Opposing Ideologies and Unintended Consequences: a History of Federalism, Coal and Poverty in West Virginia

by

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Middletown, Connecticut April, 2013
To

Doobie and Debbie Jo, Eric and Laura, Stephen and Kate.
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## List of Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Agricultural Adjustment Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Appalachian Regional Commission</td>
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<td>EDA</td>
<td>Economic Development Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUD</td>
<td>Department of Housing and Urban Development</td>
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<td>LDD</td>
<td>Local Development District</td>
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<td>NRA</td>
<td>National Recovery Administration</td>
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<td>RD</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development</td>
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<td>TVA</td>
<td>Tennessee Valley Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>UMWA</td>
<td>United Mine Workers of America</td>
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<td>WPA</td>
<td>Works Progress Administration</td>
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Maps

The Appalachian subregions are contiguous regions of relatively homogeneous characteristics (topography, demographics, and economics) within Appalachia. This classification was developed in the early history of the ARC and provides a basis for subregional analysis. ARC revised the classification in November 2009 by dividing the Region into smaller parts for greater analytical detail and by using current economic and transportation data. This classification is used only for research purposes and not to allocate ARC funds.


*A note on this map: As a clarification, this thesis focuses almost exclusively on West Virginia, though many of the state’s issues with respect to coal that are of particular interest towards the end of the thesis similarly plague relevant areas of surrounding states, including Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Most, but not all, are the areas
marked by yellow and categorized as “Central Appalachia.” They are areas that also heavily rely on coal mining.

Introduction

The Civil War represented in violent warfare the physical battle between two opposing ideologies of America. In the simplest terms, the Jeffersonians represented one half of this debate with their dreams of an idyllic life of very literal, physical freedoms in which families survived off of self-sufficient farms. The Madisonians played the part of the opponent by advocating for industrialism—a more urban or even “modern” lifestyle. At the heart of the stark differences between these visions of the American future was a debate over the role of government. The degree of participation on the part of the federal government played an integral role in the realization of each of these visions. On the one hand, Jefferson’s philosophy required a rather strict designation of federal and more local responsibilities, whereas Madison’s competing vision called for a more inclusive and synthesized relationship in order to more successfully support economic growth.

With the end of the war and the implementation of Reconstruction, it seemed that this debate was put to rest. The North prevailed, along with industrialism and Madison’s “modern” conception of federalism. The policies of Reconstruction were designed to ease race relations and rebuild the South according to this vision. Despite the obvious tension that still existed between the sympathizers of the Union and the Confederacy, respectively, the debate seemed to have been settled—now the nation had to rebuild and move on to realize the strength of the federal government as a potential catalyst for economic growth.
Physically caught in the middle of these competing visions and raging regions was the area that would become West Virginia. At the time a part of Virginia, here was a land of a diversity of people, many of whom in the most mountainous regions literally lived the Jeffersonian dream, yet publicly and politically sympathized with the Madisonian vision in order to gain their own kind of independence with the creation of a new state. This moment indicates the first significant, dramatic instance where a clash of theoretical arguments affected the lives and communities of the people living here. From this moment in history many more inspired by this Madisonian theory of federalism would follow. Policies born from this approach to government to encourage industrial growth on a national level layered on top of each of other, resulting in a unique yet economically tragic environment in southern West Virginia.

This thesis intends to highlight this part of America that was literally caught in the middle. I will argue that these debates and the one-size-fits-all policies constructed to deal with them remained active well after the war ended—physically shaping the lives of Americans in ways that decades later would leave places that held such promise—or at least were self-sufficient—in complete destitution. Furthermore, as this Madisonian form of federalism unfolded and expanded over the decades to come—most notably with policies such as the New Deal that highly expanded the role and responsibility of the federal government with respect to its citizens—layers of policies and programs accumulated on the lives of those left in the middle until the coming of the Great Society, which birthed policies to reconcile for these years of being forced between these visions.
At the heart of these adapting interpretations of the role of the federal government is the development of the coal industry in southern West Virginia. The power of this singular industry fundamentally altered the lives of West Virginians through the literal creation of towns designed around the operation of coal mines and economic support of the coal companies that built them. In many instances coinciding with major events that helped to propel the reinterpretation of federalism, the coal industry experienced a combination of market fluctuations and technological innovations that starved these towns and shed the jobs that supported them. Over time, the depressed ghost towns filled with poverty-stricken families and the bloated bellies of malnourished children emerged to meet Senator Kennedy when he campaigned for the Presidency of the United States.

This thesis does not intend to make a normative argument regarding the appropriate degree of federal government intervention in the lives of its citizens or counterfactually judge the actions of the government and political leaders. On the contrary, this thesis engages in an analytic narrative to reveal the both intended and unintended consequences and leftovers of government policy and intervention with respect to the state of West Virginia. I hope to bring a greater awareness of the multitude of causes and effects of economic decisions and public policies to the contemporary theories crafted to explain the persistent poverty of West Virginia.

The history of this state makes it an ideal setting for this argument. Industrialism played an especially interesting role in this portion of the nation because of its integral support of economic growth with its vast beds of coal. The story of this mineral in West Virginia is complicated by the fact that it brought both prosperity and
depression. However, I argue that despite the more unfortunate side effects of this mineral, the way these ideologies and economic development unfolded in the Mountain State ultimately granted “the people of the Hills” political legitimacy and modernization. As the coal industry quickly built itself, with help from politicians eager to grow the state’s economy, into a world of powerful companies and poor miners highly dependent upon the services of the company, the state seemed to be placed upon a somewhat determined path. The severe importance of the health of this mineral’s industry to the livelihood of some many West Virginians created a degree of path dependence. The location of the path that coincided with John F. Kennedy’s campaign planted the possibility for an opportunity for direct action. The Appalachian Regional Commission stands out as an institution created to specifically address the economic concerns of one region in particular, charged with realizing the solutions to these concerns through direct input from the people residing in the relevant states. However, the organization’s less impressive improvement on central Appalachia’s poverty compared with the rest of the nation suggests that perhaps the course of this path has not yet been fully changed.

Throughout the course of this work, I will analytically recite stories on local, community-based scales to the statewide level to the federal level in order to demonstrate how the expanding role of the federal government has allowed and even directly caused dramatic changes to this area. The most direct policies and actions will hopefully be quite obvious. However, what I suspect are more subtle and what I hope to flesh out throughout this thesis are those less obvious political actions that
leave significant marks and create notable changes in the lives of and spaces in which the Americans of West Virginia live.

As to be expected, other theories and methods designed to explain the rampant poverty and depressed condition of West Virginia that prompted the passage of the ARC in 1965 exist with quite a bit of scholarly backing. One more anthropological approach diagnoses West Virginia as a place that suffers from a “culture of poverty”—that the people and communities of West Virginia are poor because that is the culture they cultivate. They will not be able to develop by themselves or even with the direct support of the federal government unless this culture of poverty is changed. Some aspects of this theory dangerously tread close to the at times offensive and often myopic popular conceptions of West Virginians as simple people who lack the ambition to better their lives, especially those of previously quite popular color writings produced largely for entertainment. However, a more refreshed vision of this theory characterizes this kind of culture as a “political passivity.” John Gaventa makes the development of this phenomenon throughout central Appalachia the topic of his work, *Power and Powerlessness*. He cites Gramsci in his discussion of how a certain kind of historical economic experience produces an apparent passivity:

> Even as the ‘silence’ is broken, the initial demands of the dominated may be vague, ambiguous, partially developed. This might help to explain the phenomenon of the ‘multiple’ or ‘split’ consciousness often cited in the literature of poor or working-class groups. As long as elements of the sense of powerlessness or the assuming consciousness that grow from non-participation can be maintained, then although there may be a multitude of grievances, the ‘unified’ or ‘critical’ consciousness will likely remain precluded. And, in turn, the inconsistencies themselves may re-enforce the pattern of non-challenge. In Gramsci’s terms, ‘it can reach the point where the contradiction of conscience will not permit any decision, any choice, and produce a state of moral and political passivity.’  

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The certain economic and political path undertaken by the coal-rich areas of central Appalachia fostered an environment in which clear injustices took place, and poverty spread dramatically. This view of the cultural implications of this path suggest that even when these injustices could be recognized and fought against, the people recognized as deserving of power lack an ability to harness this shift in the power relations of their area. Thus a stagnant poverty resulted that grew much worse as market and technological changes to coal mining lowered the demand for labor in the region. This theory accurately speaks to patterns of behavior characterizing groups of miners as they wrested degrees of control from coal companies and company mercenaries, however, it focuses quite closely on events and places isolated to the Appalachian region. Thus, to a certain extent it does not take the role of external governmental forces into account.

Another popular argument broadens the field of action to include the external players responsible to at the very least a significant extent of the course of economic development of the state. Known as the “Colonialism Model,” this method utilizes a model of economic, political, and social problems that plague many African and Latin American nations after their colonizers have pulled out. It argues that capitalist developers exploited the profitable natural endowments of central Appalachia, leaving the area desecrated as fluctuating markets squeezed profits. Indeed, a prominent Appalachian and specifically West Virginian historian John Alexander Williams makes this argument by way of the political development of West Virginia. In his book documenting the combined interests of early West Virginian political leaders with extractive industries, he makes this point clear. He articulates his thesis,
“The creation of a new and uninformed polity in a territory almost wholly subject to the social impact of extractive industry resulted in a phenomenon best described a colonial political economy.” Subsequent chapters of this thesis discuss the leaders and moments that contribute to Williams’ interpretation. For the powerful interests of a few men who would gain political power within a decade of the state’s independence would use their political power in order to open the door for significant changes to take hold in West Virginia.

Both of these theories make interesting and valid insights into the problems that plague central Appalachia, and specifically West Virginia for the purposes of this work. However, they tend to not completely capture the vastly important changing nature of the federal government as it explored the extent of federalism vis-à-vis national crises. They focus too heavily on the economic aspect of this complicated issue, and only discuss the negative or poverty-related outcomes of the years between the founding of West Virginia and the creation of the ARC. In turn, this practice further solidifies the associations between this region and state and problems of poverty.

**Common Perceptions of Appalachians and West Virginians**

An integral part of this thesis regards the relationship of “the people of the hills” to the rest of the nation, most pertinent to this work those of urban America. Appalachians in general have played a rather dynamic role in the lives of what can be considered mainstream America. The most relevant starting point to this thesis includes works of entertainment such as “color writings” or personal travel writings

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generally of a religious fervor. Both kinds of works cultivate a very specific kind of image of the Appalachian West Virginian that is still often burned in the minds of people today. A notable example in modern culture includes the popular MTV television show *Buckwild*, meant to entertain viewers with images of crazy, wild, and free young adults. An appropriate quote out of the mouth of one of the stars demonstrates this theme quite well, “West Virginia is a place founded on freedom—for me and my friends, that means the freedom to do whatever the [bleep] we want.”

A modern twist on these sentiments, the perpetuation of this stereotype in one interpretation supports my notion that ideas linger, even to the point that they are embraced by those designated as “the other.” Although the nation has changed the way we talk about West Virginians, perhaps in this instance by actually allowing them to speak for themselves, we do it in such a way that it continues to perpetuate this stereotype created so long ago.

Mid-twentieth century news clippings and academic works written about the mountains of Appalachia and the people that inhabit them compare with respect to the content and, to a certain extent, the themes in which they describe this “other” part of otherwise affluent America. These works will differ in tone, for example between newspaper articles and “color writings” depicting the people of the hills as inherently violent creatures⁴, and, on the other hand, the work of academics like Michael Q.

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Harrington verbalizing Appalachian poverty to plead for a federal response. Both works conceptualize Appalachia as an area apart from the rest of the nation, defined by the unique lifestyles of its inhabitants stemming from their lack of economic development (or civilization), folkish culture, and rampant poverty. The confusing mix of reactions ranging from disgust to sympathy to an urge to preserve the externally perceived culture of the hills reveals a certain degree of urban, affluent angst in relation to the people of rural West Virginia. In the same way that we grasp the idyllic debates between the founding fathers that would shape our more perfect union, in some ways West Virginia stands as a physical reminder of Jefferson’s defeated dream. Like a treasured memento of the past, we seek to preserve it. And yet, the conveniences of modernity bring with them an anxiety to never return here, and so society places negative views of barbarism on the lifestyles of people living there.

**Major Themes of the Thesis**

*New and Old Kind of Poverty*

Woven into the tones in the approach of each work is the relationship of Appalachians and West Virginians to the rest of the nation. A vital part of this has to do with certain significant economic and political changes that took place on both a national and local scale over the several decades that concern this thesis. The result of these changes created a different kind of poverty in the hills of West Virginia, one that garnered a specific kind of government response. I categorize these differences as an old and new kind of poverty, such that the former associates with a Jeffersonian yeoman farmer kind of ideology that offered a strand of freedom in which citizens

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would be completely self-sufficient, yet live quite simply. Although the farmers in the hills before the development of coal were quite poor, they were self-sufficient. Nothing about their lifestyles begged for a government intervention, nor really even suggested a symbiotic connection with the national government body, besides for protection from aggressive Native American populations, chafed by the alteration to their own societies because of the growth of a superior-minded white population, but this is not the story of this thesis.

The new poverty of the post-industrial era is outrageous. The dominance of coal and the way it altered the land and social relations in West Virginia created an environment that economically devastated the region when the demand for coal dramatically dropped after the Great Depression. This post-industrial poverty pulls at the conscience of urban, affluent America not only because of the starvation many face in the mountains, but moreover it raises a political question of how anyone can actively participate in the democratic process when so impoverished.

The interpretation of these different kinds of poverty grounds itself in the perceived dichotomy between the greater United States and the West Virginian. The original color writings create this dichotomy and dictate the space in which the conversation of the “West Virginian” takes place—thus the common imagery of West Virginian mountaineers that clearly still persists today. Even Harrington’s discussion of the need to reconcile the political differences that stem from this dichotomy is further proof of its conscious existence.

**Unintended Consequences**

These different kinds of poverty are the product of deliberate choices, coincidences, and market forces. These choices and events birthed both intended and
unintended consequences affecting politics, economics, and communities as social spaces. Part of this involves events such as The Civil War, which created an opportunity for a part of Virginia long unhappy with its quality of role in state political affairs to form its own state. Another example includes confusing and ever-changing land laws that allowed absentee companies to own most of the land in the most coal-rich areas of what would be West Virginia. Events such as these involve a multitude of actors both on state and national scales, and yet contributed to major changes in the lives of many West Virginians.

Path Dependence

Some of these events and decisions were more significant than others. A few worked together to form the path West Virginia would take in the years between its existence and the Great Society era. This phenomenon paints a picture of path dependence, by which once West Virginia leaders and eventually miners found themselves on a certain path, they found it difficult to change course. This idea is relevant to the way the coal industry operated in the area, especially given the massive geographic obstacles developers faced in even building roads in the state. Thus, in the state’s economic dependence on coal, politicians found that the path of West Virginia’s future paved by coal. Such commitment to this path left the state susceptible to the power of market forces that dictated the demand of coal. As these fluctuated so did both the economic and physical health of the state and its people.

Layering of Institutions

West Virginia was born out of a struggle between creating a new identity, or adopting the traditions of its mother state, Virginia. Due to the political preferences of many of the counties that composed the new state, West Virginia could not
completely tear itself away from its Virginian roots. Thus, certain political approaches and policies survived the separation, notably those associated with land ownership. This trend continued throughout the state’s existence, making major impacts as the rest of the nation experienced its own economic turmoil.

The Great Depression gave birth to a new understanding of the federal government’s role and boundaries. FDR’s institutions created to combat poverty had unintended and actually adverse consequences in West Virginia, pointing to the theme above. However, many of these institutions were not eliminated with the end of the Great Depression. To borrow a Keynesian conception of prices, bureaucracies are sticky in this sense—agencies are generally not temporary institutions. As other forces (such as the market for coal) operated in the state, these government institutions also made a difference. Thus, as the perception of West Virginians changed and the market significantly lowered the demand for coal, federal political leaders working in a period of federal growth felt a need to respond with institutional action. The ultimate solution of creating a new institution also points to this. The fact that the solution is more government action reveals the general attitude of the federal government with respect to perceived issues of equality within its constituency.

Maturation and Modernization of the Political System

The changes to the way the rest of the nation perceived West Virginia helped to contribute to a new kind of awareness of the state. As the face of West Virginia grew more difficult to brush off and gained more political attention, especially with the Kennedy campaign, the politics affecting West Virginians eventually became less corrupt. The state’s journey with respect to economics and politics actually aimed to empower the “people of the hills” with a much stronger and more legitimate political
voice. This is not to argue that the political system of the United States has reached a political utopia of sorts in which even the most marginalized member of society—both economically and physically—have a completely successful political voice. However, as evidenced by the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, the attention of federal policy makers shifted to recognize the needs of people who for generations were ignored.

**Coal**

Most of these themes play into each other, thus many examples of events in West Virginia include several of them. However, the most pervasive element driving these changes and themes forward is coal. The political and economic environment on state and federal levels throughout the turn of the century to the mid-sixties created a space for the way coal developed in West Virginia. But it was the particular way the coal industry took root and grew that made these different kinds of poverty and attention from the federal government so profound. Part of the reason some of the counties separating from Virginia were included was because leaders knew they contained coal. In fact, some of these leaders held significant portions of those acres. Furthermore, many of the absentee companies that owned tracts of mountain land were associated with coal. The highly competitive nature of the market for coal created conditions in which companies built and funded whole towns, even shipping in residents from eastern Europe.

