because Carroll Smith missed important state meetings, Letcher County lost out on state allocated funding. Furthermore, Ward pledged he would raise the county minimum wage if elected to

269 "Candidate Search Results: Ward, Jim."
The local newspaper, *The Mountain Eagle* wrote an article that set the record straight on Carroll Smith’s time in office. The newspaper article detailed the fact that Carroll Smith had in fact attended every necessary state-funding meeting, and had secured significant state allocations for Letcher County. The article was printed on the front-page of the annual special election edition of the paper, and hit the newspaper stands on Monday, November 6, the day before the election. Jim Ward’s campaign followed the newspaper delivery trucks around the county on the morning of November 6, and at every single location of distribution, Ward’s supporters either bought out *all* the copies of the paper, or somehow got business owners to hide the newspapers in the back of their store. By the middle of the day, the only place Letcher Countians were able to get the local newspaper was at the office of *The Mountain Eagle*, on Main St., in Whitesburg, Kentucky. When Appalshop filmmaker Robert Salyer, who documented the unfolding of events for his forthcoming film *Honest Work*, asked why there were no newspapers at Food City, the largest grocery store in the county, Salyer was informed that employees were “cleaning the newspaper rack.”

And so Democrat Jim Ward defeated Republican Carroll Smith, and presently presides as the Judge-Executive of Letcher County. Carroll Smith returned to work in the coalmines, which is what his occupation had been before becoming the County Judge in 1993. As County Judge-Executive, Jim Ward is the head of the Letcher County Fiscal Court, the main governing body of the county government. And as of

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270 Salyer, "Honest Work."
271 Ibid.
April 2010, the entire Letcher County Fiscal Court was in unanimous support of working with the Letcher County Planning Commission and Congressman Hal Rogers to bring the federal prison to town. And so, in supporting Jim Ward’s election campaign (with significant additional funding from elite outsiders), Don Childers has helped Letcher County most of all. As the newspaper reported in April 2009, “In partnership with U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Somerset, Childers has worked to bring a federal prison to Letcher County to provide more jobs.”

Thus, in observing Don Childers’ life work as an example of neoliberal politics, I find it useful to again employ Jeffrey Reiman’s assertion that, “The fact is that the label “crime” is not used in America to name all or the worst of the actions that cause misery and suffering to Americans. It is reserved primarily for the dangerous actions of the poor.” Childers’ fight for the future of Letcher County is one that depends on keeping poor people in prison, keeping the people in Letcher County poor, and keeping poor people apart. And so, in limiting the definition a “crime,” our country defines exactly who is and who is not a “criminal.” Although Don Childers is unfortunately facing a criminal investigation for massively poisoning the public water supply, Don Childers is not a criminal. Rather, he is a “political fighter” who has spent the last six years funding the fight for a prison.

One of Don Childers’ most loyal supporters, perhaps one of those most supported by Don Childers, is James Wiley Craft, the present Mayor of Whitesburg. Below are the last four questions I asked Mayor Craft in an interview in the summer of 2008:

SR: Why do you think there is so much pressure at this moment in time to build so many more prisons?

JWC: Because we’re continuing to incarcerate people at record levels. A lot of it is drug related, but there’s more people in prison in the United States than there is in China.

SR: What do you think about those rates of incarceration?

JWC: I think it says a lot about our penal system. And it may say a lot about us as human beings, you know. Someone messes up and we demand a pound of flesh as a result of that. Maybe it’s because we’re less tolerant of people who commit crimes. I think it’s a sad commentary that we have those rates of incarceration. I think it’s a lack of vision on the part of the people whose job it is to fashion the penal codes, the incarceration codes. The simple thing is, you’re convicted, go serve your time. And never look before that or after that for any answers. And I think that’s bad.

SR: I’ve heard this prison talked about as something that could bring stability to the area, because it would be a recession-proof industry. Do you think that it would be a sustainable job source for a long time to come?

JWC: Sure, absolutely. ‘Cause, people are going to continue going to prison.

SR: Do you have anything else you would like to add?

JWC: I just hope we get it! I just hope that this committee, the planning commission, will continue its wonderful, wonderful work, and that we get that thing. Because it will change the whole face of Letcher County.274

And so it is that Mayor Craft hopes that this “sad commentary” will “change the whole face of Letcher County,” for years to come. But as Craft laments the nation’s astronomical rates of incarceration, he is resigned that it is not his job to change them. Indeed Craft is right that U.S. society is becoming “less tolerant of people who commit crimes.” And so we might ask, whose job is it to “fashion the penal codes?”

Who is becoming less tolerant of which people who commit what crimes?

It is worth noting that, even if not a single incarcerated person’s family ever moved to town, even if not a single family member ever made it to the prison to visit,

274 James Wiley Craft (Mayor of Whitesburg, Kentucky), in discussion with the author, July 2008.
even if not a single job went to someone from Letcher County, and even if not a single transferring BOP employee at FCI Letcher lived within the county limits, if FCI Letcher gets built – no matter what happens – more people will, in the words of Mayor Craft, “buy gas.” And there is only one gas station in the entire county that is not owned by Don Childers.

With such a structure in place, both where and who the possible construction of FCI Letcher will benefit must be considered on a micro and macro scale, both geographically and hierarchically – that is to say, both horizontally and vertically. While many genuinely hope that the prison might provide a better future for their children, it is clearly in the best economic interests of certain community – and national – elites. While Mayor Craft criticizes the “lack of vision on the part of the people whose job it is to fashion the penal codes,” Craft’s mayoral election was supported by Don Childers, who is working closely with Congressman Hal Rogers, who, while serving as chairman of the subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995-2000, was instrumental in writing some of the harshest “anti-crime” appropriations bills ever passed in the history of Congress. And it is Congressman Hal Rogers who Mayor Craft is counting on to “get that thing.”

There are of course many people in Letcher County who entirely and actively disagree with both the plan of the Letcher County Planning Commission, and the incredibly unequal, environmentally destructive power structure that it upholds. But many share their same ostensible goals – to increase the number of good paying jobs in the county, to improve the educational opportunities available, and to create
opportunities so that young people can stay home. But without a quick and easy substitute for desperately needed jobs and infrastructure, the local struggle for a better future for the county is a bitterly divided one. Simply put, many blame those who oppose the prison as opposing jobs. And they are right also. Letcher County needs jobs.