It was in these privately created and run communities that miners lived and built their communities. As friction between the coal companies and miners grew due to a number factors including but not limited to unacceptable working conditions, miners eventually began to organize. Many ultimately joined unions, and struggled to
find a collective voice against the private companies that fed their families and housed them. When the market for coal hit a devastating level around the time of the Great Depression, the stage was set for the birth of this new kind of poverty. The development up to that moment prevented miners from returning to the subsistence farming that previously supported them. Many of the reasons why FDR’s institutions failed West Virginia had to do with the way they worked in coalfields. Finally, the distinctive problem that so moved Kennedy led to the creation of an entire organization catering to the problems of Appalachia, specifically the most central parts that includes West Virginia.

My methodology to further unpack these themes primarily runs on a linear timeline. I begin with discussing federalism, articulating the struggle between two particular conceptions of federalism with vastly different implications for the rest of the nation. Chapter two covers the Civil War and creation of West Virginia. It thus outlines the first instance of the rehashed debate of these original conceptions to be physically fought over the land of West Virginia. This is also the only time in which the different sides with respect to these competing ideas of federalism will be the best articulated.

The subsequent chapters lean into the realm of unintended consequences and layering of institutions. Thus, the continued debate between Jefferson and Madison is more subtle, yet I hope to highlight it through my analysis. Chapter three will discuss the development of coal, and how spheres of government interacted with other to create a space for an invasive form of industrial development. In conjunction with the following chapter discussing the outbursts of growing tensions with respect to the
development of coal in the form of union organization and violent strikes, I show how in keeping development local through supporting the rapid growth of the coal industry in West Virginia, American legislators actually destroyed one of the original and lasting physical manifestations of the Jeffersonian ideal.

The final chapter discusses the Appalachian Regional Commission, and how this agency acts as a federal response to poverty in order to make political corrections to injustices brought on by decades of irresponsible development. Thus, by the time of the Great Society, West Virginia took center stage in an effort to correct political inequalities through holistic, economically focused development.
CHAPTER 1: FEDERALISM AND A STRUGGLE OF IDEAS REGARDING “THE PEOPLE”

“The question of the relation of the states to the [F]ederal government is the cardinal question of our constitutional system...It cannot, indeed, be settled by the opinion of any one generation because it is a question of growth, and every successive stage of our political and economic development gives it a new aspect.”

President Woodrow Wilson

The American federalist system fosters a legal framework that allows for a range of economic and social possibilities for its citizens. Originally molded by a group of educated men in the form of carefully worded documents, this federalist system has adapted, contracted and expanded over time, and yet continues to reference the ideas purported by these men as a way of preserving the spirit of radical ideas of the American revolution. Although the federalist structure has adapted to accommodate the needs of a growing nation in a way that has made the states more and more interdependent, holdovers from these original arguments remain. This can be seen in violent outbursts such as with the Civil War, but also in more subtle events that take decades to begin to reveal themselves. Competing visions for the structure of the United States federal system concerned with the balance of power between the federal and state governments were fought over the physical boundaries of West Virginia, beginning with the states founding, over the course of the operation of the coal industry, and once again with the creation of a federal-state partnership created exclusively to develop the state and regions of other states plagued by similar problems.

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6 Woodrow Wilson, quoted in David Brian Robertson, Federalism and the Making of America (New York: Routledge, 2012), 35.
As a note for the discussion to follow, the ideas and theories were purported by men contextualized in a tumultuous period. Furthermore, we can but piece together through dispersed documents what we believe the founders (as if this term could be discussed as a collective noun with truly directed purpose) intended for the constitution and the future of the United States. The final document displays sensitive compromises. Daniel Elazar discusses the difficulty in placing any sort of certain category on the intended structure of the government designed by the Constitution, “The language of the Constitution is neither co-operative nor dualistic per se…most sections, however, do not clearly indicate whether the powers of the two levels of government are to be exclusive or concurrent, leaving the matter open to interpretation.”

7 Writing in the midst of the final period of time that concerns this thesis in the early sixties, Elazar goes on to distinguish three different periods of distinction in the characteristics of American federalism. The first begins with creation of the United States and ends with Mexican War, thus marking the rise of the next period until 1913 and the first grant-in-aid policy of the nation. His final category ran into his era.8

For the purposes of this work, his latter two categories offer the most relevant insight in order to contextualize the federal government role and attitude with respect to political and economic development in West Virginia. However, I briefly discuss each of them because of the way they inevitably inform each other. Although the operation of the federal government affects events in West Virginia inconsistently from the state’s founding until the creation of the ARC, this is to a significant extent

8 Ibid., 312-317.
informed by the working interpretation of federalism on a national scale—especially in terms of how this political philosophy affects economic policy.

**The Creation of the Constitution and Federalism**

Each political action born out of congressional debates, executive orders or Supreme Court rulings gains its legitimacy through the codified vision of a distinctly American political philosophy. Two documents in particular, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, stand as the original defenders of this philosophy and articulators of its boundaries. Perhaps most importantly, they justify the validity of government rule by resting the impetus of all political legitimacy within the collective power of a free and equal population of individual citizens. The mysterious role of this pivotal component of the American political system has and continues to inform debates concerned with the spheres of responsibility between this group and the various levels of government from local to state to federal.

The boundaries of these spheres were obviously first debated with the founding of the country. Opposing politico-philosophical views concerned the structure that would dictate the balance of power and respective jurisdictions between state and federal governments. The resulting government framework would set the nation as a whole down a particular path, with varying degrees of state-to-state interaction and cooperation. In the years between this period and the founding of West Virginia, tangible frictions between groups of states regarding the existing federalist framework emerged because of the way it affected economic and socio-cultural traditions. The discourse that emerged rekindled debates on the federalist balance of powers, a context highly concerned with the system’s economic
implications. Eventually erupting in war, antebellum American politics reveal how the reevaluation and continued debates on the philosophic underpinnings of the American political system inform policies and attitudes of relation between state and federal governments, and the “people” themselves. This process continues with every major turn in American federal policy, so that through this recontextualization of ideas institutions are constantly created and then layered with others as they emerge. Fittingly, this pattern of layering institutions and reevaluating political responsibility begins with the creation of the very first.

The creation of Declaration of Independence and Constitution represents not only the successful challenge to colonial power, but also a compromise between competing ideologies as to the design of this new government of the people. The debates surrounding the appropriate degree of government power gave breath to the philosophical basis of the great American experiment, and created a foundation around which to frame future questions of how Americans can best govern themselves to pursue individual self-interests. Although the relative size of the nation at the time of its founding was quite meager with respect to its territory today, a key topic of debate concerned the responsibilities and design of the federal and state governments, their relationships with each other, and the ultimate role and lifestyle of the individual citizen. The related spheres of power between these entities are concerned with how best to channel the mysterious power of the people into a system of representation that effectively serves the polity’s preferences.

Beyond the basic agreement that state and federal governments maintain a comprehensible degree of separation, significant debates took place to determine the
appropriate degree of this separation and respective roles of these levels of
government. The outcomes of these debates offered tailored visions of the social and
community-based future of the United States. Delineating various responsibilities
such as infrastructure or economic policy to certain levels of government would
necessarily shape the possibilities for the nation and Americans. From these debates,
a system coined “dual-federalism” emerged as a compromise between passionate
states-rights advocates and those founders more concerned with developing a national
political body.

The specific contents and their potential implications of two of the founding
fathers exemplify these debates over the future of the United States. James Madison
and Thomas Jefferson both maintained the legitimacy of the ultimate power of the
“people” in their personal conceptions of federalism, yet these ideas vastly contrasted
with each other. Perhaps best enshrined in his contribution to the Federalist papers,
Madison supported a stronger federal government with the power to prevent factions
and thus burgeon a growing national government. In his Federalist No. 14, he writes,
“[The general government’s] jurisdiction is limited to certain enumerated objects,
which concern all the members of the republic, but which are not to be attained by the
separate provisions of any. The subordinate governments…will retain their due
authority and activity.”

Madison intentionally articulates the difference between state
and federal responsibility in terms of those rights states retain because of the major
centre of those fearful of too large a federal power.

Jefferson comes to nearly opposite conclusions in his conception of
federalism. Defending his best practice, Jefferson seems to turn Madison’s arguments

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on their head. Writing to Gideon Granger, a prominent early American lawyer and supporter of Jefferson’s ideology, Jefferson defends small, localized government, “Our country is too large to have all its affairs directed by a single government. Public servants at such a distance, and from under the eye of their constituents, must…be unable to administer and overlook all the details for the good government of the citizens…”

Charles Tarlton summarizes the spirit of Jefferson’s federalism, “Federalism, in this Jeffersonian image, is the fostering of local initiative and qualities of citizenship through the maintenance of maximum governmental authority close to the people.”

Unlike Madison’s clear support for a strong sense of republicanism woven throughout all levels and branches of government, Jefferson focused on the importance of pure democracy, at the most local levels possible.

Thus, Madison believed that concentrating power in the federal government would actually protect the voice of the American people to a greater extent than a loose confederation of related states. His allusion to the growing nation and the capacity to a strong republican government imply his vision for the future of America: he makes his idea clear that he sees the borders widening and the number of citizens and diversity therefore growing.

Jefferson, on the other hand, builds his

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12 He makes this point well in his famous Federalist 10, in which he particularly argues against factions, which he defines as “…a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” (Federalist No. 10, 1). The point of this writing is to highlight the dangers of these factions in a nation whereby each citizen is to be free and equal. He reconciles this problem by arguing the merits of a republic to protect the rights of all citizens even in a nation of a large area and varied individual states.
13 Again pulling from the “Federalist No. 14”, Madison states, “A second observation to be made is that the immediate object of the federal Constitution is to secure the union of the thirteen primitive
political philosophy around his ideal vision of the future of the United States. His intense focus on the most local elements of the government reflects a commitment to self-rule, thus the difference between Madison’s republicanism and Jefferson’s democracy.

The differences between these ideas would have grave consequences for at the very least the image of the United States. The former view expects a certain degree of growth and economic development, the other does not necessarily stifle growth, but prioritizes the virtue of keeping government as local as possible. Thus, the kinds of economic maneuvering and taxation privileges necessary for wide-scale and efficient coordination between state governments and even individual citizens would be near impossible.

With the adoption of the Constitution and addition of the Bill of Rights, the founders leaned towards Madison’s vision, though hardly abandoned Jefferson’s assertion of local rights of government. In the decades leading up to the American Revolution, the United States government adopted a system later known as “dual federalism,” whereby the government system operates on different levels, with different responsibilities. The independence and strength of the federal government was further solidified by historical decisions of Chief Justice John Marshall. The scholar who coined the phrase “dual federalism,” Edward C. Corwin, remarks on the origins and responsibilities of these levels, “By the Hamiltonian theory, the national government, although a government of enumerated powers, is within the range of powers a truly sovereign government, and so is under no constitutional

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States…and to add to them such other States as may arise in their own bosoms, or in their neighborhoods…” (2).
compulsion…to take account of the coexistence of the states…”\textsuperscript{14} The intellectual writings concerning the construction of the system that would govern the American experiment culminated in this system of dual federalism, preserving the different spheres of influence with respect to federal and state branches of government, yet designating the federal government as ultimately superior to the states.

This granting of federal sovereignty over the states represents a significant moment in the history of the United States. For with the success of the American Revolution, this collection of colonies became a legitimate, collective body of provinces, consenting to an external government wielding sovereignty over them. However, the actual operation of this system over time revealed a somewhat unexpected outcome: “…in reality, a system of shared activities was developing that embodied its own type of dualism in which co-operation between governments, not spheres of action, was the key.”\textsuperscript{15} Although crucial to reasons for the conflicts that eventually led to the Civil War, the fact that this transition occurred is unsurprising. At this moment in history the idea of the American as a nationalistic identifier was in its infancy. Indeed, at this point, all politics really were local. Especially in the areas concerning this thesis, many communities in the space that would become West Virginia physically resembled the dream of Jefferson. Much of the state was hardly even under the jurisdiction of the state of Virginia. Before the Revolutionary War, only two counties officially existed. With a growing population, Virginia busied itself creating new county boundaries throughout and just following the War. Furthermore, the residents of contemporary West Virginia found themselves much more

\textsuperscript{14} Edward C. Corwin, quoted in Elazar, \textit{The American Partnership}, 11.
\textsuperscript{15} Elazar, \textit{The American Partnership}, 14.
preoccupied with agitated Indian populations than in fostering the creation of an American identity.\textsuperscript{16}

This direct threat seemed to convince the inhabitants of western Virginia of the merits to having a collective force stronger than just the state of Virginia to protect them. The delegates in attendance at Virginia’s constitutional convention in June of 1788 representing the western portion of the state adopted federalist sympathy, convinced that, “…a strong central authority would be more likely to secure navigation of the Mississippi and…that Virginia might not be able to protect her citizens who had obtained tracts from the Fairfax proprietary.”\textsuperscript{17} However, this transition to subordination to a federal government encountered friction shortly after George Washington adopted the position as the first President of the United States. The federal government experienced a significant backlash when one of the intellectual crafters of the accepted theory of federalism, Alexander Hamilton, enacted an excise tax on whiskey. Although federal forces squashed the Whiskey Rebellion, the insurrection stood as symbol of defiance to a strong federal authority. Indeed, William McKinley, who acted as an Ohio County delegate and contributed to negotiations with the federal government, “…stated that he had no desire to oppose the tax except ‘in a Constitutional way.’”\textsuperscript{18} The actual application of the ideas so hotly debated was not completely smooth, especially in the rural areas that would become West Virginia.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 50.
These two examples also point to Elazar’s interpretation of the unintended consequences of dual-federalism. For within these events the beginnings of a relationship based more upon a degree of interdependence emerges that counters the idea of spheres of appropriate influence. In the years to come, these “people of the hills” would continue to find moments of convenience with what the federal government could offer them. However, this more symbolic than truly threatening rebellion marks perhaps the first instance of the way the friction between these ideas burst into a tangible, and in this case violent, outburst in the geography of western Virginia.

Who are the “people”?

At the center of the political debates that would produce the concept of dual federalism stood the consensus that the American government would stand in order to serve its citizens, not organize its subjects. Thus, the ultimate source for political legitimacy in the American political system stems from the free and equal “people.” Composed of the political will of each and every American, comprehending the manifestation of this supreme power proves an elusive exercise, although quite interesting when considered in terms of the rural West Virginian’s shifting relationship with the rest of the nation and federal government.

This political conception of the “people” as the fundamental source for legitimacy in American politics places a supposed check on governing bodies, and on the individuals that compose them. An especially important aspect of this conception is the seemingly infinite yet abstract potential of the people’s political power. That is, the “people” are much more than just the numerically totaled population of a given
territory. Margaret Canovan articulates this idea, “…the western political imagination is haunted by a quite different ‘People’: the population transformed into a mythic being that is not only the source of political legitimacy, but can sometimes appear to redeem politics from oppression, corruption and banality.”¹⁹ Canovan’s description captures the romantic vision of “the people” as powerful, yet nearly always potential, actors in government. It offers a vision of the government branches as ultimately answerable to this mysterious authority that simultaneously requires a government to manage itself and yet appears to ultimately have some kind of identifiable and coherent political will. Thus, the purpose of government appears to potentially serve as a service that creates a space for the individuals contributing the mythic force of this body in which they can pursue more comprehensive and independent projects.

Canovan stresses the mythic quality of this more complicated and abstract definition of the “people” because its characteristics offers an exponential potential for the people’s power to grow with time. Fittingly, her strongest example of this growing mythic power is the United States and the relationship of contemporary Americans and government with the founders. According to Canovan, the American “backward-looking local myths of the people…legitimize[s] a particular polity, and also provide[s] grounds where necessary for recalling that polity to its foundations and giving power back to the people.”²⁰ The themes of the earliest discussions of America’s foundational government actively shape the justifications behind political actions from that time forward. The especially influential nature of this in the

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²⁰ Ibid., 125.
American political system begs at the very least a brief discussion of these foundational arguments and themes that plagued the psyches of the founding fathers.

For the purposes of this thesis, I note that the concept of the people as free and equal is vital to the legitimacy of the Constitution and of the government. Each person with American citizenship constitutes a member of this group, and thus supposedly yields an equal potential to political power as any other member. However, as I intend to show through a specific case study in the pages and chapters that follow, this idea does not always directly translate as the nation grows, oftentimes in different directions. As the nation grew older and expanded territory, the government began to face certain challenges that would sometimes force a dynamic reassessment of the different government roles and spheres of influence. The application of these ideas can leave deep scars, in some cases that do not fade but are rather layered over with other policies and institutions. By tracing the economic and political story of West Virginia back to the state’s founding, I hope to unpack some of these themes vis-à-vis the state in which many of these ideas were tested and fought.

The “people” of the founding documents of the United States are presented as a singular kind of conception: they are considered the political authority, and they are presented as a single political actor. Written accounts of Appalachia and its relationship with the rest of the nation present an interesting counter to this theory. According to Kathleen Blee and Dwight Billings, “community conflicts were used by nonlocal writers to help define ‘Appalachia’ and…to explain the forms of violence that erupted there.”

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throughout rural West Virginia illustrates this idea. Jonathan Cross reflects on his
time in the mountains of West Virginia, “[My work among the mountains] was like a
translation from sunlight into darkness—from a high civilization into one of
ignorance and superstition, with here and there a family of wealth and refinement.”

Cross creates a distinction between the people of the mountains and the rest of West
Virginia that portrays the former group as almost a different kind of species. Their
lack of education and foreign, violent lifestyles invoke fear in the pastor evidenced in
this regional dichotomy. Other than attempting to spread the word of God to a people
reluctant to foreign ideas and people, Cross does not attribute much value at all to the
people he encounters in the mountains of West Virginia. They are fellow humans to
be converted, despite their inhumanity.

Some decades later, another man, a reporter this time, traversed perhaps the
same mountain roads as Jonathan Cross. Michael Harrington also distinguishes the
lifestyles of the people he encountered in terms of their poverty, “The only problem is
that ‘those people’ [of Appalachia], the quaint inhabitants of those hills, are
undereducated, underprivileged, lack medical care, and are in the process of being
forced from the land into a life in the cities, where they are misfits.” Harrington
creates a similar geographical distinction between the affluent middle-class portions
of the United States and the mountains of Appalachia, an idea he reinforces in the title
of his book, The Other America. However, Harrington utilizes a notably different
tone in his reflections on his time in “the other America.” Harrington seems to play

22 Jonathan Cross, Five Years in the Alleghanies. (New York: Sabin Americana. Gale, Cengage
Learning, 1863), 57.
23 Ibid., 201.
24 Harrington, 3-4.
on this idea of the collective American people in his analysis of the political problem with this poverty in America. He writes, “…the poor are politically invisible. It is one of the cruelest ironies of social life in advanced countries that the dispossessed at the bottom of society are unable to speak for themselves…they have no face; they have no voice.”

He insists the solution to this problem will come in the form of a federal government response to bring these lost citizens back to political parity with the nation through economic support and sustainable development.

Over a century passed between the times when these accounts were written. While they retain clear distinctions in their overall tone towards the people they encounter in the mountains, it is interesting that they both draw a distinct dichotomy between “Appalachia” and the rest of the nation. Blee’s and Billings’ analysis of constructing the term “Appalachia” thus appears to reach beyond the bounds of confronting the reports of violence there. Writers throughout time have drawn this distinction for a variety of purposes from entertainment to create a comparative base from which to demand public action. In either case, this evidence clearly problematizes the suggestion of a coherent authority of “the people” that legitimate political authority. The descriptions of these set them apart from the rest of the nation as either violent, irreligious creatures of the hills or helpless, poverty-stricken Americans who indeed deserve a voice, yet cannot muster the will to speak.

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25 Ibid., 6.
26 Ibid., 176.
The Debate of Ideas Festers to the Impetus of War

“Every day proves to me more and more, that this American world was not made for me.”
Thomas Jefferson

The debates between Jefferson and Madison, though seemingly ended with death of each man and adoption of the Constitution, experienced a renaissance in the antebellum period of American politics. Refashioned as the traditional voices to back frictions arising as a result to economic growth, the competing visions between Jefferson and Madison came to represent in a sense the ideological differences between the northern and southern states. The commitment to allow each state to maintain its own identity and control over economic resources to a large extent reflected the diverse nature of the states, especially regionally.

Already by this time, clear differences between the people and economies of Americans residing in northern contours of the nascent nation contrasted with those in the southern realm. Indeed, it was the conflicts produced by these differences that contributed to the abandonment of the Articles of Confederation. Although the adoption of the Constitution helped to address these, it was by no means a political panacea—the northern and southern regions of the nation continued to stand in stark contrast to one another. Furthermore, Elazar’s observation of the intended spheres of influence molding into a cooperative relationship spurred friction between states, especially in terms of federal legislation. Although states found themselves politically more connected through the powers of the federal government, the separated states

28 David Brian Robertson, Federalism and the Making of America, 21.
continued to celebrate their *individual*\textsuperscript{29} identities at least in part because the nationalism needed to connect Americans lagged behind the official creation of a binding national government. Over time the shape and sentiments of these concepts began to take on regional differences within the nation.

The ideas expressed in the founding documents of the nation suggested a provocative experiment of individual freedom and democratic rule vis-à-vis the contemporary governments of Europe, the United State’s nearest cultural neighbor. The unexpected victory following all the violence expended and subsequent lives lost fighting for the right to perform this experiment pressured the intellectual and political leaders behind the powerful documents that guarded the philosophical grounding of the nation. These leaders, most of who sympathized with Federalist arguments, were concerned with fostering a nation and culture to rival, and yet stand in distinction of, that of many European nations.

As time eroded the excitement over the foundational events such as the Revolutionary War, the failure of the Articles of Confederation and the adoption of the Constitution, prominent characters active in the first years of America’s existence gained a growing awareness of the lack of *American* cultural creativity. For a nation that in the words of Alfred North Whitehead stood alone with Augustan Rome, “…when the people in power did what needed to be done about as well as you can

\textsuperscript{29} I specifically say individual because I do not mean to imply that the dichotomy between the north and south had necessarily been developed as of yet. Rather, I argue that the states were more concerned with their individual identities rather than drawing lines along regional patterns. I do not think this came until later as separate northern and southern senses of nationalism took shape in large part because of the shared differences in economic and political ideas that did noticeably run across regional lines.
imagine its being possible,“ the strength of the nation proved quite important to these “people in power.” The pressure to build this distinctively American national culture grew vis-à-vis the mother power from which the founding fathers demanded independence. Even as Americans began to produce creative work, they were aware of the new roads they paved. Linda Kerber describes the mindset of these later-nineteenth century writers, “It is no wonder that this generation did not understand its fathers; when Emerson remarked that from 1790 to 1820 there was not a thought in Massachusetts, he was not so much stating a fact as making an assessment of a cultural outlook with which he was unsympathetic.” Emerson’s staunch disapproval represents the vision for the cultural ambitions of a certain sect of early Americans building the first nationalist sentiments—that is, really defining what it means to be of America. Such cultural frustrations point to the beginnings of a nationalist sentiment with some of the nation’s elites. Integrally tethered to a national government capable of igniting a connecting force between its citizens, this growing sense of nationalism as a collective force was met with friction because of the legislative, and consequently, economic implications of a growing federal government.

This vision and Emerson’s vein of disapproval did not resonate with all Americans. In political and cultural terms, this distinction between the Federalists and Jeffersonians continued its battle for the power to shape the future of the United States. Kerber writes, “…the Federalists of Jefferson’s time were bitter men…America appeared to be developing a civilization which they did not

understand and of which they certainly did not approve. The more they clung to their
definition of what a proper Augustan age would be, the less likely it seemed that
America was going to have one.” The first decades of America’s existence saw
these competing arguments and visions of what the United States could and should be
debated through the political, economic, and cultural discussions of its leaders and
people. Both sides celebrated certain victories, especially with the compromises of
the Constitution, and succession of leaders who represented men from both sides of
this primary debate.

However, these ideas adapted to represent different geographical regions of
the nation. As it did so, fear of how the future of the United States would be affected
by different aspects of the reality of these representative areas planted anxiety
between these regions. Various symbols came to represent and shape the debates
between these areas. Some were especially emotional, most notably the institution of
slavery, while others involved the balance between political voices. The apparent
general relationship of the North to the South sheds light on the former’s political
consciousness with respect to the South’s political complaints as these tensions grew
thicker in the years leading up to the Civil War. Northern sentiments reflected a sense
of superiority over the South. Historians conclude that in general Northern views
viewed the South as a place to be “Northernized,” exemplifying that, “…the
construction of American nationalist ideology in the mid-nineteenth century was not a
process undertaken jointly by both sections…Instead, as Foner noted, two alternative
ideologies emerged, each reliant on the other for definition.”

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32 Ibid., 4.
33 Susan Mary-Grant, North Over South, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 5-6.
agitated when Southern states sought to officially separate themselves from the
northern portion of the nation. However, this did not satisfy the Northern conception
of how the United States was meant to be. Grant explains, “Convinced that their
democracy was, in Abraham Lincoln’s words, ‘the last, best hope of earth,’
northerners could no more allow the secession of the southern states in 1861 than they
could permit the South to remain in the Union unchanged.”

Thus, it appears that at
the core of the Northern conception of American nationalism existed a sense of
superiority over Southern states, a superiority realized with the Northern victory in
the Civil War and commemorated in popular phrases such as “The War of Northern
Aggression.”

Grant collects writings and expresses the Northern sentiments with respect to
the South in terms of a skewed power dynamic dominated by the North. Agreeing
with her vision is eased by the counterfactual outcome of the Civil War, and evidence
found without much trouble in her collected newspaper clippings. However, as noted
in the following chapter, the reality of national politics in the decades leading up to
the Civil War were much more delicate, with a heavy reliance on maintaining a
balance between the Northern and Southern interests in the federal chambers of the
government. These were exacerbated as the nation expanded its territory, an
ironically complicated issue for the President who personally fostered much of this
growth. When Jefferson purchased the Louisiana territory from France in 1803, he
directly challenged his ideal of small government because of the opportunity
presented before him. However, this element of federal government action largely

34 Ibid., 9.
exemplifies this period.\(^{35}\) Along with the opportunity for physical growth of the nation, the governance of this purchase represented a physical space over which the crucial balance between Northern and Southern values took place. As this sensitive balance grew more difficult to maintain vis-à-vis the expansion of slavery in these new territories, one of the nation’s oldest states tore apart—the hyper-legal creation of West Virginia acting as a physical and philosophical battleground of debates begun at the creation of the nation.

**Emergence of Cooperative Federalism**

As the nation picked up the pieces from its bloody war of cultures and ideologies, the United States began to adopt laissez faire economic policies as the nation industrialized. Much of this industrialization of more northern cities literally fueled by the coal of West Virginia, this period dramatically altered the United States in myriad terms, including but not limited to physical landscape and economic and social dynamics. Although West Virginia’s experience proved much different than that of the rest of the nation, in this moment the operation of American federalism began to once again change. Ultimately, however, it was the effects of the Great Depression and responses of FDR that significantly redefined the American brand of federalism. The programs enacted by this President while his nation struggled with economic hardship created a standard of precedent for the degree of support offered by the federal government.

The acts of FDR in response to tragedy of the Great Depression greatly expanded the role of the federal government. However, according to Elazar, this era

in American federalism began years before the groundbreaking legislation of the FDR era. With the rise of urban industrialism in the United States, Elazar finds the first cash grant (otherwise known as grant-in-aid) distributed in 1913 to mark the commencement of the era most commonly designated as cooperative federalism.\(^{36}\) As with West Virginia state politics, power shifted from Republicans to the Democrats. However, the economic circumstances of the New Deal era combined with the rising Marxist movements in Europe ushered in rising anxieties over the appropriate degree of government intervention in a liberal society. These anxieties reappear in a new form with respect to fear over the role of unions in the West Virginia coalfields around this same time.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{36}\) Elazar offers this distinction with a degree of hesitation. He finds this label for this period in American democracy misleading because it fails to recognize the nuance operation of federalism before this period. As opposed to “cooperative federalism” specifically occurring in this time period (1913 on), he rather argues that American federalism has been cooperative to some and in varying fashion since its inception. I find his interpretation intriguing because of the way it interprets federalism as an evolving political system that at no point evolves into an indiscernible outgrowth of its original form. Rather, as it evolves it retains significant holdovers from its former operation. Elazar, *The American Partnership*, 315.

CHAPTER 2: BACK TO THE BEGINNING—THE CREATION OF WEST VIRGINIA

West Virginia’s physical location is pivotal to the path and outcomes of its economic, social and political development—especially in its most isolated regions rich with coal. The unique qualities of West Virginia’s landscape actively shapes the setting in which its citizens and businesses build their lives. The mountains and crevices stretching across this state act as their own characters in the history of this state—their gifts as well as their impositions provide valuable opportunities while presenting what can seem insurmountable obstacles.

Thus, the story of the state’s creation begins even before the first argument over the federalist structure of the United States government. The impressive role of geography in West Virginia’s communities and economies significantly informs how scholars conceptualize the development of society and political economy in the state. Indeed, no matter the ultimate focus of the work, most histories on the state of West Virginia open with vivid depictions of the physical environment in which the chosen subject matters acts. These geographic anomalies further inform the designation that West Virginia is a world “apart.” Although my work is not a pure history of the state, its politics, or its economics, a discussion of the intersection of the coal industry and the politics that shape West Virginia and support its citizens requires at the very least a few words on the landscape in which these two essential aspects of

38 Common examples of works by respected scholars include the following: John Alexander Williams, West Virginia: a History (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2001), or Otis K. Rice, West Virginia: a History (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky 1985).
modern life—economics and politics—meet. Thus, the Mountain State is truly the most appropriate name for the subject of my work because of the manner in which these inescapable and breathtaking aspects of this state’s landscape pervade into at times unexpected aspects of society.

West Virginia’s contemporary borders encompass 24,231 square miles split by the Appalachian Trail in its path connecting the eastern portion of the United States from Maine down to Georgia. The topography averages 1500 feet, yet ranges between 4,861 feet and 247 feet with forty different mountains reaching peaks beyond 4000 feet.\(^3^9\) Over the course of several million years, geologic activity worked the salt-laden trough called a geosyncline that would become West Virginia.\(^4^0\) Just east of this trough, a risen continent aptly named Old Appalachia played a crucial role in creating the environment that would seal the fate of the people that inhabit this area millions of years in the future. The material that slid from Old Appalachia into the geosyncline pushed the rock around it upward as it was pushed downward, thus creating a geological disruption called the Appalachian Revolution. This caused rock strata to undergo continuous cycles of folding and uplifting, during which time much of this space resembled more of a swamp than mountainous paradise, covered with vegetation. The final stages of this process oversaw this vegetation decompose to slowly create vast amounts of the chalky, black substance known as coal. Over the next several million years, this uplifting


\(^{40}\) Rice, West Virginia: a History., 1.
process continued as erosion simultaneously ate away at these ancient, natural structures through the Ice Age, which saw the work of streams enter the equation.\textsuperscript{41}

The combination of these natural processes shaped the breathtaking peaks the first human inhabitants of this land constantly struggled to traverse, and created the substance that so many saw as West Virginia’s opportunity for economic success.\textsuperscript{42} I now turn to the moments directly leading up to the development of this industry in the political history of the state. Just before the creation of the state, those areas to be most affected by coal contained dispersed communities of self-sufficient farmers. Rugged, independent pockets of small communities and a few powerful captains of industry who often held political and economic seats of power distinguish this period. However, major, significant changes swept over these people with the creation of a new state and political identity and rapid economic changes that dramatically changed the lives of each person and family nestled within these mountains.

Eastern and western Virginia

The towering peaks shaping the state dictate the feasibility of traversing the landscape, a challenge that has confronted humans seeking to explore and settle this land from the first colonizers to the highway construction workers currently blasting the sides of these mountains to create federal roads. Indeed, the rugged nature of

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{42} Examples of this exist both with respect to West Virginia and the nation at large. For example C. E. Lester, the former editor of \textit{Coal Age} writes, “Bituminous coal is power, and power is the essential of modern industry.” C. E. Lesher, “An Introductory Survey of the Bituminous Coal Industry.” \textit{The American Economic Review} 11, no. 1 (1921), 49. Another example more specific to West Virginia is in Nancy Sue Smith’s \textit{History of Logan and Mingo Counties}, when she describes the massive development changes that came as a result of the coal boom in Williamson. Between swelling employment in rail and coal mining, the town grew rapidly in population. Nancy Sue Smith, \textit{History of Logan and Mingo Counties Beginning in 1617}. Williamson, WV, n.p. 1966.
West Virginia’s landscape largely explains the demographics of the area shortly before the civil war, when the only descriptive distinction distinguishing this place was “western Virginia.” Before June 20, 1863 the contemporary state of Virginia enjoyed the title of the largest state in the Union, stretching across the current boundaries of West Virginia to share a border with Ohio. The diverse topography in a state of such a large size created natural geographic divides, and regional differences festered in Virginia for nearly a century before its dramatic schism into two separate states.

These differences were apparent for some time before the state’s division into its eastern and western counterparts. A distinguished historian on Virginia prominent during the period leading up to its separation, Charles Ambler divides the most divisive conflicts discernable between the major halves of the state into three major sections. Each marks a moment in the state’s history whereby balances of political power were challenged, destabilizing the dominant spheres. In exposing points of weakness within these balances, new opportunities were created to reshape the social and political context of government in the state, until it eventually split into two parts. He begins with the period bookended by early years in colonialism and Bacon’s Rebellion. The next episode of conflict began when settlers in the Piedmont region demanded a voice in the colonial government as the colony expanded into their territory. This second designation petered out with the reforms that came with the Revolution, though was not truly resolved until the constitutional convention of 1829-30 (for which Ambler performed the transcription). The final period, and the one most important for the purposes of this thesis, centered around western
Virginians’ dissatisfaction with the quality of their voice in the state government. This problem only resolved itself during the Civil War when the two regions separated into two different states. Each of these conflicts began with political frustrations between different socio-economic groups within the state, and required some kind of violent intervention (though not necessarily having directly to do with the sectional conflict at hand) to resolve the issue.

The Blue Ridge Mountains are perhaps the most natural geographic boundary between these two Virginias, as the landscapes and lifestyles on either side differed—in some cases rather dramatically. The eastern portion of Virginia was known for not only its crucial role in the creation of the United States, but also for its resemblance and relation with the antebellum south. Virginians from the more eastern portion of the state tended to hold more slaves and were much more likely to own larger estates. Furthermore, following the spirit in which the state earned its name as a reference to the virgin Queen of England, Virginia was officially an Anglican colony. This established religion was an official component of the political identity of Virginia until the state legislature voted to separate church and state in 1786. However, for the purposes of encouraging settlement in the more rugged

44 I should note that none of these distinctions are universal, but the history of West Virginia written by Colonel Lang offers a brief overview of the major issues leading up to the schism within a few decades after the event by someone who lived through them. Theodore F. Lang, *Loyal West Virginia from 1861 to 1863* (Baltimore, MD: The Deutsch Publishing Company, 1895), 3.
45 This is most clearly evidenced by the fact that four out of the first five Presidents of the United States hailed from this largest state in the Union. Ibid., 2.
46 Ibid., 3.
areas of the state, Virginia was historically quite tolerant of other denominations of Christianity, especially those of a Protestant creed.48

Unlike the western part of the state, eastern Virginia in general supported agriculture grown in large plots of land quite well. One crop in particular proved especially profitable, yet could be linked to political tensions between these two parts of the state. Eastern Virginia soil yielded high quality tobacco, bringing the larger plantation owners of this part of the state a considerable degree of prosperity.49 This geographic difference that yielded economic profitability with tobacco in the east marks a major difference between these regions on the one hand because of natural resources, yet that also unevenly affected the political atmosphere and economic health of the entire state. The political interests with respect to this crop heighten when considering the method of production and cultivation of tobacco, precisely because of the human—or in this case, slave—element involved.