But Letcher County needs more than just jobs. People in Letcher County need healthy and safe ways to make a living wage. In such terms I believe it is necessary to consider how the prison proposal itself is incredibly divisive, and effectively erodes local solidarity for the brilliant models and alternative cultural narratives being continuously put forth by the scholars, activists and artists of Letcher County – visionary work that is being done in collaboration with people all over the nation and the world, inside prisons and outside of them and in every place in between.

Proposals and people that courageously declare that, “Even if it is a few hundred minimum wage jobs available,” that is not good enough, and that does not make a prison a good choice for the future of their community.

And so, regardless of such constructed opposition, alliances continue to be forged. One example among many is The Haven of Rest in Martin County, Kentucky. Eileen Mullins is the founder and director of The Haven of Rest, a free hostel for family members and friends visiting their loved ones who are incarcerated inside of the United States Penitentiary Big Sandy (USP-Big Sandy). The Haven of Rest sits on top of a mountaintop removal site, on top of an abandoned deep mine, around the corner from USP-Big Sandy, in Inez, Kentucky – the very town in which President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a long forgotten war in 1964.
There is a map of the United States of America on the wall in the living room of the hostel, covered in hundreds of colored thumbtacks marking all of the places where people have traveled from to get to the prison to visit. As Mullins told me,

We’ve had one lady from the country of Lebanon that spoke no English, but her son brought her from Detroit. We’ve had Canada, Mexico, five families from Puerto Rico, Alaska, California, New Jersey, New York, I think one from Connecticut – you see the map out on the wall? That’s how many families. And we haven’t updated it since the end of March, which I want to do, because of new people. We’re just having new people every week.275

Sitting in her office, in a space that epitomizes the broken promise of the war on poverty, the enormous environmental, economic and social crises presently facing the nation, and the unyielding perseverance of multi-sited, interracial alliances on the ground (even after the ground has been blown away), Mullins explained to me the second reason that the system works,

Some of them will tell me, on their first trip up, a lot of them have never travelled that far, they rent a car, they’re scared to death, and map quest, and your GPS does not work for here, and so, we don’t exist as far as maps on the internet. So they will send them to the head of a holler on 908 Coldwater, or, if they get in here in the middle of the night… especially the men, say, “oh I’ve got my GPS,” and then they’re downtown in Inez wandering around all night trying to find this and the only way they find this is they find a police officer.276

Because Eileen Mullins’ Haven of Rest is built on top of a vast, relatively new mountaintop removal site, the road to her haven was only recently paved. Thus, as of August 2009, her address did not show up on Google maps and could not be located by GPS. And so, within the present technological schema of knowing and mapping space, Mullins’ haven cannot be empirically mapped.

275 Eileen Mullins (director, Haven of Rest), in discussion with the author, August 2009.
276 Ibid.
As Wynter describes the feudal-Christian European worldview, the land beyond Cape Bojador on the coast of West Africa was determined as nonnavigable by “the categorical models of the earth’s geography, as prescribed by the Scholastic order of knowledge of feudal-Christian Europe.” Because this land was unredeemed by the celestial spheres of the heavenly universe, it could only exist symbolically as an “abode of chaos,” incapable of sustaining human life. Only against this “abode of chaos” could the feudal-Christian European “abode of order” be measured. In the same terms, the symbiosis of neocolonialism as a relocation project is only possible because, in the words of Eileen Mullins, Central Appalachia is a geography that does not exist. It does not exist because it cannot exist – because it continues to serve the increasingly necessary function of being a place for the nation to conveniently extract, export and isolate all of its overlapping, growing crises. And while this socio-spatial geography enables the very existence of modern, middle-class, suburban and urban America, it does not fit within its singular definition of humanness. Thus, according to the governing epistemological rules of representation, it must be defined as an uninhabitable and nonnavigable “torrid zone.” Accordingly, although the directions for how to get to any of its blown off, decimated mountaintops are nowhere to be found, as Ron Eller writes, “we know Appalachia exists because we need it to exist in order to define what we are not. It is the “other America” because the very existence of Appalachia convinces us of the righteousness of our own lives.” America could not exist without both the invisible, structural, catastrophic exploitation of Central Appalachia, and the visible,  

278 Eller, Uneven Ground: Appalachia since 1945, 3.
localized narrative of the complete failure of Central Appalachia. That is to say, Appalachia is only allowed to exist to America as defined by those who own it, but are not of it.
1,100 inmates. It will bring 400 jobs to the area.

will hurt many jobs

Prisons create long-term industries that are not just critical to an area's economy, but also are essential to improving the quality of life for those living in the region. The additional jobs and income generated by prisons can help to improve local economies and reduce poverty.


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Conclusion
Listening to the Canaries in the Coal Mine

Today, forty-six years after President Lyndon B. Johnson visited Inez, Kentucky, to declare his mission to “eliminate poverty” from Tom Fletcher’s front porch, Martin County is ranked as the eleventh poorest county in the nation by median household income. In 1980, the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force documented that absentee coal corporations owned approximately 57% of the surface area of the county. Today, Martin County has the highest percentage of surface-mined land of any county in the state of Kentucky, and much of this is from mountaintop removal coalmining. Over a quarter of the entire surface area of the county has been surface-mined, roughly 37,760 acres. And in 2000, Martin County, Kentucky was the site of the worst “environmental” disaster ever to occur in the southeastern United States.

On October 11, 2000, the bottom of a 2.2 billion gallon coal sludge impoundment owned by Martin County Coal, a subsidiary of the Massey Energy Corporation, broke into abandoned underground mines directly below. Sludge impoundments, also called sludge ponds or coal slurry ponds, are manmade ponds filled with the billions of gallons of liquid toxic waste that is left over from the process of “cleaning coal” in coal preparation plants. Before the spill, Martin County Coal had submitted maps to the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration

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281 Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, "Land Ownership Patterns and Their Impacts on Appalachian Communities: A Survey of 80 Counties," 35.
282 "County Profiles."
283 This disaster has since been surpassed by the coal sludge spill in Harriman, Tennessee, in December 2008.
(MSHA) showing at least the minimum 100-foot barrier in all places between the bottom of the pond and the underground mines below. It was later discovered that in many places the barrier had been less than 10 feet. And when the last layer of land broke, 306 million gallons of toxic sludge ran through the abandoned underground mines below, spilling out into two tributaries of the Tug Fork River on Wolf Creek and Coldwater Fork. The flood filled the tributaries with black, thick sludge for miles and miles. It contaminated the public water supply for 27,000 people, and killed all aquatic life in the local waterways. The amount of toxic waste was over thirty times the size of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. The Massey Energy Corporation called the event an unfortunate “act of God.”