Virginian tobacco in the 19th century grew on large plantations, and in addition to quality soil, depended on a peculiar institution for its large profits. These two resources worked in conjunction with each other to act as the primary resources of the eastern half of the state.50 By 1850, eastern Virginia contained more enslaved blacks than free whites, with populations of 409,793 and 401,540, respectively. These numbers stood in stark contrast to those of the western portion of the state,

48 Ibid., 62.
49 Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861, 112.
50 Ibid., 112.
which actually boasted a higher free white population of 492,609, yet contained much fewer slaves at 62,233.\textsuperscript{51}

The People of the Hills

To the west of Blue Ridge, Virginians led notably different lifestyles than those of their eastern counterparts. Their land could not support tobacco plantations, they held considerably fewer slaves, and suffered from underrepresentation in their state government to the benefit of their eastern neighbors.

The first Europeans to settle in this area were of German and Scotch-Irish descent. These pioneers settled in the Valley between the peak of the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies, before the institution of any official political system.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, these foreign nationals created communities of survival, whereby “the westward advance of her peculiar institutions was thereby interrupted, and a new society, naturally hostile to things Virginian, was planted.”\textsuperscript{53} These communities built themselves from the ground up, reinforcing means of self-sufficiency by growing staple crops and supporting small markets for only necessary service industries such as shoe and wagon makers. Furthermore, any markets for products or agriculture were restricted by lack of and difficulty producing infrastructure connecting cities and towns, thus limiting the seller to any area within a reasonable walking distance.\textsuperscript{54}

Just as over the eastern boundary of the Blue Ridge, religion played an important role in the lifestyles of western Virginias. However, the isolation and

\textsuperscript{51} Both parts of the state also recorded the number of free blacks living in each section. These numbers were 45,783 for eastern Virginia, and 8,123 for the western part of the state. Lang, \textit{Loyal West Virginia from 1861 to 1863}, 3.
\textsuperscript{52} Ambler, \textit{Sectionalism in Virginia, 1776-1861}, 13.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 14.
ruggedness of this area of the state took advantage of the relative religious tolerance of Virginia and thus experienced a wider variety of mostly Protestant denominations. A short list of this variety obviously included Anglicans, but also numbers of “Presbyterians, Lutherans, German Reformists, Quakers, and Dunkers…” However, the natural, mountainous boundaries that made these areas so rugged and thus contributed to the easing of religious intolerance also changed the practice of these different religions. In settling this new frontier, survival quickly became a priority, and the burgeoning communities growing within the valleys of mountains were naturally isolated. This kind of environment inevitably compromises the practice of any universally organized religion, especially in an isolated area with such a diversity of denominations. Even for simple tasks performed by most church leaders such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals, communities relied on roaming pastors of a random denomination to stop by on infrequent visits.

These communities thrived within themselves, not answering to higher, more organized government oversight. Yet, the people of these communities still practiced politics and governed themselves. The philosophy behind their practice reflected the theoretical traditions of the nationalities that settled the area. Ambler writes, “To the Scotch-Irish, the political leaders, civil liberty meant freedom of person, the right of fee-simple possession, and an open door to civic honors. They believed that free lands made free peoples who had a perfect right to form free governments.” From

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56 Ibid., 62.
57 Ambler’s inclusion of a fee-simple approach to land ownership is an issue that becomes especially important in the upcoming chapters with respect to how coal companies and more established forms of government conceptualized land ownership with respect to the citizens who inhabited these areas. Ibid., 15.
the brief description of sectional political frustrations above, this approach to politics helps to explain the reasons why the issues regarding taxation and representation became such a problem between eastern and western Virginia in the years leading up to and during the Civil War.

The pioneers who settled the rugged frontier west of the Blue Ridge in Virginia built their lives very much so within isolation. They brought with them their religious, cultural, and political traditions from wherever they originally hailed, but found that the conditions of this new experience fostered communities of self-reliance. However, these organic practices of religion and politics, specifically, would find broader support in theoretical underpinnings springing up throughout the nation.

To begin with religion, the unregulated and denominationally ambiguous practice of Protestantism coincided with two significant events in the history of the United States: the Great Awakening and the Civil War. The former of these fostered a philosophy that meshed quite well with the political philosophy of the Scotch-Irish populations that inhabited these mountains. Because the Great Awakening largely revamped already-existent forms of Protestantism by infusing them with a greater emphasis on emotion and downplaying the necessity of ritual, western Virginians became “the plastic material for the revivalist who found them receptive to a gospel which taught a direct personal relationship between Christ and the believer.”58 This newer approach to religious theology and practice found a more aggressive voice

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with the coming of the American Revolution, which questioned the integration of church and state.\(^{59}\)

Another aspect of life within these mountains that helped to distinguish western Virginia has proven one of the most memorable and iconic aspects of life in the mountains of West Virginia: the feud. According to the Appalachian scholars Kathleen Blee and Dwight Billings, “‘Feuding’ was the common term that contemporary commentators applied to sustained incidents of widespread violence throughout Appalachia…in the 19th century.”\(^{60}\) Unfortunately, scholarly research on the actual instead of simply perceived preponderance of violent feuds is sparse.\(^{61}\) Still, one feud in particular played a major role in the areas that would become significant coal-mining regions in the years to come.

The famous family feud between Hatfield and McCoy families along the border of current-day West Virginia and eastern Kentucky acts a defining cultural characteristic of central Appalachia. Carried out over the same land that within decades would become neatly designed company towns, the myths surrounding issues between these families came to feed stereotypes constructed by Americans foreign to this land. Altina Waller discusses these, even at the hands of academic scholars in the latter half of the twentieth century. She notes, “…if the existence of schools and churches was admitted, then journalists and scholars pointed to the backwardness and irrelevance of those institutions…ignorance, isolation, and the lack of social institutions lead to idleness, absence of ‘industry,’ and a tendency to


\(^{60}\) Blee and Billings, “Violence in Local State Formation”: 672.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., 672.
violence.” Confirming Blee and Billing’s analysis of analogous feuds in Kentucky, however, the families involved often at least attempted or used mixed strategies to address their grievances in court rather than through sectarian violence. Ironically, the most violence this state would see came with the impetus of ‘industry’ and coal. Still, the concept of the feud is historically significant to West Virginia and the external conception of its people.

The Center of the State Conflict

As mentioned above, western Virginians led vastly different lifestyles than those of the east, and it was these western populations that tended to carry the barbaric-like stereotypes of the color writings mentioned in the previous chapter and informed by mythic feuds. However myopic these depictions may be in hindsight, they are at least inspired by grains of truth regarding the lifestyles of many western Virginians. The people of western Virginia could not sustain the massive plantations of the east because of the landscape and soil conditions in which they lived, and instead made their livings through other ways much less associated with southern antebellum culture.

Despite the smaller free white population, eastern Virginia enjoyed a certain dimension of privilege over its western neighbor. This was most importantly of a political kind, and centered on taxation. Colonel Lang describes the most common grievances of many western Virginians, “The west complained that a large proportion of the property of the eastern planters, which consisted of slaves, was either wholly or in effect free from taxation, while all of theirs was taxed…affirmed

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63 Ibid., 2, 8.
that they derived little benefit from the sums expended for internal improvements…”

Tax records validate this complaint of the western counties of Virginia, suggesting that slave-owners enjoyed a degree of favoritism. Quoted in David Zimring’s “Secession in Favor of the Constitution,” an advocate of separation from Virginia compared the raw numbers of property tax rates for land assets and human property: “a slave worth...$1600 to $1800 was taxed the same as $300 value of land.”

Frustrations only worsened in the legislatures meant to symbolize political equality because the eastern population of the state secured a firm control over the Virginia senate, and thus could prevent any real changes in the tax policies from taking place.

The political frustrations surrounding representation in the state legislature planted seeds that would inspire politicians from the western part of Virginia to consider a bold, permanent move to solve the problem. Just as with each of the other two major sectional conflicts in Virginia, the resolution of this one would coincide with an especially violent event: the American Revolution. Amongst its myriad other significant contributions to American history, the Civil War forced a question of identity upon one of its oldest states. The Wheeling Conventions held May 13-15, 1861 and June 11-25, 1861, respectively, proposed a question the answer to which would either create a completely new state in order to preserve the Union, or preserve the state of Virginia in order to create a new nation. The events and debates surrounding this decision were much more complicated than the purely ideological

64 Lang, Loyal West Virginia, 4.
differences between Unionists and Rebels, as evidenced by the political landscape with respect to these two groups after the new state’s founding. Indeed, the legislative actions taken in West Virginia’s infancy reflect not only the ideological preferences of those in power, but also the realities of the maintaining control in a new state with a population used to taking matters into their own hands.

“Secession in Favor of Statehood”: The Federal Government Role in State Creation

Forces external to both eastern and western Virginia were directly responsible for the creation of the state. The Civil War, and especially the conviction of President Lincoln, played a significant role in the official creation of the Mountain State. The influential role of the federal government in this intrastate conflict raises an especially interesting analysis with respect to the loyalties of the people lying on either side of the dividing line. These “people of the hills” with their self-supporting communities built over decades of immigrants and rugged colonizers surviving off of whatever available resources lay at hand free from the oversight of a larger body of government found themselves working with the federal government—an even larger and more powerful body than the Virginia state legislature—to air their grievances.

The Civil War represented the culmination of deep tensions within the nation. As these tensions festered over time they more and more reinforced (or created heated perceptions of) differences between the northern and southern sections of the

67 Curry, “Crisis Politics in West Virginia.” 84.
68 This section marks an interesting transition in allegiances for the people of western Virginia in terms of political loyalties. For a place that developed communities without real help from a larger government structure, it is rather interesting that they preferred the power of the federal government. I argue they thought that by catering to this larger and more bureaucratic structure, those most vocal and committed to the creation of a new state were able to gain it. Thus, by breaking away from their “nearest neighbor” western Virginians were actually able to assert more control over their lives.
nation. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, Barry Weingast puts a significant emphasis on the importance of balance between these forces to help to explain why this period beginning in the 1850s brought such violent instability. Extending the argument that federalism with a limited national government required a balance in the senate, Weingast explains how any cracks in this carefully maintained balance shifted the focus of Americans and created issues as the United States continued to expand westward:

Whenever something threatened to destroy or dismantle the system providing for limited national government, public attention turned to national politics. Maintaining balanced delegations to the Senate required not only careful control over the designation of territories as free or slave. The design of territories and the admissions of states could not be considered on the basis of the inhabitants’ wishes alone. Balance required that neither section grow too fast relative to the other. Agreements about the structure of the territories were therefore central to the future of American democracy. Adverse decisions about the territories would affect both the Northern and Southern economies.\(^{69}\)

The careful debates over the admission of each new state into the union exemplify the characteristics dividing the northern and southern halves of the nation that required balance.

As the United States developed into a more sophisticated economy, two demands in particular concerned the national government: the health and support of this growing economy and the future of slavery. In several ways these interests were connected—especially for southern agricultural production. The dramatic improvement of the transportation systems within the nation acted as a major propeller of this growth because of the way it connected different regions of the nation allowed their economies to grow together. For instance, the produce and

agricultural goods produced in the south were transported and traded both inter-regionally and internationally under the auspices of Northeastern bankers and traders.  

These dramatic economic changes across and specific to different regions of the nation acted as a hotbed for supporting the growth of new political voices and visions for how to best manage these changes. Known as the second-party system, two national parties, the Jacksonian Democrats and the Whigs, played off of local issues to create coalitions of local organizations and interests in order to gain control of the national government. These issues became passionately divided as those crafting national policy found themselves in the difficult situation of choosing between two sets of interests in nearly perfect opposition to each other. Weingast contextualizes this idea with respect to laws affecting economic policy, “Most Southerners opposed high tariffs and internal improvements, both of which primarily benefited Northerners…at their expense…Southerners were also hostile to the idea of a national bank…Finally, Southerners advocated the expansion of slavery into new territories.” These issues arose as the nation underwent an influx of immigrants who shifted the interests of the voting population, and created a new addition to the American voting polity as they gained their citizenship status, further challenging the maintenance of this careful balance.

On the political front, the Democrats faced a crisis when their regular attempt at a coalition between their constituents in the two regions failed, and a new party emerged with enough northwestern backing to soak up the power vacuum created by

70 Ibid., 159.
71 Ibid., 159.
72 Ibid., 160.
this failed coalition. Especially worrisome to Southerners, the Republicans advocated a free-soil policy, which would eliminate slavery from all new territories. Because sectional balance was so weak at this point, the emergence of this party created a deep fear for the future on the part of southerners. The fragile balance that fostered a degree of comfort between the North and South and created an environment in which Americans could focus their attention on issues pertinent to their local politics and communities, was severely disrupted. In Southern portion of the nation, a fear crept over the states that tightly clung to federalism and states’ rights.

This fear inspired action in Virginia shortly after the election of Lincoln. By April of 1861 the Virginia Convention passed a secession ordinance, sparking serious apprehension of the “present, fearful emergency” in the minds of northwestern Virginians. Within less than a week’s time, John Carlile headed a meeting in Harrison County to discuss how to confront the situation. The present members planned for the First Wheeling Convention to be held from May 13 to 15, 1861. The content of this convention discussed the justification for and possibility of separating from the larger state. Perhaps not as dramatic or frightening as a deep threat to the essentials of a given way of life, western Virginians in support of creating a new state found themselves with grievances that in some ways mirrored the main complaints of Southern Americans of their northern counterparts. This quality of their grievances challenged those western Virginians in search of a

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73 Ibid., 186-187.
75 Curry, “Crisis Politics in West Virginia,” 82.
separate state to frame the argument in a way to gain support from the federal government.

Two men in particular came to represent the opposing sides of the debate on timing. John Carlile led the charge for the immediate creation of a new state, while Waitmen Willey cautioned such dramatic action, yet still supported creating a new state. Carlile and his supporters feared that by not acting immediately Virginia as a whole could secede from the United States, thus continuing the pattern of eastern Virginians drowning out the preferences of the western citizens of the state. Adversely, Willey could not imagine how to realize their goal of independent statehood legally given the current political conditions of the state. Should they (western Virginians) act first, then a good chance stood that the rest of the Union would not support them, especially because Virginia at large had yet to make any serious move towards secession. Therefore, Willey saw no plausible reason for the Union to throw their legal support behind a western Virginia secession.\(^76\)

Willey’s apprehension to the immediate creation of a new state was not necessarily a case of an overcautious legislator. Quoted in Zimring, historian George Moore describes the federal government’s lack of immediate eagerness regarding the creation of a new state from Virginia. He states, “…[the federal government] was not interested in erecting a separate state government in western Virginia because such a step reflected animosity rather than conciliation.”\(^77\) Indeed, Moore’s argument is congruent with Lincoln’s official position soon after his election. In a speech at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania given in February of 1861, he

\(^76\) Zimring, “Secession in Favor of Constitution,” 27.
\(^77\) George Moore in Zimring’s “Secession in Favor of Constitution,” 26.
proclaims, “Now, in my view of the present aspect of affairs, there is no need of bloodshed and war. There is no necessity for it. I am not in favor of such a course, and I may say in advance, there will be no blood shed unless it be forced upon the Government.”78 Thus, this group of representatives would have to carefully construct their positions and arguments for statehood to a federal government primarily interested in physically keeping the nation together. No matter how legitimate their concerns regarding the volume of their voices in the state legislature, the creation of a separate state required an appropriate opportunity to convince the federal government that this new state was in their favor to create.

On May 23, 1861 Virginia joined a collection of its Southern peers by voting to secede from the United States. Despite reaching this decision through a democratic vote, the outcome and ultimate decision to secede clearly reflected the preferences of the eastern part of the state. Forty-four thousand men of western Virginia cast their votes on this secession ordinance, but only four thousand of them agreed with their eastern brethren.79 The massive majority of western voters sided with the Union, rejecting secession. Unfortunately for these citizens, eastern Virginians overwhelmed this incredible imbalance of votes.

However, Willey’s apprehension abated with his state’s positive vote on secession. This rebellious action gave the supporters of new statehood a much more plausible avenue by which to gain federal government support. These men saw an especially good opportunity through the recently elected President. As evidenced

above, Lincoln sought to avoid violence despite whatever internal conflicts plaguing his nation and constituents. Furthermore, Lincoln expressed his ardent support for sustaining the Union throughout his campaign.\textsuperscript{80} However, his tenacity contra violence eroded as Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas joined rank with South Carolina by seceding from the Union. In this proclamation to arms, Lincoln deems normal judicial action inadequate to confront these rebellious states, and thus insists, “…I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, in virtue of the power in me vested by the Constitution, and the laws…hereby do call forth, the militia of the several States of the Union…in order to suppress said combinations, and to cause the laws to be duly executed.”\textsuperscript{81} With this proclamation, Lincoln revealed his potential for flexibility in order to preserve the Union, a characteristic vital to West Virginia’s creation.