Notably, during the administration of President Clinton in the 1990s, the budget for the Office of Surface Mining (OSM), the primary agency responsible for regulating the U.S. mining industry, was drastically cut. Six field offices closed altogether, and inspection and enforcement staff was reduced by one third. But during the 2000 campaign for the presidency, Al Gore pledged to change the increasing lack of regulation in the mining industry. Running on an environmentalist platform, Gore spoke out against the industry because of its affects on global warming. In response to Gore’s proposed regulatory agenda, coal companies threw

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their support behind George W. Bush, and pumped money into the Republican campaign in coal producing states in Central Appalachia. On election night, Kentucky, West Virginia and even Al Gore’s home state of Tennessee all went to Bush. All three states had gone to Clinton in the 1996 presidential election. Without the support of Big Coal, the 2000 election could have had a very different outcome.

And so George W. Bush entered the oval office, the very same year as the Martin County sludge disaster. Up until the change in administration, Jack Spadaro of the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) had been in charge the investigation, and had been carefully building a case against the Massey Coal Corporation for criminal negligence. But within days of Bush’s inauguration, a new team of investigators was put on the case. Jack Spadaro was promptly “demoted from being head of the National Mine Health and Safety Academy and forced out of government for his criticism of the administration and the coal industry.”

Bush’s new investigation team cited Massey Coal on two minor violations and issued a $100,000 fine. Massey Coal, the largest coal company in Appalachia, ended up paying only a $55,000 fine.

Following the spill, Congressman Hal Rogers made no effort towards holding Massey Coal accountable for the enormous disaster within his district. He did however continue to allocate funding to Martin County from his eastern Kentucky PRIDE program. Rep. Rogers and General James Bickford, the former Secretary of the Kentucky Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet, launched the PRIDE program in 1997. As the PRIDE website explains the vision of the program:

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286 Ibid., 251.
287 Salyer, "Sludge."
Eastern Kentucky PRIDE is a nonprofit organization funded by federal grants to encourage and assist citizens, local governments, schools and others in 38 counties of southern and eastern Kentucky to:
1. Improve water quality in the region.
2. Clean up illegal trash dumps and other solid waste problems.
3. Promote environmental awareness and education.288

The eastern Kentucky PRIDE program is a project that recruits citizens in eastern Kentucky to volunteer to clean up their own counties. As the acronym declares, “Personal Responsibility in a Desirable Environment.”289 And so it was left up to the citizens of Martin County – 37% of whom were living below the poverty line in 2000 – to clean up the enormous mess that Massey Coal left behind, for free.

But it was not that Rep. Rogers was ignoring Martin County following the sludge spill. He was simply focusing his efforts elsewhere. During the years of ongoing environmental investigations regarding the spill, which ultimately resulted in a huge cover-up of one of the worst man-made disasters in our nation’s history, Rep. Rogers was working with closely with Martin County elites to finalize the plans for the construction of the United States Penitentiary Big Sandy (USP-Big Sandy). Just like in every other county, a group of community elites formed to work with Rep. Rogers to bring the prison to town. In Martin County, the group called themselves the Honey Branch Industrial Development Authority, and was composed of six members. The leaders were Inez Deposit Bank President Mike Duncan, who at the time was also acting as the 62nd Chairman of the Republican National Committee, and local “coal czar” Jim Booth, the owner of Booth Energy, a company that owns and

289 Ibid.
operates ten mines within Martin County.\textsuperscript{290} The group was named after the Honey Branch Industrial site, the very place they hoped to “develop” with a prison. When these leaders first came together in 1997, the “Honey Branch Industrial Site” consisted of an expansive, barren mountaintop removal job just a few miles outside of downtown Inez. And so the Development Authority began to negotiate with the Pocahontas Land Co., the company responsible for stripping the surface of the land.\textsuperscript{291} Pocahontas had acquired the land in 1992, after it had already been deep mined and abandoned by the Raven Coal Company. As Jim Booth was quoted in the paper, “I think this authority is a wonderful opportunity to establish a relationship with Pocahontas. We have got to understand their development plans and they need to understand ours.”\textsuperscript{292} Apparently the two groups understood each other very well. After negotiations, the Pocahontas Land Co. \textit{donated} the land to the Bureau of Prisons for the construction of USP-Big Sandy. The federal government never paid a dime.\textsuperscript{293}

Monroe Cassady is a citizen of Martin County, who worked as welder for Martin County Coal and Wolf Creek Coal between 1974-1995, and was very involved in the local political organizing that demanded reparations from Massey after the 2000 sludge spill. Cassady knows everything there is to know about Martin

\textsuperscript{291} The tragic irony of the fact that the corporation responsible for stripping the land was named \textit{Pocahontas} demonstrates how the colonial-settler relationship to the land in this country has never shifted. Rather it remains openly articulated in all its contradictions as an innocent and harmonious relationship cultivated for the common good, yet is actually very destructive and individualist.
\textsuperscript{292} Ronnie Hickman, "Where Will Prison ‘Land’? Honey Branch Authority to Negotiate with Pocahontas " \textit{Mountain Citizen}, September 24 1997.
County Coal and Martin County politics that the local newspapers do not print. As Cassady explained to me, regarding the site selection process for USP-Big Sandy,

Now in the Appalachian Mountains, where you’re taking the mountaintop off, and pushing it over, off of course, you don’t have that much topsoil. You can fertilize with liquid nitrogen or whatever, and about every two or three weeks, spray the liquid nitrogen to it, and it’ll stay just as green as it can be. But you’re drawing your sand rock, your rock, and then when you quit putting that liquid nitrogen to it, it’s gone – I mean, it turns brown in three weeks… because there’s no water left. There’s no water base, there’s no trees. It’s just all for show. That’s the reason that your coal companies needs your federal prisons and this and that, to say, this is the reason that we need mountaintop removal. Now they don’t say this….²⁹⁴

And so the construction of the prison began in order to demonstrate to the citizens of Martin County the good things that can come from mountaintop removal coal mining. And best of all, the Pocahontas Coal Company would not have to keep spraying toxic chemicals on the barren land in order to keep it green, so as to fulfill the Environmental Protection Agency’s surface-mining “reclamation” regulations.