Shortly following Virginia’s official secession from the Union, in June of 1861, representatives once again met to discuss the possibility of creating a new state. In the interim between the First and Second Wheeling Conventions, Willey and his supporters gained more confidence in the legal plausibility of successfully creating a new state. The Second Wheeling Convention produced actual steps towards reaching this goal—by claiming to be the legitimate government of Virginia. A Union war governor Francis H. Pierpont headed this “Restored Government,” immediately contacting Washington for official recognition “as the \textit{de jure} government of Virginia”.\textsuperscript{82} Lincoln dictated his obvious support for this Restored

\textsuperscript{80} Zimring, “Secession in Favor of the Constitution,” 28.
\textsuperscript{81} Abraham Lincoln, “Proclamation Calling Militia and Convening Congress,” (1861) in \textit{Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches and Writings}, 296.
\textsuperscript{82} Curry, “Crisis Politics in Virginia,” 82.
Government of Virginia in a message to Congress on July 4: “These loyal citizens, this government is bound to recognize, and protect, as being Virginia.”

Although it would take another two years to officially create the state, these representatives secured the support of the federal government at a time of total crisis in the nation.

**The First Years of Statehood: Creating a State Identity**

Politicians of West Virginia achieved a monumental goal in the midst of Civil War. With the official creation of a new state, legislative questions arose that would determine the future of the state’s politics and economics. Debates surrounding these questions largely divulged between either relying on political traditions of eastern Virginia or creating a new sense of political culture more heavily based around encouraging industrialism. Fluctuations in leadership in the years shortly following statehood demonstrate the uncertainty the state faced with respect to these decisions. The legislative choices made during this time period at the state level created the environment in which the first major coal companies committed major investments in developing the coal industry. These early decisions encouraged investments, and helped to give West Virginia an identity distinct from, and yet somewhat representative of, its former eastern partner.

The first few years of West Virginia’s statehood consisted of arguments and political struggles about the nascent state’s identity. Because many of the implicated counties clearly sympathized with Virginia, state leaders concerned their first years in office consolidating a specifically “West Virginian” identity. This process included restricting voting rights, so that those left eligible to vote gave the illusion

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83 Abraham Lincoln quoted in Curry, “Crisis Politics in West Virginia,” 82.
of a more unified electorate.\textsuperscript{84} State political leaders designed these policies to foster an explicit recognition of the new state’s identity. One such policy sought to undermine Confederate sympathies by requiring oral oaths on the parts of voters that “…he had never voluntarily borne arms against or held an office hostile to the United States, the Reorganized Government of Virginia, or the state of West Virginia; that he would support the constitutions of the United States and West Virginia….”\textsuperscript{85} The Boreman administration oversaw the implementation of a number of other ordinances enacted in the name of national unity. A loyal Unionist, the great majority of these policies sought to disenfranchise Confederate sympathizers.

The pro-Unionist governor’s goal to oust former Confederates from his state did not end with voting laws. By the mid 1860’s, Boreman extended his Confederate suspicions to identify them in public offices as well. His Confederate anxiety culminated in the creation of a series of “registration boards,” designed to screen voters to determine their sympathies. Even if the individual in question agreed to take the oath, the board reserved the right to deny his vote. His administration even went as far as to propose a constitutional amendment to ban returning Confederates from voting. Named for the senator who chaired the committee, the unsuccessful Maxwell Amendment revealed inconsistencies in the Union party, as “…the coalition that had been necessary to create West Virginia weakened as new

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 156.
differences over proscription and disfranchisement overshadowed the need to unity in crisis.”

These differences also manifested themselves within torn communities. Returning soldiers faced opposition, despite Lincoln’s Proclamation of Amnesty. Randall Gooden offers a specific example of such behavior in Harrison County, “…Union citizens held meetings on the township level to discourage ex-Confederates from living in the county, and this grassroots movement resulted in a county meeting for the same purpose.” Thus, the anti-union sentiment codified by the Boreman administration was also expressed on a grassroots level, revealing the degree of disunity existing within the new state. Those most excited about the creation of the new state—especially those who felt politically silenced while under Virginia’s jurisdiction—encountered some difficulty in welcoming different ideas into their political and social framework. The continued adherence to these policies eventually encountered violent opposition until by the end of the decade the administration eased their grip. In one instance, Boreman requested the assistance of federal troops when the citizens of Jefferson County insisted on voting in the Virginia state elections upon being newly included in the territory of West Virginia through an agreement between the new state and Virginia.

As Boreman began his second term he changed his focus from political issues to economic. However, by this time, the state legislature’s relaxation towards anti-

87 Gooden, “Neither War nor Peace,” 214.
89 Gooden, “Neither War nor Peace,” 216.
Confederate policies may have come too late. In elections just a few years trailing the state’s birth, almost all of those officials who fought for the state’s independence lost their legislative seats. Such a quick flip in voting preferences points to the weakness of the Republican Party’s loyalties in West Virginia. Their replacements were obviously to the chagrin of Boreman Unionists. Reminiscent of the political leaders of Virginia, the election of these new leaders is indicative of West Virginia’s struggle to establish its own identity separate to that of Virginia, and yet clearly retain some of its political culture and sympathies. Thus, despite fighting and earning independence, West Virginia’s inaugural years of statehood were largely defined by the way it built upon already layered institutions from its former state government.  

Once again, the landscape of the state played an integral role in West Virginia’s history. Part of the issue with garnering and harnessing public opinion was the difficulty of navigating the state’s terrain. At this time, much of the state was still inhabited by pockets of smaller, dispersed populations nestled in mountain valleys. Physically reaching these citizens proved very difficult, not to mention the fact that most of them would have sympathized with the Democratic party much more so than with the GOP. According to the observations of one reporter writing to a northern Republican news source on rural West Virginians, “Many of them are unable to read, and they are Democrats because they don’t know any better. Of course among this class of people public speaking is the only kind of campaign work which

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90 A strong example of this political layering began includes persisting patterns of electing officials. Despite the political differences that caused eastern and western Virginia to split into two separate states during the Civil War, the settlers who steadily migrated west across the state carried with them the deferential political tradition of landed eastern Virginia. Following the elitist tradition, the typical man elected to office was one of the richest farmers in his jurisdiction.
accomplishes anything.”\(^91\) Whether or not these West Virginians would vote Republican if they “knew better,” the reporter’s point regarding their isolation did impact each man’s vote. However, this issue of political communication would open the door for a new generation of democrats to grab hold of party politics and transition the political system of West Virginia into a more modern one.

Each vote that supported a Democratic state government consented to a legislature influenced by a Virginian political tradition and a certain degree of nostalgia for the old South. Unlike the preceding state regime, the Democrats who took office had a much friendlier view of former Confederates. Still, the party that beat the GOP in 1870 consisted of a coalition between somewhat antagonistic partners. Debates over policy and government organization were more often than not divided; thus the items successfully compromised offer interesting insight into the ultimate goals of those falling on either side of the dividing line. Williams discusses the few successful measures of the Constitutional Convention of 1872, “The new constitution replaced the statemakers’ townships and boards of supervisors with county courts, the traditional Virginia form of local government…Finally, it adopted provisions governing the granting and confirmation of land titles…eventually [nicknamed] ‘Lawyer’s Constitution.’”\(^92\) In line with one of the major points of contention between eastern and western antebellum Virginia, state political leaders sought economic development initiatives to help the new state grow.

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\(^91\) New York Times, October 8, 1876, quoted in John Alexander Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old: Ante-Bellum and Statehood Politics as the Background of West Virginia’s ‘Bourbon Democracy.’” *West Virginia History* 33, no. 4 (1972), 356.

\(^92\) Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 321.
However, these policies often reflected the political workings of their divorced eastern partner. Williams describes these held-over land policies in greater detail, “…the constitution entailed further confusion in land and tax policies and facilitated, under the supervision of ‘distinguished land attorneys,’ the eventual transfer of titles from small owners to mining and lumber corporations.” West Virginia’s openness to corporate development seemed a good way to encourage development within the state. These policies came at the turn of the century, just as the demand for coal would soon experience dramatic growth.

Three men in particular heavily influenced these first few years in West Virginia political history: Johnson N. Camden, Henry G. Davis, and Stephen B. Elkins. Throughout his significant contribution to the study of West Virginian and Appalachian, historian John Alexander Williams has written extensively about the work and lives of these three men. His insights into their role in not only the political but also purely economic health of West Virginia are especially valuable. Each of these men was a union sympathizer, and, moreover, they each held interests apart from their roles as state leaders in the health of railroads and extractive industries. Camden maintained a close relationship with John D. Rockefeller, whereas the others were connected to each other through marriage and developed the railroad, coal and timber industries. Elkins also expanded the banking industry, spreading from the northwestern part of the state to other localities.94

None of these leaders were heavily involved with the creation of the West Virginia. Elkins actually spent the duration of the war in Missouri and New Mexico,

93 Ibid., 367.
94 Williams, West Virginia and the Captains of Industry, 3.
not actually establishing a residence in West Virginia until he became the son in law of Davis. Elkins along with another prominent leader involved in the glass and other industries, Nathan B. Smith, would build the Republican Party in the post-Civil War years, while Camden and Davis would work together to revolutionize the Democrats. Williams discusses the importance of each of these men’s roles in the early years of West Virginia political development:

They perfected West Virginia’s modern political system, subdued or co-opted local competitors for power, adapted the state’s political representation along with its fuels and raw materials to the use of metropolitan industrialism, and trained their less powerful collaborators and successors to the work of a *comprador* middle class. As much as the men who brought the state to life in 1863, these four were the makers of West Virginia as it is today.95

This passage reveals Williams’ sympathies with colonial theory, especially his choice adjective for the rising middle class. Furthermore, he highlights the roles these men played, and the extent to which their interests seemed so disconnected with those who fought so hard to prove the legitimacy of West Virginia’s creation. For even those who would go on to work with the defeated Republican Party were of a different breed than the leaders who devoted themselves to the state’s creation. Thus, “…the ‘old-line’ Republican leaders had to make do with crumbs from the new Republican table, if indeed they got anything at all.”96 However, this party would have bigger problems than just fighting reinvention from new leaders: although they represented the first regime of West Virginia, they would quickly lose out to the Democrats such as Camden and Davis.

95 Ibid., 4.
Disparate interests formed coalitions within the post-bellum Democratic Party in West Virginia. Although they never developed enough to form truly distinctive categories, four major groups emerged that Williams distinguishes as the Regulars, Redeemers, Agrarians, and the ‘Kanawha Ring.’ Camden and Davis stand out as the main leaders of the Regulars, though they eventually would form coalitions with the ‘Kanawha Ring,’ making the differences between them more difficult to distinguish. Leaders of both of these parties hailed from the more urban areas of the state, were generally professionals and/or held interests in extractive industries. The two other parties concerned themselves to a much greater extent with the more rural residents. The differences between the two rural parties mostly fell along sentiments with the old state. While the Redeemers’ message called for a remembering of the old and state and economic way of life, the Agrarians advocated a more forward-looking vision of policy.97

These political leaders during the Bourbon era of West Virginian democracy suggested a new interpretation of the state’s future. Pulling away from the political ideals of a stronger central government purported through strong voting restrictions during the Boreman regime, these new Democrats ruled in a style that harkened back to some of the original debates about American democracy. According to Otis K. Rice, the basis of the Democratic unity that helped to explain the party’s success in maintaining their grip on power stemmed from, “the overwhelmingly rural character of the state and party devotion to Jeffersonian principles of low taxes, economy in the government, and states’ rights…. “98 This period in West Virginia political history

97 Rice, West Virginia: a History, 165.
98 Ibid., 168.
witnessed a government that eased the restrictive voting practices of the Boreman regime. Thus, the grip of the government appeared quite loose.

However, conflict between the state’s past and future festered below the surface. Williams sheds light on the different arguments complicating the political realm of the state, contextualizing them in the larger context of national politics. He claims the state was torn between “a preindustrial system corresponding to the ‘first American party system’ of Jeffersonian times, and an industrialized one, a local version of ‘the third American party system’ that emerged nationally after the Civil War.”

This argument between the old and new certainly captures the struggles of the West Virginia political system at this time. However, in this dawn in not only a new state but also a new historical time period for the United States at large represents a rehashing of sorts of the original debates of the nation between Madison and Jefferson because of the different roles of government that would come about with either choice. Furthermore, this period in American politics incited new possibilities for the federal government, especially given the boundaries Lincoln pushed during the Civil War by suspending habeas corpus and even supporting the creation of this new state. This debate is made even more interesting given the specific circumstances of West Virginia, especially its mountainous terrain and known-yet-untapped extractive resources. These elements contained unknown but anticipated potential with respect to economic opportunities of the state, made even more tempting given Camden and Davis’s private interests.

This Bourbon easing of government interference, however, is not to suggest the regime was not making active political choices that would bring massive changes

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to the state, beginning with the ways they campaigned. As mentioned above, many parts of West Virginia were still quite isolated and held onto the political views of old Virginia, especially in the border counties. Camden and Davis took great advantage of this by investing in the press. Furthermore, their role in the railroad industry meant they could offer valuable forms of patronage. Their massive donations combined with federal party donations gave the Democratic Party in West Virginia a strong base, especially around areas of communication.\textsuperscript{100}

Thus, the Civil War created the opportunity for West Virginia to act as both a physical and philosophical battleground for American government and ideals. Taking this chance to gain independence from a state in which they felt a large percentage of people lacked a political voice because of where they lived, vocal leaders incited federal sympathies to support secession. However, the first state leaders seemed to undermine this ideal when they silenced members of their constituency with restrictive voting policies. With the impetus of industrialization, the state would turn towards economic development of the state through policies that made West Virginia attractive to companies with the capital to turn a profit on the coal seamed within their mountains.

\textsuperscript{100} Williams, \textit{West Virginia and the Captains of Industry}, 13.
CHAPTER 3: COAL

“A man’s coal is his castle.”
Queen Elizabeth\textsuperscript{101}

Commercial mining of coal predates the birth of the United States as an independent nation. A now abandoned mine near present day Richmond, Virginia provided coal locally as well shipped its surplus to burgeoning northern cities like Philadelphia, New York, and Boston as early as 1750. At first mined almost completely by hand, American coal grew at a sluggish pace in its early years because timber satisfied most energy demands. However, the following century would see a marked shift in the demand for energy resources so that within a hundred years of this first recorded mining coal consumption superseded that of wood.\textsuperscript{102}

Despite its humble beginnings in eastern Virginia, coal would come to have much stronger associations and significance with the most western parts of the state. The American coal industry in general gained immense strength towards the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, especially so in West Virginia. This is in large part due to the bituminous-type of coal that ran throughout the seams of western Virginia’s mountains. This specific kind of coal is of rather good quality, and easily converted to coke. A highly effective fuel, coke is created from coal after undergoing extreme heat, generally in devices aptly known as coke ovens. As the demand for West

\textsuperscript{101} Queen Elizabeth, quoted in Glen Parker, \textit{The Coal Industry: a Study in Social Control} (Washington, DC: American Council on Public Affairs, 1940), 14.
Virginia bituminous coal grew with the rise of industrialization, coke ovens were often constructed close to the mines for quick conversions.

First mined to help support the burgeoning salt industry, coal mining in contemporary West Virginia began in the Kanawha Valley. Lack of adequate freight transportation retarded the growth of this extraction industry in western Virginia, as opposed to the mine in Richmond, which fell close to the James River, a natural source to transport coal out of the state. Thus, even as coal production began to pick up, it was those coal-rich areas closest to water transportation that were mined first. This initial reluctance alludes to massive upfront costs related to coal mining problematic throughout the American coal industry, though especially true in West Virginia. This characteristic in combination with several others discussed below contributed to the especially volatile nature of this industry, described as “…one of the most chaotic industries in the United States….”

By the turn of the century American cities saw their demand for energy supplies rapidly increase. During this time, cities such as Philadelphia and New York began to industrialize at fast rates, requiring a powerful and easily accessible energy source. As the process of coking became more commonly practiced, the demand for bituminous coal in particular increased. These changes in demand proved the proper encouragement to investors to pursue mining opportunities in the more inner regions of western Virginia. Thus, a few short decades in the late nineteenth and early


twentieth century would make this area known for something other than hillbillies and violent feuding: coal.

The emergence of this industry forever changed not only the mountainscapes of this state, but also directly contributed to fundamental changes to the lives of the people residing within these mountain valleys. These changes extended beyond socio-economic adjustments, fundamentally altering the relationship between West Virginians and their government on both a state and federal level. Despite the traditional view of West Virginians as backward hillbillies, or even the recognized implications of their hindered economic development with the passage of the Appalachian Development Act, the results of the coal industry’s practices in light of political accommodations helped to modernize the political voice of these citizens because of the way it developed in this specific region of the United States vis-à-vis political reinterpretations of federalism on a nationwide level.

The Great Investment

“The hard fact is that all coal companies, regardless of ownership, were prisoners of a market over which they had little or no control. No company—no matter how noble its motives—could increase its labor rates very far above the average and hope to survive.”

Walter R. Thurmond, Logan County coal operator

The actual practice of coal mining requires a vast amount of resources in order to extract the coal from its mountain seams. The very first coal companies in contemporary West Virginia’s Kanawha Valley were typically smaller businesses with direct interests in the salt industry. As mentioned above, the costs of transportation and success of timber prevented investors from committing significant

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107 Rice, West Virginia: a History, 82.
resources to mining. However, these issues are but the first of many significant sunk costs businesses would have to endure in order to mine in western Virginia. As these first major companies emerged on the inner regions of this mountain state, investors and businessmen encountered highly undeveloped areas, inhabited largely by scattered populations of self-sufficient farmers. Along with investing in the proper equipment, companies often poured money and resources into creating towns to support the extractive industries. Known as “coal-” or “company towns,” these places were literally whole planned communities—from personal residences to general stores and even schools and churches—owned, operated and maintained by the coal companies themselves.