During the time that USP-Big Sandy was being constructed, Diane Sawyer decided to come down from ABC’s corporate headquarters on the Upper West Side of Manhattan to film an hour-long ABC news special feature on poverty in Appalachia. Sawyer spent two years filming extensively in Martin County, following the lives of four Appalachian young people, for the 2009 premiere of the ABC 20/20 News Special “A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains.”²⁹⁵ The feature provides an alarmingly precise re-articulation of the Appalachian “culture of poverty” model of the 1960s. The narrative paints the picture of incompetent, uneducated,

²⁹⁴ Monroe Cassady, in discussion with the author, August 2009.
drug and alcohol-addicted parents who are unable to provide for and protect their young children. It does not speak of the county’s landownership patterns, provides no history of the coal industry’s exploitation of the region, and never mentions the 2000 sludge impoundment disaster. Furthermore, throughout the episode often while many of the characters in the piece are sharing their own stories, in their own voice, the ABC report provides subtitles on the screen so as to translate their Appalachian dialect to ABC’s assumed audience of northern, white, middle-class viewers, thus further enforcing this location as the norm. As the ABC website summarizes the struggles of the young characters in the piece,

Courtney, 12, hopes for a home for her and her family…. Shawn Grim, 18, tries to fight his way out of his dysfunctional family in the mountains by becoming the high school football star of Appalachia while sleeping in a truck. Jeremy, 18, makes a decision to accept a life down inside the mines, and Erica, 11, is forced to grow up too quickly, trying over and over again to save her mother’s life.296

But perhaps the most revealing moment of all is when Diane Sawyer asks Jim Booth (leader of the Honey Branch Industrial Development Authority and reportedly the richest man in the county), how he feels about having so much wealth, in the midst of so much poverty.

“That is a huge house!” Sawyer exclaims, as the camera pans over his enormous mansion. “Do you feel a little weird building a house that big in Inez, with that much poverty right up in the hills?”

“I wanted to show the people that I’m embedded here,” Booth answers Sawyer (in an Appalachian accent without subtitles), “This is my house and I’m

staying here. It’s made a statement that has caused a lot of people to say, “I want to do what he’s done.”

Of course, all the people in Martin County cannot do what Jim Booth has done, because Booth’s individual “success” depends on the devastation of the region’s land and people. But so does Dianne Sawyer’s. And nobody is asking Diane Sawyer how she feels, living in a multimillion dollar mansion in New York City, in the midst of so much poverty. Nobody is asking because this is not the poverty that is being shown on the ABC network – because this is not the poverty that it is assumed viewers will empathize with. Because the people living in poverty outside of Diane Sawyer’s apartment building are not “her people.” And so Diane Sawyer travelled 700 miles south of New York City, to Inez, Kentucky, to showcase the exclusively white, and hence unimaginable poverty that can only exist in “A Hidden America.” And so, from the perspective of Diane Sawyer, a wealthy white northern liberal, the program draws the moral line between liberal and conservative consolidation of wealth. Rather than invisibilizing local power structures, Sawyer’s narrative blames the county’s extreme economic inequality on certain greedy local elites, and on the poor themselves, effectively localizing, individualizing and whitewashing the problem of poverty. The program won the 2009 Peabody Award for excellence in radio and television broadcasting.

Jim Booth is respected in Martin County because “he gives back to the people.” He is a local philanthropist, funding many important things, like a very

297 “A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains, a Diane Sawyer Report.”
298 Ibid.
299 Ronnie Hickman (staff reporter, Mountain Citizen), in discussion with author, July 2009.
expensive new scoreboard for the local high school football field. Diane Sawyer is respected for the same reason – only she is a philanthropist from afar. As the ABC website showcases, because of the news feature, all of the children featured in the show received many wonderful gifts. The ABC feature summary reads,

Courtney, 12, is one of those children whose face reminds us of the famous portraits of the Appalachian past. Her clothes are stuffed into a suitcase under her bed in the small house she shares with 11 relatives in Inez, Kentucky. Her mother, Angel, struggles to stay off drugs and hopes to give her four daughters a better life by getting her GED and becoming a teacher. With no car and no public transportation, Angel walks 16 miles roundtrip, four hours total, to her GED classes.300

And as the ABC website boasted in an article written right after the feature aired,

Since Diane Sawyer’s special, “A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains” aired Friday, there have already been concrete changes in some of the children’s lives, thanks to an outpouring of support from viewers nationwide… A viewer drove all the way from Nashville, Tennessee, to Inez, Kentucky, to see 12-year-old Courtney and to donate clothes to her family, and a California family is sending her the Hannah Montana boots she wants so much.301

And so Diane Sawyer’s “concrete” work sparked a momentary flood of aid to four young people in Inez. Yet while Jim Booth refurbished the Martin County high school football field, and Diane Sawyer made sure that Courtney got her Hannah Montana boots, neither of them had anything to say about what the future holds for all of the poor kids in the Martin County public school system, or for that matter, all the poor kids in the New York City public school system.

301 Gray, "'Children of the Mountains' Get Help: Offers of Help from Viewers for Children in Central Appalachia."
And on May 16, 2002, fifty-two Inez middle school students were taken on a tour of the almost-done federal penitentiary.

As the local newspaper reported, in the caption underneath a picture of all of the kids inside the prison,

Fifty-two Inez Middle School students toured U.S. Penitentiary Big Sandy Friday morning. The facility is expected to be finished in September and occupied by January 2003. The event was arranged by IMS Youth Service Center Director Nora Ray, who has done an outstanding job in her third year, to reward the students on meeting their objectives in the 25-book campaign and in math. Project manager Bob Parks talks to the students while they tour the outer part of the facility. Students were taken into the maximum security portion where inmates will be kept in the 7’ by 14’ cell for 23 hours a day.\textsuperscript{303}

The trip to the prison was a reward for kids who had been succeeding in school. As the article went on to explain what prize, exactly, they were being given,

The Tour lasted about 90 minutes as Park and Parr [project manager and director of maintenance at the facility] talked in great detail, answering a host of questions. Park took students and the volunteers that made the trip to the one safe area of the facility, which is a tunnel that allows correctional officers and other prison personnel to be isolated from inmates in case of a riot. Park said inmates do all the work at the prison, including cooking, cleaning and general maintenance. Park gave some harsh realities as students asked what could happen if a fight breaks out and an inmate has to have medical attention. Park said if the injury is serious, an inmate would probably die due to the length of time it takes to insure security. In the event an inmate has to be taken to a hospital, it takes four correctional officers to perform this task.\textsuperscript{304}

As Inez Middle School Youth Service Center Director Nora Ray was quoted in the paper, “I hope students learned that prison is not a place they want to be in and that staying in school and getting an education are keys to them staying out of a place like this.”\textsuperscript{305} And so, as a reward for doing well in school, these eleven, twelve and thirteen year-olds were taught that “inmates” are not humans; that their labor is exploitable, that they can be left to die, and can be shut away in small cages 23 hours a day.

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
But as the Inez middle school kids were taught that a prison is “not a place they want to be in,” the Inez high school kids were being taught a very different lesson. Four years earlier, on April 7, 1998, BOP officials from FCI Manchester, the federal prison in Clay County, Kentucky, visited Sheldon Clark High School, the Inez public high school. During school hours, these officials gave the high school students a lesson on how to start preparing for a job at the facility, so they would be prepared for the work when the prison opened. Because of the incredibly low number of local people who had gotten a job at FCI Manchester when it opened in Clay County in 1992, Martin County officials launched an offensive, and actively recruited young people to prepare for the prison jobs. As Ray Guillory, executive assistant to the warden at FCI Manchester, explained to a room full of Inez high school students,

> There are two very important things you can do now, before you start any type of educational training. You can’t get in any type of trouble with the authorities or involved in drug use. It could be that you might be playing around with these things. I know it’s considered ‘cool’ right now, but you’ll find out how ‘cool’ it is when you apply for a job. The second thing I would encourage is that you get involved in any type of volunteer work or community-based activity that would enhance your chances of being employed. Any type of experience that you can gain is valuable, especially if it involves working with the public. After you do these things, then you can work on taking college courses in law enforcement or criminology.  

Thus preparing for a job at the federal prison became the new reason Inez teenagers were instructed to stay off of drugs and be involved in their community. And so while the Inez middle school kids were told that prison is a place you never want to end up – because you might die if you do – the Inez high school kids were told that the prison was only place they could end up, if they wanted to make a good living and

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not have to move away from home. Of course, this was predicated on the assumption that they would be the ones guarding, not guarded. And this assumption was articulated in entirely racialized terms to the Inez high school students. As the newspaper went on to summarize the event,

> A trait that will help someone land a job in a prison system, in addition to other requirements, is the ability to speak Spanish, according to Guillory. Hispanics will make up a large part of the prison population at the new correctional facility, and will need interpreters, he said.

> “This will definitely be a big asset to those who want to increase their chances of gaining employment at the prison,” said Guillory. “Another thing you might consider is multi-cultural classes where you can learn a lot about different ethnic backgrounds. This might help you by knowing a little about an inmate’s background.”

According to an inmate profile of high-security prisons, published in the BOP’s “Final Environmental Impact Study,” whites will make up 42.8 percent, African America 52.1 and “other” 5.1.

In such terms the teenagers were told that knowing Spanish would be an “asset” and “multi-cultural” classes would be a good idea for those serious about getting a job at the prison, thus entirely naturalizing racialized definitions of criminal identity. But it is true that in eastern Kentucky, in what is reportedly the whitest congressional district in the nation, many young people have not had that much contact with people of color. And so, in a high school classroom in the mountains of rural white Appalachia, multiculturalism was preached through the prison system in “post racial” America.

Furthermore, the way in which the countywide education system became fixated on the prison extended beyond the middle school, beyond the high school, into the community college system. In anticipation of the prison, the Big Sandy Community and Technical college system, which has four campuses throughout

307 Ibid.
eastern Kentucky and is the most accessible, affordable destination for higher education in the region, drastically enlarged its criminal justice program. As the newspaper reported of the Prestonsburg campus,

Prestonsburg Community College has offered classes in Law Enforcement for many years, but they only offered one-half of the courses needed for an associates degree. With the construction of Big Sandy United States Penitentiary and the influx of more federal grant money available for police officers, PCC is meeting the challenge of training people for a law enforcement career with an associate degree program as part of their Law Enforcement Technology program. Dr. Deborah Floyd, PCC’s president said this is part of the college’s response to the prison. In the past, anyone seeking a degree in law enforcement had to attend Eastern Kentucky University. This has been a drain on resources for local law enforcement and for new police officers.

“As this program grows, we want to work with EKU,” Floyd said Friday. We hope to go beyond the associate degree level. It’s a part of our commitment to our community. We want to bring this type of education to people.”

While local elites hoping for a prison eagerly anticipate how it will become, in the words of Reverend Elwood Cornett, “a new economic engine, a little machine in the middle that will trigger all other kinds of business,” prison proponents never talk about how it might affect the social reality of the geography outside its walls. While elites want the prison to become central to the economic reality of the community, they assume it will be, in the words of ex-prison guard Trey Narramore, “something you just don’t talk about after coming home from work.” But every economic order is upheld by a cultural system, and the prison economy is no different. In observing the structural reform that occurred within the regional education system in order to

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308 Mountain Citizen, September 15 2010.
309 Cornett, discussion.
310 Narramore, discussion.
support this new possibility for employment, it is clear that prisons have indeed become central in the social reality of Central Appalachia.

Yet most often they have the opposite effect than that which local elites desire – they become central to the social reality, yet remain marginal in the local economy.

As Professor Mike Dixon, head coordinator of the Criminal Justice Program at the Big Sandy Community and Technical College explained to me,

I have been here since 1998. And I am here because Prestonsburg Community College saw what appeared to be a very obvious need: to have a program in place to accommodate area residents to be better prepared for potential entry-level positions at the Federal Penitentiary in Martin County. Over the past eleven years, we have managed to graduate about 250 students. Some of them, I’m gonna say maybe as many ten or twelve, or between ten and fifteen, are now employed as correctional officers at the Big Sandy Penitentiary in Martin County. But I don’t think the program is the panacea that they expected it to be. That all one would have to do would be to come here, and earn an associates degree, and be automatically guaranteed a position at the new prison in Martin County.

And the reasons for that are kind of varied. First of all, the federal government has entry-level requirements that are not standard to other entry-level positions. The federal government will accept a Bachelors degree, or a combination of an associate degree, and real world experience, in order to be considered for entry-level correctional officer positions at their facility. Big Sandy Penitentiary is a maximum-security institution, it houses well over a thousand inmates, all of whom are potentially dangerous, it’s a maximum-security facility. We have people who graduated from here and went on to gain real world experience in local and state level institutions. In other words, we’ve had people graduate from here and who went to at perhaps the Floyd County Jail or the Paintsville Regional Jail, others have gone to places like West Liberty in Morgan County, others have gone to LaGrange or other State level institutions, and worked there for three, four, five years, and then filled out an application to the Big Sandy Penitentiary, and received full consideration. Some even got the jobs.