This characteristic of building whole towns to support the industry reflected certain requirements of the industry in order to enjoy financial success, or even just to stay afloat. These factors lead to highly competitive or monopolistic tendencies with respect to how companies interacted with the land and people essential to mining. Glen Parker lists several reasons explaining this phenomenon, including, “…the industry usually operates under increasing returns connected with the utilization of hitherto unused capacity, and coal has an inelastic demand.” He goes on to state, “transport development brings monopoly through intensified competition, and geographic compactness, likewise, ultimately makes for monopoly.”

The combination of these factors distorts any “natural” sense of economic competition in free and fair markets, thus already rendering the industry operation inefficient. These characteristics contextualized in a mineral-rich state at the turn of the century and dawn of industrialism created an intense amount of pressure, setting West Virginia

down a path of development that would render the health of its economy highly sensitive to market fluctuations.

**Land Ownership**

Unreliable market demands and the sobering sunken costs required to mine coal generated an intense amount of pressure on the investing companies to exert as much control as possible over what resources they could. In the most physically apparent terms, this alludes to land ownership. In a study commissioned shortly after the establishment of the ARC, the Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force found that 50 percent of land in “high coal” counties in Appalachia at large was privately held. This percentage was even higher in coal counties in West Virginia—for example, Mingo County and McDowell Counties were 62.5 percent and 75.9 percent privately owned, respectively.\(^\text{109}\)

This aspect of the coal industry pervasive throughout central Appalachia stands as an obvious method of corporate control. With the purchase and manipulation of this land in the interest of coal and industry, many of the mountain farmers eventually moved into pre-constructed towns, often along with numbers of imported immigrants and free blacks fleeing the Deep South in order to satisfy the demands for labor in the coalfields. Furthermore, this event sheds light on the role of the government during this time: the legally recognized ownership of land for the benefit of large corporate coal companies created a socio-economic situation from

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\(^{109}\) Although this study was not conducted until the early 1980’s, the impetus to even complete the study was informed by decades of poverty thought to be linked with the results of extractive industries and absentee landownership. Although she lacks such precise statistics, Rasmussen (1994) discusses how the political attitude towards land ownership shifted to allow this kind of absentee land ownership to become so pervasive shortly after West Virginia took its first actions as an independent state. The Appalachian Land Ownership Task Force, *Who Owns Appalachia?: Landownership and Its Impact* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 24.
which the original farmers could not return. For under these circumstances they were legally prevented from reclaiming agrarian lifestyles. Thus, corporations took advantage of early stages of political modernization to make their purchases hyper-legal by working through a federally recognized framework of landownership rights.

Before the peak profit years of the coal industry, the areas of West Virginia most blessed with coal deposits consisted of dispersed farming communities. These families survived largely off of land by their own hand, living by the same land on which they and their parents were born and raised. While technically at this time these lands fell under the jurisdiction of Virginia, their legal ownership was often contested. The history of the official claims over these lands is as difficult to traverse as the winding roads cutting through the mountains of contemporary West Virginia. During Virginia’s colonial period, much of the land fell under the property of land speculators, many of whom resided someplace other than the Virginia colony. To the chagrin of King George III, smaller settlers crossed the forbidden border west of the Allegheny Mountains to seek out an independent, farming lifestyle. Thus, the deeds to the lands, while often contested, did not usually prevent frontier mountaineers from raising self-sufficient farms.

Shortly following the Revolutionary War, Virginia found it in its interest to incorporate organized towns throughout its western regions. This sudden inspiration

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110 For fear of too many Britons fleeing for the hopes of greater success in the New World, King George III restricted the settlement of land to the west of the Allegheny Mountain range. Still, much of this land already belonged to larger, often absentee landowners, or was mutually claimed by several different settlers, making the job of differentiating between deeds quite difficult. Thus, ever since the first settlers began to build their lives on the new frontier, the official deeds for land were already in dispute, often with absentee landowners. Barbara Rasmussen, *Absentee Landowning and Exploitation in West Virginia* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 23.
was most strongly in response to Native American violence. The state hoped that by encouraging population growth under the auspices of local governments that answered to the state, some of this violence could be quelled. In conjunction with this development, the state reassessed its land grant system. After refraining from issuing grants for several years following the Revolutionary War, the newly minted state of Virginia passed the Land Office Act of 1779. This law created the Virginia Land Office along with an organized system to issue and recognize land deeds. It offered a flat rate for a hundred acres of land, and gave certain privileges to soldiers. The act also designed a bureaucratic system consisting of several procedural steps to ensure land grants were correctly issued.

While this law and new office represented a step towards legitimizing the state’s system for recognizing land deeds, its design encouraged large landowners. Within a few years of the law taking effect, millions of acres of land in western Virginia were owned by a handful of wealthy men. Furthermore, one of the lead designers of the Land Office Act was Thomas Jefferson, thus representing another political move that appeared to compromise his political ideal. Still, the passage and implementation of this act immensely helped to make sense of the overlapping and outdated deeds that plagued the colonial system before the Revolutionary War. Because the act stopped short of wiping all former claims to land ownership, disputes over deeds continued even after the act’s passage. However, most local disputes were now generally deferred to the Land Office in Richmond. Thus, a central, permanent

113 Rasmussen, *Absentee Landowning and Exploitation in West Virginia*, 34.
locus of authority could override previous claims through a codified, democratic system.

The state of Virginia helped to make investment in coal rich areas more attractive through their friendly policies towards corporations. As the thought of investment grew more appealing to companies with the necessary assets, they obviously took an interest in obtaining legal ownership of this property, and, at least to the offices of the state, made their intentions to mine coal known.\footnote{Ibid., 46.} These loosely connected communities of farmers in all likelihood had never conceived of the full ramifications of corporate land ownership, much less the environmentally taxing process of coal extraction. Thus, the common story of the corporate purchase of Appalachian land begins with speculative investors purchasing vast stretches of land for only a couple of dollars on the acre. Because the famers inhabiting the land could not conceive of the possible consequences of this transaction, they sold acres with little hesitation, “…for while the agents wanted the land, the mountaineers were more interested in maintaining community harmony. To them, there seemed to be plenty of land for everybody. As one resident recalled, “‘since land was plentiful, folks would take what money was offered and move on to the next mountain.’”\footnote{Gaventa, \textit{Power and Powerlessness}, 53-54.} The time of these purchases coincided with a lack of rigorous record keeping with respect to land ownership policies,\footnote{Ibid., 53.} and thus most likely any disputes would have deferred to the Land Office back in Richmond. Because the representatives of the coal companies hailed from more concentrated populations of people that required more carefully
maintained record keeping, they were careful to make sure these transactions were legally legitimate.

The purchase of such immense acres of land on the part of external corporations not only represents the impetus of now infamous absentee land-ownership, but also an incidence of the application of more rigorous legal policies on the part of the state of Virginia that until this point had remained elusive to this practice. Furthermore, historically these deeds were of little concern to generally elitist government officials. The main concern of the government of the Commonwealth of Virginia was to streamline a system in which to grant official recognition for the ownership of the land, no matter that these deeds so often benefited wealthy men residing outside of the state. However, because these laws were constructed to technically also preside over all parts of the United States, including the most rural and desolate areas, these farmers of central Appalachia technically engaged in a totally legal transaction. The primary difference between any sorts of financial or otherwise transactions for land, presumably between other small farmers, previous to those with coal speculators was the strictly read legal ramifications that in this case fell in support of the absentee coal companies.

**Creation of the Company Town**

“The ‘company town’ was the most important institution in the coalfields. It was the foundation on which the coal operator built his total system. The company town cannot be understood simply as coal ownership of houses, stores, roads, teachers, doctors, deputies, etc. Ownership was the basis of control, but the essence of the coal town was total control.”

Richard Simon

The unique set of circumstances that emerged as larger investors began speculating in coal in West Virginia created one of the most intriguing aspects of this

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study—the company town. Coal companies literally built these towns from the ground up, providing the infrastructure and creating the spaces in which their miners would build their lives—but always in the ultimate interest of coal. Boasting the general amenities of most small American towns, these company towns commonly consisted of rows of housing for farmers and their families, a company store, and even education and worship services. In addition to housing miners, these towns represented the most powerful method of control the coal companies wielded over their miners. However, contrary to common belief regarding the details of the power dynamics of these towns, the miners who lived there were not necessarily slaves to the individual company for which they worked. The structure and daily operation of these towns proved a fascinating manifestation of the coal industry response to intense pressures in a desolate area sparsely populated before the great investment. The miners, hailing from as far away as Europe and as close as the farmer who used to till the land above the mine, converged into a collection of similar worlds completely owned by the company from which they earned their living.

The scenario described above represents the company town at its height, generally set between the end of World War I and the dawn of the Great Depression. Growing up in a typical company town in the forties and fifties, Homer Hickman describes the major characteristics of his hometown, appropriately named Coalwood:

Our house, like every house in Coalwood, was company-owned. The company charged a small monthly rent, automatically deducted from the miner’s pay. Some of the houses were tiny and single-storied, with only one or two bedrooms. Others were big two-story duplexes, built as boarding houses for bachelor miners in the booming 1920’s and later sectioned off as individual family dwellings during the Great Depression. Every five years,
all the houses in Coalwood were painted a company white, which the blowing coal soon tinged gray.\textsuperscript{118}

Before this “paternalistic” stage, the company town was in its “pioneer” phase—they were much less organized and offered but a small fraction of those company towns at the height of coal mining.\textsuperscript{119} However, as the market for coal picked up, the first decades at the turn of the century oversaw massive changes to the West Virginia valleys. The height of the company town was responsible for some of the largest changes to befall the West Virginian during this time, and would come to have massive implications for the face of federalism with respect to the state.

The establishment of the model coal town represented a highly effective way to capture order. Coal miners received no regular paycheck; rather, they worked as contracted employees for the coal company, and were generally rather dispensable. Typically, their commission relied on the amount of coal they mined each day. Thus, the miner was “…a sort of sub-contractor who undertook to mine and load coal at so much per ton. It forced a close analogue to the ‘tenant farmer system’ upon the industry. This freed the management alike from any real bother about planning or any real concern in organizing the work.”\textsuperscript{120} This arrangement encouraged an environment that relied heavily on manual labor. This, along with factors that discouraged the initial investments for so long anyway such as geography, helps to explain why industry lacked a robust mechanism to encourage modernization in terms of technological innovation.

\textsuperscript{118} Homer Hickman Jr., \textit{Rocket Boys} (New York: Dell Publishing, 2000), 2.
\textsuperscript{120} Hamilton and Wright quoted in Simon, “Uneven Development and the Case of West Virginia: Going Beyond the Colonialism Model”: 168.
A miner’s typical workday tested his mental stamina while destroying his body. The lack of mechanization meant that miners spent their days adhering to five tasks required for properly weighing coal and thus earning their scrip. Separated into distinct spaces, miners divided their time between the respective rooms for “supporting the roof, undercutting the coal, drilling a hole in the block of coal, blasting the coal down, and finally loading the coal with a shovel into cars.” Thus, the process of coal mining with respect to its market mechanisms as well as the relationship of the contracted miners to their operators fostered a system by which intensive manual labor was in high demand. The nature of this work and the structure of the relationship between the company and the miner fostered a unique society with seeds of paternalism and suggestions of slavery.

Every activity performed and every space breached by each member of the family each day belonged to the same coal company where the father earned his wages. Furthermore, coal miners were typically paid in a currency valid only at the locations the coal companies owned. Called scrip, most companies created their own form of currency in place of paying miners in a government-issued tender. So, when his wife would shop for household necessities and food, she used this scrip in shops owned and operated by the company. And although he did not pay for it, the miner’s children spent their days absorbing lessons taught by teachers employed by the company in buildings built by the company. When they worshipped on Sundays, company preachers cared for the mining family’s souls. Thus, although he was not a

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121 Simon, “Uneven Development and the Case of West Virginia: Going Beyond the Colonialism Model”: 166.
salaried employee, the coal company for which he mined acted as a central and influential figure—if not controlling—in literally every aspect of the coal miner’s life.

In addition to supporting infrastructural development of new towns, private coal companies also provided certain protection services to maintain order. Oftentimes the police forces of company towns consisted of privately funded and trained guards who worked for the coal companies. The following chapter describes these guards and their role in greater detail, but in southern West Virginia the most well known and feared of these mercenary-type service agencies were the Baldwin-Felts. The lack of a robust local police force left space for these private guards to act as the legitimate monopoly of violence in the coalfields.

The miner felt the power of this control the most in those moments of friction between his interests and wellbeing and those of the company. For one miner working in Olcott, West Virginia near Kanawha County in the first decades of the twentieth century, this power denied his family sustenance because he took a train ride. In his autobiography, Fred Mooney describes how quickly his life changed when his employing coal company learned he looked for a new job. When his wife went to purchase their daily food allowance, the bookkeeper denied her despite the fact that Mooney was owed wages. He recalls the shop employee’s explanation to his wife, “…in the event he leaves our employ it may be some time before he moves out of our house and the money due him will be absorbed for house rent.”122 The full impact of Mooney’s hope for professional improvement hit the family later that evening: “When I returned home on the evening train I found my wife in tears. A notice was

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served on me to vacate the coal company premises in three days or be evicted. Lillian tried to explain to me—she thought she had injured my chances." The sudden foreclosure forced the family to begin again, humanizing the potential for tragedy when a private company, swayed by market fluctuations, controls so much of a person’s life.

Mooney’s story also illuminates a sort of self-reinforcing system with the coal industry. By compensating for the lack of control the industry faced with respect to the free market, this kind of behavior on the part of the coal company therefore distorted the market for labor power. Because individual companies retained such control over both the professional and the personal lives of their workers, they each created a pseudo-feudal system. Thus, any breach of loyalty to the company brought exile to the miner. This kind of pressure combined with the lack of economic diversity implies that miners would be quite reluctant to seek employment elsewhere. However, Mooney’s reaction to the eviction notice hardly suggested much surprise. He goes on to describe a “human drift” trend, “composed of workingmen migrating from place to place, from one point of the compass to another, with the thought ever in mind that just beyond is something better than what I have here." Although his living situation improved only marginally, the latter half of his disheartening story does in part break the stereotype that the miner was a complete slave to the individual company for which he worked.

In his study examining the degree of monopsony in West Virginia coal towns at the turn of the century, William M. Boal further challenges this commonly held

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123 Ibid., 10.
124 Ibid., 12.
notion through empirical research. His findings suggest that, “…employer monopsony played at best only a small part in determining wages in turn-of-the-century coal mining. In contrast, real wage fluctuations over time, driven primarily by product demand shocks, show frequent movements of 20% or more over intervals of just a few years.”\(^{125}\) These findings problematize the ironically romanticized image of the struggle of the enslaved coal miner. This is not to suggest that these miners and their families did not experience massive injustices. However, the individual miner was more of a slave to a system rather than to a specific company. Articulating this distinction lends additional support to the evidence that suggests the nature of the market fluctuations and high cost of upfront capital create an especially high-pressure system. Furthermore, in those periods when the demand for coal dipped and stalled in the lead up to the Great Depression, many miners left the coalfields to join the clusters of Appalachians that began to form in mid-western urban areas like Cincinnati and Chicago.

However, although not a system of slavery to any one company, the conscious design and daily operation of company towns fostered an environment that made whatever company that dominated a given area king. For as nonbinding as the miner’s professional relationship was with the company, their personal life was at its mercy of the company. The infrastructure and social services provided by the companies in their towns placed the companies in a position of acting as a paternalistic figure to the miners and their families. Wages, or sometimes called “allowances,” directly depended on how much each miner worked, the houses in which the miners raised their families were owned by their company, the company

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\(^{125}\) William M. Boal, “Testing for Employer Monopsony in Turn-of-the-Century Coal Mining.”: 534.
schools taught their children while the company churches cared for their souls and the company bars drowned their anxieties. Thus, whenever a single or group of citizens of the company town wished changes or improvements, their only option was to seek the approval of their company.

Despite the pervasiveness of private corporate control of these new towns, ultimately and without exception all of these towns continued to remain a part of the larger United States. Thus, aside from those groups of new immigrants, all residents and miners were citizens of the greater United States, technically retaining all rights and political power reserved to the people of the Union. However, developing a healthy political culture or even effective institutions remained difficult. The nature of peoples’ lifestyles made this development near impossible: moving between different coal camps and companies was plausible, and yet the actual experience of working for any company consumed the life of the coal miner. Furthermore, the multiple layers of power possessed by private industries left little leverage for local political powers to wield over these companies.

Still, political systems were quite present throughout West Virginia, including the coalfields. Any present systems existed as holdovers from the past, where groups of pioneers developed their political cultures as a result of their isolated lifestyles.

Colonialism in America?

In a broader theme crucial to theoretical discussions of the development of the coal industry in West Virginia or central Appalachia at large, these land transactions granting legitimate recognition of ownership to coal companies also act as the first steps in the theorized colonization of coal-rich central Appalachia. Writers such as
John Gaventa (1980), John Alexander Williams (2001) and Ron Eller (1976) describe this process in detail to explain the process by which central Appalachian communities slumped into the rampant poverty witnessed by Senator Kennedy when he visited on his presidential campaign, and in many instances, continues to persist today.

This term “colonization” derives from the extraction of natural resources by an outside industry for the purposes of primarily supporting development in an area other than that from where the resource is extracted. This theoretical explanation for economic depression present throughout most of designated Appalachia, though most rampant in the central, coal dependent areas, in part responds to the sentiment that portrays Appalachians as responsible for their poverty. Instead of focusing on broad, cultural themes that would prevent industrialization or development from taking root, these historians and economists discuss the role of outside forces. Just as with the coal industry’s response to imperfect market pressures, absentee land ownership also stands as the grounding example of colonialism in America. From here, the dependence on extractive industries and the exportation of these resources without much recycling into the local economy continues to support this theory.