But to back up a minute or two, that facility, the federal facility, is dangerous. The people in there are dangerous. Some have gone only to leave, after realizing the potential for danger and harm, even though it’s a federal facility with all the federal resources – [they realize] that that kind of work wasn’t for them, and they left. We’re finding that people who do go to work up there are no stranger to the correctional facility setting – of course they come from other institutions first. It is rare that somebody just leaves Big Sandy
[Community and Technical College] goes on to EKU [Eastern Kentucky University], gets a bachelors degree in criminal justice, and walks right through the front door of the Big Sandy Penitentiary. That’s not the norm, ok. If we’ve graduated over two hundred and fifty people in our eleven-year history, and only ten or fifteen are working there, that gives you some idea of how disillusioned people can get even though they may have the education that’s required. Working in a prison is dangerous. And it’s not for everyone. And it takes a certain amount of courage and stick-to-it-iveness, so, some come, some go.\footnote{311}

As prisons become increasingly central in the social reality of Appalachia, mostly white young people are being taught, from middle school through college, that the thousands of people incarcerated within their communities are extremely dangerous, are not white, and are not human. Many young white people reject this logic and refuse to ever apply for the job. Others are willing to try it out, perhaps because they have been told since the age of fourteen that it is the best option they have, but often cannot even get the job at the federal prison in their community that they are being trained for. And if and when they do get a job in the prison system, many often realize what an awful job it really is, and leave. But in order to even get to the point where they can get the federal job, they must work their way up through the system, starting at the very bottom, often receiving a salary that is barely above the minimum wage. Our interview was interrupted by a young woman, about my own age, coming in to ask Professor Dixon about an internship at the Otter Creek Correctional Facility in Wheelright, Kentucky.

In such terms I think it is a dangerous mistake to assume that just because Central Appalachia has so many prisons, it has the most racism. But the assumption that white Appalachian Americans are the most racist white Americans runs deep in

\footnote{311} Mike Dixon (head coordinator of the Criminal Justice Program at the Big Sandy Community and Technical College), in discussion with the author, August 10, 2009.
our national narrative. For example, during the democratic primaries for the 2008 presidential election, this assumption became very visible. After Clinton crushed Obama in Kentucky and West Virginia, charges of “endemic racism in Appalachia” were heard throughout the media. In response to such charges, Ada Smith, an activist, filmmaker and youth organizer from Whitesburg, Kentucky, wrote and recorded the following radio piece titled, “Appalachia: the Scapegoat for America’s Racism,” which aired on National Public Radio’s Youth Radio Project:

I spend a lot of time trying to convince people that where I’m from is not anything like deliverance, the Beverly Hillbillies or the Dukes of Hazard. Since I’ve moved away to college, it’s hard when people here my accent and assume I’m racist. In current election coverage, the media has chosen to fall back on stereotypes. I’m hearing once again that Appalachia is full of racists, incapable of voting for a person of color. I know racism exists in Appalachia. But so do black communities. All the voters here aren’t white and elderly. I think we may be scared to admit that more Americans than just Appalachians have a race problem. Instead of questioning how we’re going to deal with racism as a country, it’s easier to make Appalachia the scapegoat, carrying the load.

I go to a small liberal arts college in Western Massachusetts. In many ways, it’s the opposite of where I grew up in eastern Kentucky. Many people assume my campus is a place where racism doesn’t exist, just because it’s northern and liberal. Just this school year, a noose was hung on my campus though. It reminded me that racism does exist, in places that folks don’t like to admit. My community faces a lot of the same problems as communities of color in places like New Orleans, New York City and Puerto Rico. Yet I’ve had people from those areas not want to talk to me. They’ve later told me, after we’ve become friends, that they saw all southern whites as racist. The last thing young people in the mountains want, is to be further isolated from other struggling communities. All the conversations about the rural primaries are making it worse. I’m really afraid that next time I meet someone new, they’ll assume that I would never vote for a black president. The truth is, my friends who are young voters, are all talking about change, just like the rest of the country.\(^{312}\)

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As Smith’s piece describes, in “post racial” America, white people are not supposed to be racist anymore – and especially not at northern, liberal institutions. Racism is something that our nation has progressed beyond, on a linear timeline of future orientation, regulated by the clock, calendar and technology. In such terms, the only people who are still racist are the ones who are behind the times, the ones who are “backwards,” the ones who are Yesterday’s People. The poor white Americans. And most of all, the poor white Appalachian Americans. But, as Smith points out, racism is not a problem that only exists in certain geographies. And in fact, one of the places that has the very highest rate of racial disparities within its criminal justice system is Washington D.C., our nation’s capital.313

But in the present epistemological order, the metaphorical “black hole” of the urban ghetto/prison is being systematically being relocated to the very poorest, very whitest “pockets of poverty” in rural America. Thus I return to the heart of Kwame Nkrumah’s definition: “Neocolonialism, like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries.” The social conflict of “affluent America” has always been the question of color. And so it is this conflict that must be exported, relocated and isolated in invisible, internal geographies – in order for the rest of the country to be “post-racial.”

On October 6, 2003, the United States Penitentiary Big Sandy opened in Martin County.314 The prison cost $174 million. At the time of its completion it was reportedly the most expensive federal prison ever constructed by the United States

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Federal Government. But a little over a year before it opened, the prison began to sink into the abandoned coal mine below.
Leaning Tower of Honey Branch

Worked-out coal seam under the prison could be factor

BY RONNIE HICKMAN
MOUNTAIN CITIZEN STAFF

DANIELA — Many would love to visit Daniel to see the famous Leaning Tower of Pisa built nearly 500 years ago. But local residents may not have to travel far to see their own "Leaning Tower of Honey Branch," located at the site of the U.S. Penitentiary — Big Sandy.

A Bureau of Prisons spokesperson confirmed on Monday that rumors of the sinking of at least one of the 140-foot gantry towers is true. Another reliable source said one of the prison's four buildings is also sinking into the ground.

The federal facility, rumored to be the most expensive project undertaken by the BOP at $174 million so far, is scheduled to open in January. The "slippage," as it was called by a BOP spokesperson, could delay the prison's opening, as well as add more cost.

The high-security facility was built on a reclaimed strip mine site on a ridge identified as Honey Branch. When construction began, one potential problem was an abandoned, mined-out coal seam 150 feet below the site.

Raven Coal Co. mined the 35-inch Stockton seam until the mine was abandoned in 1952, according to the Department of Mines and Minerals. The area under the prison reportedly was "mined extensively" which included "pulling pillars" (or retreat mining) in which stumps of coal left for roof support were extracted.

A spokesperson for the Office See LEANING, page 7

BOP seminars postponed until September

BY RONNIE HICKMAN
MOUNTAIN CITIZEN STAFF

INEZ — The business and jobs seminars scheduled tomorrow at Sheldon Clark High School and the Martin County Senior Citizens Center by the Federal Bureau of Prisons have been postponed until September, according to Kathy Litcher, Activation Coordinator to the BOP's Mid-Atlantic Region.

An exact date for both seminars hasn't been set. Litcher said Martin County Economic Development Director Carolea Dills will have to check with the high school and senior citizens center will be available during the month.

The reason for the postponement is that the BOP wants the administrative staff of the $174 million U.S. Penitentiary — Big Sandy on board, namely warden Dan Dove and two associate wardens, Randy Madam and Charles Mulloy. The BOP wants the three to attend both seminars in order to introduce them to the public.

"After the prison opens, the public won't get a chance to see.

See SEMINARS, page 7

Family Drug break-in

July 16, 2002

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As the newspaper reported in July of 2002,

.... A Bureau of Prisons spokesperson confirmed on Monday that rumors of the sinking of at least one of the 140-foot gun towers is true. Another reliable source said one of the prison’s four buildings is also sinking into the ground.

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A spokesperson for the Office of Surface Mine Reclamation and Enforcement yesterday said many sites in western Kentucky, with underground mines under them, have been successfully “grouted” with a concrete-like substance injected at high pressure.

This method is used to fill voids that might exist in excavated underground mines in order to provide a stable, “slip-free” foundation for buildings above. Of course, there must be extensive geo-technical engineering work to determine how to confine the grout to the area to be stabilized.
When the Honey Branch site was selected for the prison, the BOP spent millions of dollars on site-preparation, which included filling the underground mines with concrete.³¹⁶

Although the prison was still sinking, after injecting more concrete-like substances into the abandoned, mined-out coal seams below, the BOP transferred the first people to the prison starting in September 2003. And thus Guinier and Torres’ metaphor of disposable, incarcerable (assumedly black but entirely invisible so we don’t even know) men as the canaries in the coal mine materialized. The canaries are in fact in cages, sinking into abandoned coal mines. But this time they are not birds, but our own species – they are humans. And in November of 2003, they were demanding law books. As a front-page article in the local press titled “Inmates sue over transfer to new prison” reported,

Roughly a month after opening its doors, the U.S. Penitentiary – Big Sandy is facing its first lawsuit. According to a complaint filed by four inmates transferred into the facility’s minimum-security camp in October, the move was unfair because the prison is currently without a law library to enable them to continue with pending litigation they face in court. Inmates Kelcey Kendrick, Lucky Irorere, Ernie Embree and James Hill, filing on their own behalf in U.S. District Court in Pikeville on Nov. 12, said the lack of a law library with tools, such as legal research materials, typewriters and copy machines, denies them constitutional rights and interferes with their access to the courts.³¹⁷

In 2003, in the most expensive federal prison ever constructed in the United States of America there was no law library. And these men were demanding the law.

But it is the law of the land that allowed the mountaintop to be blown away, that allowed the most expensive federal prison to be built in one of the poorest places

³¹⁶ Ibid.
in the nation, that allowed a corporation to poison the public water supply from which these men must drink, that treated these men like animals and placed them inside of cages that were sinking into an abandoned coal mine, inside a prison in which they might be left to die, and denied them the right to be heard. It is the law that placed these men outside of the law.

We need to listen to the canaries in the coal mine. They are being silenced because they have incredibly important things to say. Because they are in the coal mine for three critical reasons: to be reformed into a society that is burying them alive, to rehabilitate an economy that the war on poverty failed, and to reclaim a mountaintop removal site that the Pocahontas Coal Corporation permanently destroyed. That is to say, they are there to solve all of the problems of “post-coal” Appalachia in “post-racial” America.

And so, if we listen to the canaries in the coal mine, then we hear that the crisis of “post-coal” Appalachia, like the idea of “post-racial” America, is actually not post anything at all. Because the “post-coal” crisis is a labor crisis in a technologically advanced society – the coal is still being extracted, more destructively and more quickly than ever before. It just doesn’t need that many people to do it anymore. So “Clean Coal Technology,” which our President is powerless to oppose (and hence strongly supports), won’t save the land or the people. “Clean Coal Technology” saves the industry. As President Obama announced his new major initiative on February 3, 2010,

The United States is the Saudi Arabia of coal. And that’s because, as I said, it’s one of our most abundant energy resources. If we can develop the
technology to capture the carbon pollution released by coal, it can create jobs and provide energy well into the future. So, today, I’m announcing a carbon capture and storage taskforce that will be charged with the goal of figuring out how we can deploy affordable clean coal technology on a widespread scale within ten years. And we want to get up ten commercial demonstration projects, get those up and running by 2016.  

But as President Obama pledges his support of clean coal technology, his work to restrict mountaintop removal coalmining – one of the many dirty secrets of “clean coal” – lags far behind. And while elites carefully construct a clean and technical solution to the question of coal, we continue to blow up our own land. Perhaps the Obama Campaign learned from the Gore Campaign that you just can’t oppose Big Coal. After all, according to the January 2010 ruling of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, this is what the Supreme Court is telling us as well. And so, as the industry gets saved, American Apartheid will persist in invisible places in “post racial” America as a solution to the question of poverty that is not being solved.  

And it will not be solved, as long as the research of poverty remains ruled by economics, the reigning theology of our present disciplinary order of knowledge. As Michael Katz outlines, in the 1970s, on the heels of the Daniel Moynihan’s report,  

With an outraged Civil rights movement behind them, the critics drove cultural questions out of poverty research for about fifteen years. However, sociologists and anthropologists concerned with poverty failed to replace culture as an organizing concept. As a consequence, their disciplines became marginal to the policymakers and scholars who led the emerging national