While this line of thinking offers a valuable perspective on the historical factors that contributed to the severe poverty of Appalachia in the mid-twentieth century, it tends to too severely react to theories that blame the “Appalachian” for the region’s poverty. Thus, when these theories present their arguments, they begin with the stated effects of the economic circumstances that coal speculators faced with their

initial investments. For example, in his book on the history of West Virginia, John Alexander Williams lists three main factors that constitute the colonization of the state: “...a high degree of absentee ownership...heavy dependence upon extractive industries oriented to distant markets; and a relative lack of those manufacturing industries that provided the greatest stimuli to material growth and welfare in the nation at large.” Each of these factors is obviously true and contributes to the colonization theory of West Virginian counties with generous coal deposits.

However, it, like theories that purport a culture of poverty to explain Appalachian struggles with development, make oversimplifications regarding the status of coal counties in West Virginia and other parts of central Appalachia in particular. Richard M. Simon explains the oft-overlooked nuances of the poverty in coal counties, “The penetration of Appalachia was not a conscious group decision to appropriate the wealth of the region. It was instead unplanned and uncoordinated, individual and corporate entrepreneurs maximizing profits through the market.” Simon carefully abstracts from broad or reactionary theories and stereotypes to reorient the approach to poverty in central Appalachian and West Virginian coal valleys. In doing so, he stresses an emphasis on the relations of power within the community itself to explain the development of the coal industry.

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128 Most of these types of theories are outgrowths of the stereotypes of color writings depicting the violence and classlessness of the “Appalachian.” Thus, they create and reinforce distinctions between the Appalachian and the affluent American. This “otherness” created an image that blamed the shoeless coalminer for his poverty. “The image that emerged, while accurate in an aggregate economic context, was resented by thousands of residents who did not like the way the media portrayed them as isolated, backward, ignorant, and pathetically impoverished. Appalachia was again represented to the country as a place that was indeed in America but not a part of modern American life.” Richard Straw, “Appalachian History,” in *A Handbook to Appalachia: An Introduction to the Region*, ed. Grace Toney Edwards et al. (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 18-19.
129 Simon, “Uneven Development and the Case of West Virginia,” 181.
Although coal-centered counties in West Virginia and neighboring areas in Appalachia suffer from many of the same characteristics as former colonies, used by their owning nation to extract their resources, the Appalachian case is more complicated. If for no other reason, than by the fact that West Virginia was and is a part of the United States, and the speculators were technically connected and subject to the same federal laws as the people of West Virginia. Echoing Simon, the development of coal industries fulfilled no “master plan” for West Virginian economics and politics. The sheer fact that all actors—whether the external investor or the native coalminer or famer—were technically political equals complicates the colonial theory. This is especially true vis-à-vis the European colonial model, which concerned both economic and political gain. Thus, a fair analysis of the development of the coal industry and impoverishment of the West Virginian improves from being informed by colonial theory, but this theory fails to capture the role of market forces and specific government policies regarding West Virginia coal.

Statewide legislation and a national turn to laissez-faire economic policy influenced how the coal industry entered and developed in West Virginia. By the end of the industry’s first decades, corporate companies responded to the high pressures and significant costs of capital by inciting as much control as possible over the land, while also providing its workers and their families with housing and other necessary provisions that most typical small towns could provide. However, the roles of local governments are hardly mentioned throughout histories written during this time in coalfield development because the massive influence of the companies left little space for them to play an effective role.
The following chapter explores the tensions that built under the surface of life in the coalfields with respect to this massive amount of control. As unionization on a national level drew greater attention and amassed growing support amongst industrial workers in other states, unions began to focus more and more on West Virginia. Eventually, these became the space for the miner to feel empowered—to realize a power of expression crowded out by the pervasiveness of corporate control over his life in places like Williamson and Coalwood.

The years leading up to and following World War I were tumultuous ones in West Virginia. These years witnessed organized violence in the state between miners—some of them descendants of the self-sufficient farmers of Jefferson’s anti-federalist dream—and their corporate coal operators. Through these moments of violence, West Virginia once again became the physical battleground where frustrations over growth and the contested role of government on the part of citizens who feel they lack a voice or any control at all over their lives fought against the entity they most perceived responsible.
CHAPTER 4: THE VIOLENT INTERSECTION OF COAL, POLITICS, AND THE UNION

“When I get to the other side I shall tell God Almighty about West Virginia.”
Mother Jones, political activist and leader of union movements

Within a few decades of attaining statehood West Virginia underwent significant changes that not only altered the physical and socio-economic landscape of the state, but also laid the groundwork for fundamental reformations to the state’s political atmosphere. As industrialization encouraged urbanization and the nation at large entered the Progressive era, certain frictions under the surface of daily affairs of the state grew more problematic. Like the national arena, the post-Bourbon era governors reconsidered their positions and responsibilities with respect to their constituents, especially those laboring in the coalfields. For along with impressive growth, coal mining also brought tragedy or feelings of oppression to those miners and their families injured or killed by accidents in the underground mines. Eventually these tensions would bubble to the surface, popping up through union meetings and smaller scale strikes and eventually bursting into violent and brutal conflicts between private coal companies and their mercenaries, bands of miners backed with national union support, and state and federal troops. The political interpretation of this organized union activity sparked a fear fed by the terrifying prospect that that the red scare could creep into the heart of America—that a predatory socialist weed carried

by the United Mine Workers of America could take root and strangle the liberty of the original American republic this physical place was meant to preserve.

The land policies adopted with the new constitution allowed for larger coal companies to build their operations, thus beginning the decades between 1880 and 1920 that would bring unprecedented growth and industrial change to the new state. However, not much time would pass before this Jeffersonian, hands-off approach to governing would run into problems. For along with this political vision came an economic one in which most families would be self-sufficient, and thus able to self-govern. This idealized vision of anti-Federalist philosophy could never come to fruition given the owners of the land deeds. The pressures for control that dictated the design and operation of the coal industry that consumed their workers’ lifestyles contradicted this image. However, the modernization of the political structure that allowed for these codified land rights was directly connected with the recognition of the equally codified rights of citizens to make demands of their government. Because of the all-consuming nature of the coal industry that often left its workers and their families without a feeling of political control whatsoever of their communities, citizens began to demand intervention for protection.

**The First Political Wafflings to the Allegiance to Coal**

Coal mining is a dangerous profession. The first political responses in terms of miner safety came just on the eve of significant growth in the industry, but took time to root and grow across groups of miners in the coalfields. For example, early in 1875 under the regime of John J. Jacob, a delegate from Mason County submitted a bill to regulate the ventilation of mines. Proper ventilation would obviously improve
air quality, and could also help to prevent other dangerous problems such as explosions. However, this bill did not make it past somewhat arbitrarily assigned Judiciary Committee, as it was “indefinitely postponed” following little debating.\textsuperscript{131}

Although a failure, this first bill sparked a pattern of others designed to regulate the growing industry in order to protect its workers. For example, within a couple of years, the future Bourbon governor E. Willis Wilson introduced a highly detailed bill that would create levels of oversight over the mines. It received less attention than the one from Mason County. Though silenced, this bill was in good company; by 1879 the West Virginia House and Senate each established their own Mines and Mining Committees due to the volume of introduced legislation.\textsuperscript{132} Thus, despite the reluctance on the part of lawmakers to pass significant legislation, the practice of coal mining was already pushing back on the concerns of the state lawmakers.

The politics of coal expanded beyond the boundaries of the state legislature. The Democratic Party’s national connection chafed as the national leadership pursued a reform platform that would remove the Morrill Tariff, an industry-protecting tariff. Besides inciting more friction between the North and South in the antebellum period, this tariff helped to support coal mining in West Virginia, especially in its infancy. This was obviously of great concern to the industry and the bill’s producers, including West Virginia political leaders such as Camden and Davis. Their concern was further

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 137.
buttressed by the looming, tangible threat of Canadian coal and its convenient juxtaposition to New England, a major market for West Virginia bituminous coal.\footnote{Williams, \textit{West Virginia and the Captains of Industry}, 17-21.}

As friction against coal practices built on the statewide level, the assurance of a protective tariff began to crumble on the nation wide level. This incited a palpable uneasiness especially within those leaders with direct ties to the coal industry. For the most powerful leaders of the state, Williams states, “the route to power in West Virginia, as it had been for Elkins earlier in New Mexico, lay through Washington.”\footnote{Ibid., 46.} Throughout this time period, Davis and Elkins played pivotal roles in national as well as state politics, performing favors and inviting prominent leaders to vacation homes to discuss political favors. Given this time period in American politics, however, political favors and questionable moves were hardly too unusual. The heavily intertwined political and economic interests between the Republican and Democratic parties in West Virginia, however, came to a head in the relationship between Davis and Elkins.

Worried about his party’s growing sentiments against tariff protections, Davis turned to his son-in-law’s growing power in the rival Republican Party. Defeated by attempts to encourage leaders such as President Cleveland to meet with him at his estate to reform tariff legislation or to have railroad legislation passed,\footnote{Ibid., 45.} the former senator shifted his support away from his home party in the interest of coal. He clearly expressed his allegiance in a speech and transcribed letter now known as the “April Manifesto,” in which he attacked Governor Wilson for taking actions against tariff and railroad legislation. In it he states, “…in consideration of all questions, the

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\item[\footnote{133}]	extnormal{Williams, \textit{West Virginia and the Captains of Industry}, 17-21.}
\item[\footnote{134}]	extnormal{Ibid., 46.}
\item[\footnote{135}]	extnormal{Ibid., 45.}
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welfare of the people of West Virginia, which include [sic] the development of its great resources, should be given the preference over and above advantage or disadvantage that might accrue to individuals or political parties.”¹³６ Thus, Davis conflates the welfare of all citizens of West Virginia with the coal industry, claiming it is in the people’s best interest to have this tariff.

He clearly was so passionate about the issue that he sought to protect it even if it meant ceasing his allegiance to the Democratic Party. Williams describes his next move, “The solution to their dilemma…pointed to Elkins’s election to the Senate seat his father-in-law once held, thus restoring at least his political prospects and installing in Washington a senator whose primary allegiance was to coal.”¹³⁷ Although the process would take longer than either man expected, Elkins eventually received his Senate seat by the end of the decade, in the process salvaging at least part of their beloved tariff. Thus, the politics of coal within the state began to shift. Some of the most powerful political leaders directly tied to coal such as Camden, Davis, and Elkins continued to wield immense power, though it was clearly beginning to crack. Still, coal ruled the economy of the state. Examining the political structure of the state more deeply suggests that as political levels drew closer and closer to the most local levels of government, private coal companies continued to have monopolies of political power within their self-funded and incorporated townships.

By this point in the state’s history, West Virginia realized the power of coal. The last of the Bourbon governors and member of the “Kanawha Ring,” William Alexander MacCorkle strongly defended the mineral at the question of changes to

¹³⁶ Ibid., 44.
¹³⁷ Ibid., 46.
mining protocol. He stated in a letter to the House of Delegates, “[This bill] must have a deleterious effect upon this greatest industry of our State. The greatness of West Virginia is founded upon our coal…The chief and permanent source of wealth for the next hundred years must be in our production of coal.”\textsuperscript{138} The efforts of leaders such as Elkins, Davis and MacCorkle demonstrate the way that coal and its economic prowess granted its protection a super-political concern. Their language considers the entire industry to be such a powerful part of the still new state’s growing identity. Indeed, at this time, the mineral was set on an upward trajectory in terms of its extraction and market demand—and few other economic interests were in place to diversify the economy.\textsuperscript{139} In 1897, coal was rising to its peak in production in West Virginia. Production up to this point had grown quite quickly, actually reaching a peak in production that year at over fourteen million tons. And although MacCorkle could not have known the actual potential of coal production in his state, this number would pale in comparison to the hundreds of millions of tons West Virginia mines would produce in the years to come\textsuperscript{140}, growing rapidly through WWI until the great depression and ultimately experiencing a brief resurgence that would peak production at an all time high in 1947 due to artificial increases in demand because of WWII.\textsuperscript{141}

Such growth in the coal industry certainly strengthened the economy of the state. New cities grew as populations expanded with the influx of European immigrants and southern blacks joined the ranks of good ol’ boy farmers working for

\textsuperscript{138} Massey, “Legislators, Lobbyists and Loopholes,” 164.
\textsuperscript{139} This would become an especially painful problem for the state in the coming years and during the Great Depression, an issue more fully explored in the following chapter. Williams, \textit{West Virginia: a History}, 149.
\textsuperscript{141} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: a History}, 188.
mining operators. The growth of industries throughout West Virginia, particularly coal though also timber and glass to lesser extents, shifted the concentrations of populations around new industrial centers fed by mining. Although compared to the rest of the nation West Virginia was still quite rural, the thirteen percent of the state that was urban at the turn of the century represented new settlements centered around extractive industries.\textsuperscript{142} As this of course meant altering the natural setting of the state, Williams marks this moment in the state’s history as the first time “…West Virginia came to be thought of as a place of ugliness as well as of beauty.”\textsuperscript{143} Although Williams’ statement refers to the changes in the physical landscape such development brought, industrialization more dramatically altered the social relations of the state.

**Strikes, Unions and Modernization?**

Just two years before MacCorkle made his written defense for the coal industry against changes to mine inspection regulations, the mining industry in West Virginia made another kind of record: eighty-three deaths due to mining accidents. The year of MacCorkle’s speech this number was sixty-three, not to mention one hundred sixty-seven injuries.\textsuperscript{144} Thus, the coal industry was making itself known in several different dimensions: in one respect as an avenue for economic growth and urbanization, but in quite another as a potential source of corporeal and mortal

\textsuperscript{142} Williams, *West Virginia: A History*, 115.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 115.
Furthermore, arguments relating to coal regulation did not remain confined to the halls of the state legislature and within written correspondences between the governor and other political leaders. These battles somewhat reluctantly or sluggishly discussed in political chambers began to take on new methods of consideration in the form of violent protests and guerrilla-like warfare fought in the streets of company towns.

Various private coal companies created many of the newly incorporated towns during this period of massive growth for the state communities for their miners and their families. Partly born out of the Bourbon style of election politics and partly due to the growth of railroads and radio access, the flow and interpretation of information within the state began to change. In 1907 the Raleigh Register observed:

> Towns and cities are springing up where before stood dense forests or waving fields of grain; thousands of coke ovens gleaming along the pathway of the iron horse and clouding the noon-day sun with their endless streams of smoke; armies of men collected together from every quarter of the globe to dig his vast treasures from the mines; heavily loaded freight trains plunging through the mountain fastnesses, fording great rivers and spanning wide canyons to carry to the world its precious supply of fuel.  

Just as the coal mined from their mountains industrialized cities to the north, these quick and dirty changes profoundly affected all dimensions of the lives of West Virginians in the coalfields. The man so passionate about the coal industry noted some of the most significant changes to come about because of it. In another letter, MacCorkle wrote, “The change, apparent to ordinary persons, was in the material development, in the mode of education, in roads and cities and farms, but underlying

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145 I would further like to remind the reader that the particular nature of this urbanization is problematic due to the fact that many of the newly incorporated towns supported by coal were more often than not literally created and supported by private, corporate coal companies.
146 Raleigh Register, quoted in Jeff Biggers, The United States of Appalachia (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2006), 144.
this change and not so well apparent was the real change, which was the political change.\textsuperscript{147} Citizens once separated by mountains now found themselves working in closer than formerly imaginable quarters with people from all over the world, all slowly collecting the fabric necessary to form a collective identity of sorts around the particular mine for which they worked. Eventually, the miners would come to identify the sources of both their nourishment and frustrations of poor working conditions with a tangible person and corporation.

MacCorkle mentions these political changes reflected efforts made on the parts of Camden and Davis with their investments in information dissemination through newspapers and media. The combination of these changes with economic growth and urbanization created an environment described by Williams which “…move[d] West Virginia beyond the preindustrial political culture with its regional networks of kinship and influence to a modern politics dominated by pressure groups, mass media, and professional organization.”\textsuperscript{148} With these changes came a realignment of expectations on the part of the individual voter, although the influx of immigrants created a population a large portion of which were not citizens and therefore could not vote—thus representing a tangible separation between the resident of an area and the government.\textsuperscript{149}

This was especially significant in the coal camps and most isolated areas of West Virginia, where, according to Ron Eller, these massive social changes with

\textsuperscript{147} William A. MacCorkle, quoted in Williams, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 115.
\textsuperscript{149} This is significant because it represents a \textit{legitimate} separation between a resident and worker of place sharing many experiences with others who could vote because of citizenship. However, I believe that within the coal camps these groups were in quite similar political situations because of the dominance of coal companies.
industrialization inundated miners with a new sense of class-consciousness. To a certain extent confirming the thought behind the nostalgia for purity of the Jeffersonian, Americana ideal nestled within the mountain valleys, Eller describes the general approach to community relations and politics and how these changed or were challenged by industrialization:

Whether or not the spirit of freedom and independence is characteristic of all mountain people, there seems to have emerged in Appalachia a system of cultural beliefs that preserved what Herbert G. Gutman has called a “vision of Old America—a belief in America as a land of promise and independence” where men could “be their own rulers” and where “no one should or could become their masters”…Not until the end of the nineteenth century, when industrialization began to bring overt class consciousness to the region, did this democratic ethos begin to conflict with the mountaineer’s perception of social reality.¹⁵⁰

This scenario, combined with the growing rates of injuries and deaths associated with the daily practice of mining, began to build a thick tension within the coal camps. However, it would take some time before this class consciousness developed to create bonds between different groups of miners strong enough to make them risk their lifestyles, and eventually even their lives, in order to gain a collective victory over the coal company.¹⁵¹

This era saw multitudes of changes sweeping the nation as a whole, though clearly affecting other parts of the country quite unevenly. For example, with the turn of the century national politics entered the Progressive era. During this time, the United States would come to reassess the role of the central government vis-à-vis

¹⁵¹ Furthermore, in order to accomplish this, the coal operators and their respective companies needed to also become a recognized enemy that was withholding something from the miners as a group that was markedly robbing them of some part of their conceived rights vis-à-vis the industry and even society at large.
industrialization and urbanization. However, another intrastate agency emerged that would come to challenge the coal industry’s grip on power in the years to come. The United Mine Workers of America cited a victory in the national coal industry in 1897. That year, they won an agreement against bituminous coal operators that would establish eight-hour work days and negotiated pay scales in the participating states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. West Virginia was not intentionally left off of this list by the UMWA. Rather, the eventual inclusion of this state was seen as vital to the survival of the union, especially given the impressive growth numbers that state experienced.\textsuperscript{152} Thus, once again this state would come to have an indispensable significance to a growing movement in the nation. Within a few years, West Virginia would again come to act as the physical battleground between opposing ideas for the political relationships between spheres of power and policies that affect economic outcomes.