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319 The Federal Bureau of Prisons has not yet signed a “record of decision” (ROD) to build the prison in Letcher County. But as the Letcher County proposal hangs in the balance, even in the midst of a recession, the BOP has six new construction projects currently underway in the following locations: McDowell County, West Virginia; Mendota, California; Berlin, New Hampshire; Aliceville, Alabama; Yazoo City, Mississippi; and Hazelton, West Virginia. Felicia Ponce (public affairs, Federal Bureau of Prisons) email exchange with the author, March 2010.
debate. Instead, leadership in poverty research passed to the economists, whose capture of the issue remains scarcely challenged today. But perhaps the question of poverty is not only an economic question. Perhaps even, the crisis of surplus labor is primarily a crisis of denied individual functionality in a neoliberal state that does not even need its own people any more, a state that tells us it has no use for so many of us – a state that is post people. And so, in order to avoid the possible “outbreak of civil disorder produced by mass unemployment,” some people are being trained to warehouse Others; other people from their own country, and even, of their own generation. It is a country in which prisons are being presented to communities as something that will bring “30 jobs for every 100 inmates.” And it is a country in which prisons are being built on land that is determined as having “no historical significance.” And so, in an economic system that does not equally value American life or American land, I believe that any counter-analysis cannot be purely mathematical. The equations will always come out wrong. The “extensive geo-technical engineering work to determine how to confine the grout to the area to be stabilized” will never stabilize right. There is “slippage” occurring in the earth’s crust. But rather than continuing to inject the planet with concrete-like substances at high pressure, perhaps it is time to reconsider the methods used to provide a stable, “slip-free” foundation for the buildings above.

There is in fact one coal company left that is still taking out coal from the mountaintop removal “industrial site” site that hosts both the United States Penitentiary Big Sandy and Eileen Mullins’ Haven of Rest. It is called Czar Coal. The Czar Coal Corporation also gifted land to the U.S. federal government for the

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320 Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*, 43.
construction of the prison. As the *Mountain Citizen* newspaper reported on November 18, 1998, “In June’s official groundbreaking ceremony for the prison Congressman Hal Rogers thanked coal company executives from Pocahontas and Czar for their donation of land to the prison project.” And as the article went on to outline, “Several companies and individuals currently have mineral rights on the Honey Branch property, including Harvard University, which owns natural gas reserves and Czar Coal.” And so, as Harvard’s complicity makes explicit, our present disciplinary order of knowledge does not ignore Martin County or the work of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Rather, it requires the existence of both in order to uphold the current definition of national “progress.”

Thus in my own attempt towards understanding “the urgency of now,” following the lead of Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres, I too recall the words that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke to his staff in 1967, just before he was killed:

We’re going to take this movement and… reach out to the poor people in all directions in this country… into the Southwest after the Indians, into the West after the Chicanos, into Appalachia after the poor whites, and into the ghettos after Negroes and Puerto Ricans. And we’re going to bring them together and enlarge this campaign into something bigger than just a civil rights movement for Negroes.322

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As the Kentucky Encyclopedia further outlines Harvard University’s historical presence in Martin County, “In 1981 Norfolk & Southern, through its subsidiary Pocahontas Corporation, owned nearly 48,000 thousand acres of surface land and more than 81,000 acres of mineral rights. Other major landowners in Martin County include the Martiki Coal Corporation, Mt. Sterling Land Company, and Harvard University. Fully 75 percent of the owned mineral rights are held by out-of-state corporations and individuals. Artificially low tax rates allow for major profits for the owners and operating coal companies, while limiting benefits to local citizens. In 1980, for example, the largest owner of mineral rights – more than 81,000 acres valued at more the $7 million – paid Martin County only $76 in taxes.” *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 613.

Inspired by the vision of Martin Luther King, Jr., and of so many others, I turn to the magical realist wisdom of Guinier and Torres, found within the pages of *The Miner’s Canary: Enlisting Race, Resisting Power, Transforming Democracy*, to a bold and simple declaration that perhaps there is space for *all* of us in a project where “at its core it does not ask what you call yourself but with whom you link your fate.”

Eileen Mullins is white, was raised an Old Regular Baptist, and is a conservative republican. Her Haven of Rest opens its doors to people of all colors, from all economic brackets, of all genders, of all ages, of all sexual orientations, from all nations, speaking all languages, in all accents, believing in any or no religious faith, and of any political persuasion. And if somebody needs to get to USP-Big Sandy to visit, but doesn’t have a car, and can’t afford to rent a car, Mullins tells them to take a plane, a train, or a bus to the Tri-State airport in Huntington, West Virginia, and then she will drive an hour and a half from Inez, Kentucky, to pick them up. The only agenda of Mullins’ Haven of Rest is to keep the canaries alive. Because since they are in fact humans, not birds, if they don’t see their families, they might not make it out of the coal mine alive. Mullins understands this because her son is a canary too, but in a different prison, in a different *somewhere else*, hundreds of miles away from Inez, Kentucky.

As Eileen Mullins shared with me as we sat together in her office on top of a mountain that no longer exists, in a place that we as an affluent society *are not supposed to know exists*,

\[323\] Ibid., 9-10.
I know what it does to you the first time in. Nobody can relate to that unless you’ve been there. You think you’re ready for it – you’re not ready for it. When I picked up the young woman from Puerto Rico, and we started driving up that mountain, and she saw the prison gun towers, she completely went to pieces. But I knew where she was. When they come out of there the first time, I know they’re going to be a mess, the kids to. I’ve had the kids come screaming in that front door, I want my daddy, why couldn’t he come with us? Why do we have to leave daddy down there? I want my daddy.

And all you can do is just give them a hug. But our little dogs, my little Dotson, and Ann had one too, they were our therapy dogs. You bring a dog to a kid, and it calms them down. So we call them our therapy dogs. And, when they go down, and they get turned down and they can’t visit and they’ve travelled that far – that’s happened to me. So when they come up here and they’re crying, I just hold them, and we cry together. And then I say, okay, you have a choice. You can’t get in, but you’re here. Now, you can be upset and cry all day, or you can say, okay, what can I do. You can take a walk, you can read a book – you have a choice. How are you going to spend the rest of this day?\footnote{Mullins, discussion.}

But it is not only Eileen Mullins’ work to be a healer, and to urge people to ask the question, \textit{what can I do}? And it is not only the work of her visitors to oppose the direction in which our nation is presently progressing. It is up to us as a society and as a \textit{species} to find a new definition of progress that does not depend on prisons or coal; a kind of progress that is measured not by ‘\textit{economic development}’ or ‘\textit{technological advancement},’ but by our ability to provide clean air so that every canary can breathe, and, in the words of Helen Lewis, “a clean glass of water for every Appalachian child.”\footnote{Helen Matthews Lewis, "A Clean Glass of Water for Every Appalachian Child," in \textit{Appalachian Transition Essay Project} (2010).} A notion that allows each of us to aspire for a world in which \textit{all} peoples, animals, rivers and mountains can be healthy on their own terms.
As Aimé Césaire proposes in *Discourse on Colonialism*, such would be “a humanism made to the measure of the world.”\textsuperscript{326}

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