At the dawn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, West Virginia miners, although becoming more aware of inequality and injustices within the fields, were not necessarily eager to unionize. Part of the problem speaks to the most basic issue any changes trying to take hold within the Mountain state face: the mountains. Although more navigable than in years past, West Virginia was still difficult to traverse compared with other states where union organizing was common. Richard Lunt explains the extreme situation unionizers faced, “The mountainous terrain isolated mining camps, making miners completely dependent upon the company…To break the company’s control over the miners would require supreme union effort.”\textsuperscript{153} Even with this effort, the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{152} Richard Lunt, \textit{Law and Order vs. the Miners}, 14.} \\
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 14-15.}
actual miners were reluctant to join. Many of their employers had them sign “yellow dog” contracts, which forbade them from joining unions.  

The legitimacy of these types of contracts proved a popular legal argument fought in the court systems throughout this time period in West Virginia. An important victory for the coal companies came in 1907 when the Hitchman Coal and Coke Company won an injunction against the UMWA, thus prohibiting the union from encouraging miners to break their yellow dog contracts. This ruling by the federal district court would not be the last word on the matter, however. World War I marked a shift in the court’s approach to the boundaries of contracts, unions, and miners. Although this temporarily expanded the UMWA rights to approach miners, shortly after the war finished, the courts retracted to their previous position on the matter.  

However, even with these binding contracts, the UMWA faced issues getting miners to join at first for ideological reasons. Despite directed attempts at unionizing the miners of West Virginia, the campaigns continuously failed to pick up enough traction to secure the kind of passionate support necessary to carry out a successful united force against coal corporations. David Allen Corbin investigates this problem, suggesting that historians, while accurately identifying a major reason for this problem lying with close relationship between coal operators and government officials, overlook the miners themselves. He argues the miners in the valleys of West

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154 These contracts became especially contentious within a few years, as unionism became more common, building into violent outbursts between mine guards and miners. Richard Lunt provides a copy of common premade employment contract. His example in particular requires the miner to adhere to the practice of “open shop” mining, a term to describe nonunion mines, but where often the wages offered to the miners rivaled those of the union demands. This move on the part of coal companies helped to undermine the ammunition of the unions to gain more members, yet kept miners dispensable. Ibid., 78.  
155 Ibid., 15-16.
Virginia were rather apathetic towards organization, finding no horribly significant reason to join the unions: “The people—the native mountaineers and southern blacks and European immigrants—who poured into the southern West Virginia coal fields in the 1890s were overwhelmingly of nonunion and nonmining backgrounds. They were existence-oriented.”\(^{156}\) Perhaps contradictory to the cultural image of West Virginia mining country as a place defined by the coal that created the towns, the first miners of the region hardly conceptualized of themselves as miners in terms of their occupation playing a significant part of their identity. Rather, many were in the first generations of those who moved from farms or to the U.S. for the first time—mining was likely seen as only a temporary moment in their lives.

Corbin finds this facet of worker identity essential to explaining the power coal operators wielded over their workers. He describes frustrations of union representatives on the eves of WWI, “Labor organizers…found that the miners were quick to accept both company promises and advice to stay away from the union…miners readily accepted the coal operators’ claims that the UMWA was trying to turn the state’s coal trade over to the competitive states.”\(^{157}\) Thus, union organizers faced challenges not only from the obvious obstacles of physical isolation and coal operator resistance, but also from the miners themselves.

Furthermore, international fears growing around the ideas that brought Marxist revolution to Russia crept into the minds of lawmakers throughout the United States. During this period, unions began to be associated with socialism because of their obvious hardline position on working class rights. Thus, any sympathy for them


\(^{157}\) Ibid., 27.
in the courts or even on the parts of the miners could be seen as siding with an
unwelcome political idea in the United States. J. W. Hess contextualizes the
autobiography of Fred Mooney, a former Secretary of district 17 of the UMWA in
terms of this scare and the birth of the anti-union movement that would come to be
known as “the American plan”: “A reactionary mood swept the nation following
World War I. The ‘red scare’ of 1919-20, the upsurge of the Ku Klux Klan, and a
strong anti-union trend were features of the period.”\(^{158}\) These fears certainly stretched
between the hills of West Virginia, causing particular uneasiness in the consciousness
of Governor Glasscock, a key player in the early years of West Virginia mine wars\(^{159}\)
and last of the Bourbon governors in the state.

Beyond its somewhat ambiguous effect on the West Virginia court system
with respect to union boundaries and contract limits, World War I had a significant
impact on the mining industry, especially in West Virginia. When the United States
entered the war, demand for coal skyrocketed due to the need to increase industrial
production. Although extraction rates had on average been steadily increasing since
the turn of the century, the years of active fighting saw a significant rise in the mining
of coal in the state, making a difference of over two million tons of coal annually
mined between 1913 and 1916.\(^{160}\) However, by 1915, financial crisis hit West
Virginia as the artificial growth of the demand for coal caught up with the state.

Glasscock’s successor and the first governor to be born within the borders of
the state after the creation of West Virginia, Henry Hatfield, took office at the

\(^{158}\) J. W. Hess, introduction to Fred Mooney, *Struggle in the Coal Fields*, ix.
\(^{160}\) West Virginia Office of Miners’ Health Safety and Training, “West Virginia Historic Coal and
beginning of this boom in demand in 1913. More progressive than his predecessor, Hatfield began his term at an especially tumultuous time in the history of the state. As the local coal industry enjoyed heavy profits as a result of the inflated demand from war, strikes began to sweep the nation. Unlike with the original UMWA contract victories, West Virginia was no exception. The first strikes in the coalfields came long before his tenure as governor in the 1880s. As discussed above, because of the conditions and circumstances of the workers, their attitude towards mining as a profession, and their relationships with their respective operators vis-à-vis prevailing political attitudes at the time, these smaller strikes garnered little political reaction and were not strongly organized.\footnote{In fact, it was these first strikes that actually preceded the passage of the Hitchman Act, to the detriment of the efforts of the UMWA.}

Despite the relative failures of these first strikes to make a serious impact on improving the conditions of the workers for those relatively few coal miners who joined in with the unions, these first insurrections helped to define the unique pattern of striking activity within the American bituminous coal industry at large. In his empirical study of these first strikes, Jorg Rossel’s conclusion makes union activity in the bituminous coal industry unique compared to other American industrial sectors with a history of union organization. He states, “...bituminous coal miners’ strikes evolved in a different direction: they grew larger over the whole period covered and were based on the union strategy of broad-based solidarity between miners in different establishments and regions.”\footnote{Jorg Rossel, “Industrial Structure, Union Strategy, and Strike Activity in American Bituminous Coal Mining, 1881-1894,” Social Science History 26, no. 1 (2002), 2.} Although Rossel’s analysis includes all regions of the United States that practiced bituminous coal mining, and West Virginia
clearly posed a challenge to the UMWA, his conclusions still provide an interesting exposition for how this more general pattern informed the UMWA organizers in West Virginia.

Rossel’s findings come as a direct result of the way UMWA organized itself in order to garner greater support regionally across bituminous miners. He discusses how organizers created cohesion between miners despite meager financial resources, “They held meetings, listened to workers’ grievances, and made speeches on union policy…These meetings were intended to increase the miners’ solidarity. Furthermore, they were a place of democratic activity: local union presidents had to be elected, and strike calls were put to a vote.”163 The democratic nature of these meetings is arguably one of the strongest reasons for the eventual success of union organization in West Virginia. Because of the tightknit relationship between the political apparatus and the coal industry,164 miners realized little if any respectable voice in the political process.

Furthermore, the growing power of the coal industry disrupted even the highly corrupt political apparatus in place prior to such dramatic growth. Ron Eller describes a suspicious coincidence between the rise of King Coal and voting habits, “A decline in voter participation characterized the new political culture that emerged in the United States after the 1890s…rural voter turnout dropped sharply, as farmers were alienated from the political system, which they perceived to be increasingly

163 Ibid., 8.
164 To add to my discussion above, Corbin finds the link between the two groups of immense power in the state to nearly completely crowd out any discernable voice from the miners. He states, “From the rise of the southern West Virginia coal establishment in the 1880s until the New Deal of the 1930s, the coal miners in this area found little sympathy and no support from the West Virginia political machinery.” David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, 13.
dominated by economic interests.”¹⁶⁵ This perception was clearly accurate. This decline in voter participation suggests the democratic ethos described by Eller above began to crumble, building in its place a system of dependence on the system at hand.

As the remnants of the identity of the descendants of the once-independent mountain farmers destabilized with the growth of industrialization, the concentration of miners in coal towns grew more and more common. Although the first few years of organized life in the coalfields proved quite violent, these were more indicative of unorganized outgrowths of personal disputes or drunken brawls, often racially charged.¹⁶⁶ The massive growth brought on by WWI and increased union attention on West Virginia converged with this changing sense of political consciousness amongst the miners. David Corbin explains, “The nature of the company town focused the workers’ discontent, not on each other nor on a racial or ethnic group, but upon the employer—the coal operator—enabling the miners to develop that sense of group oppression necessary for class feeling and behavior.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, in eliminating the space for political expression and yet retaining full control over the services and land ownership of the town planted a seed fed by animosities and frustrations in response to the dangers of mining and unpredictable nature of the market for coal.

I do not intend to argue that racial and ethnic tensions were completely relieved through striking and union activity, but an identity was cultivated between

¹⁶⁶ This period in particular refers to what Crandall Shiflett identifies as the “pioneer phase” in the genealogy of the company town in West Virginia. He describes the conditions during this early phase in the history of the company town, “Not unlike the western frontier, the coal camp drew a congregation of young, single or unattached males who had been uprooted from definite expectations of social behavior and placed in a strange and unfamiliar environment where anxieties and tensions of life and work sought relief in exaggerated and sporadic outbursts of unbridled behavior...Since ethnic and racial prejudice prevailed, the confrontations easily involved mixed groups.” Crandall Shiflett, *Coal Towns*, 52.
the different groups against the more oppressive figure of the coal operator, further fueled by union organizers. However, as the collective identity between the miners continued to build as an oppressed group against coal operators and their absentee employers, conversations between groups took place on a more regular basis. Plans began to form in order to take action against the operators. However, this is not necessarily to say that in breaking down these racial and ethnic barriers and beginning to form a sense of class consciousness that a true consensus was created. On the other hand, the idea of consensus existed that helped to move men from the mines and into streets, armed with pistols and enraged by a sense of injustice. In his closely examined study of the West Virginia mine wars, Roger Fagge challenges Corbin’s insistence on the formation of a coherent class consciousness, instead claiming:

…despite the appearance of unity in the act of struggle, the West Virginia miners did not form a coherent or stable political position either in the electoral sense, or in terms of a radical identity to match their actions. Instead they articulated a vague and ill-defined version of Americanism which focused on the specific problems of West Virginia, and made broad appeals for law and order and citizenship rights.\footnote{Roger Fagge, “‘Citizens of the Great Republic’: Politics and the West Virginia Miners, 1900-1922.” \textit{International Review of Social History} 40, no. 1 (1995), 32-33.}

Thus, a lack of consensus existed regarding the degree of intellectual and political solidarity between bands of miners against coal operators. Fagge’s point is strengthened when considering the traditional party loyalties of the three main groups comprising the miners of West Virginia: former farmers with a historical preference for the Democratic party, rather recently enfranchised blacks with obvious loyalty for Republicans, and then groups of immigrants who could barely communicate with the other miners, not to mention the fact that they lacked any vote whatsoever.
However, such tensions were made worse as state and federal reactions to strikes as they became more and more organized, resulting in multiple issuances of martial law with the assistance of federal troops. Such a reaction only reinforces the critical need to retain the political space for expression and at least the idea of control.

Still, in critical moments of oppression Fagge and Corbin agree these groups were able to overcome their differences and violently direct their grievances against the identifiable oppressors that were their coal operators. One particularly dramatic example of this degree of organization in tandem with the UMWA was the infamous Matewan Massacre, the topic of John Sayles’ film *Matewan*.169 Reinforcing the old nickname given to the state from the times of the violent but oft-inflated Hatfield-McCoy disputes, “Bloody Mingo” would become infamous yet again for acting as the home to one of the most violent outbursts of organized tensions between miners and their operators. The cause of the massacre unsurprisingly involved disputes between the Red Jacket Coal Company operators and Mingo County miners backed with union support. The climax of the strikes that led to evicted miners bringing their families into camping communities in the woods occurred on May 19, 1920 when the Chief of Police Sid Hatfield shot dead Albert Felts, one of the controlling members of the Baldwin-Felts detective agency. Violent anarchy then ensued between his accompanying guards and the rogue miners-turned-guerrilla fighters hidden throughout the town.

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The Great Depression Comes to West Virginia

Moments such as these helped to define an era of a particular kind of violence in the coalfields of West Virginia. That is, the organized, even if not coherent, response to an amalgamation of factors both controllable and uncontrollable on the part of individual coal companies that caused economic and political hardship for miners and their families. However, these issues would only be significantly worsened and ultimately permanently altered by the Great Depression—an event that disproportionately affected West Virginia with respect to the rest of the nation, but economically destroyed the coalfields. Unlike with other market downturns and fluctuations, the coal industry in West Virginia was forever changed following this particular catastrophe, acting as a major turning point in the history of this region.

This event in American history also marked a shift in federal response to economic hardship. The alphabet agencies of FDR’s New Deal were active in West Virginia, and did bring relief. However, the way they operated actually had an adverse effect on West Virginia, largely because these programs undermined the factors that gave the state’s economic sector any sort of edge. Paul Salstrom discusses this problem in immense detail, his main points hinging on the importance of the continued use of subsistence farming in West Virginia as a supplement to income. Programs of the National Recovery Administration (NRA) such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) actually benefited other parts of the nation such as the Midwest at the expense of

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central Appalachia because of the way they put in place price supports and benefited capital-intensive agriculture.\textsuperscript{171}

These programs brought not only harm to the West Virginia and other areas of central Appalachia, but rather markedly mixed results. Salstrom ultimately categorizes the effects of the New Deal as a sort of mixed bag that caused the region to reconsider its economic prospects, “The New Deal’s money injections, though they harmed the region’s textile and coal industries, helped to save its land by making people less dependent on farming their land. So a trade-off was involved.”\textsuperscript{172} This tradeoff represented a significant factor in a line of history of the coal-rich Appalachian Mountains that traces this area’s path to dependency on greater government—and generally federal—support.

The next and final chapter of this thesis explores perhaps the most climatic event in this genealogy to date—the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission, a government agency that is neither federal nor state run, but rather a partnership between the two designed to bring this part of the country identified as being “left behind” in a certain sense by the growth of the rest of the nation. West Virginia is the only state in the program to be completely encompassed in the area of concern. This action further incites a reconsideration of the nature of federalism, and the final government-supported installment to the ideological battle physically fought over this region for nearly a century.

\textsuperscript{171} Paul Salstrom, Appalachian’s Path to Dependency: Rethinking a Region’s Economic History 1730-1940 (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994) xxiv-xxv.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., xxv.
CHAPTER 5: THE CREATION OF A PERSONALIZED AGENCY FOR A REGION IN NEED

“As hunger allows no choice; To the citizen or the police; we must love one another or die.” WH Auden quoted in Michael Harrington’s The Other America

As the twentieth century hit its halfway mark, the economic depression rampant throughout the foothills of West Virginia was undeniable. By this point, the phenomenon that would come to be known as “brain drain” tapped the coalfield’s population—the scores of European immigrants made good on their promise of transiency and left soon after the demand for coal dipped for a persistent period. What was left was the skeleton and weakly beating heart of a once immensely powerful industry, gasping to remain alive.

The miners and their families who remained perhaps found solace in the uncommon luck of maintaining employment, and yet grew poorer than their ancestors had ever been. For although they may have maintained some of their farms for smaller crops, the land was so altered by the practice of coal mining that they could not return to the lifestyles of their great-grandfathers—not to mention the now universally practiced throughout even the most rural parts of West Virginia adherence to land laws, most often to the benefit of absentee corporations. Thus emerged a face of poverty new to these mountains, awaiting the sharp reporting skills of Michael

174 Crandall A. Shifflett, Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960, xi. This would also later come to be associated with native West Virginians or other central Appalachians leaving in search for better opportunities outside of the state. In the most literal sense, the best and brightest young people would permanently leave the state, taking with them whatever talents or educational experience they may have with them.
Harrington and subsequent political ones of John F. Kennedy, Jr. to incite an unprecedented political response to poverty.

The product of two different presidents’ commitment to eradicating poverty in the United States, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was established in 1965 to address the specific needs of this region.\(^1\) The passage of this act alone on a federal level acknowledged the existence of certain characteristics that set Appalachia apart from the rest of the nation, and thus that required a specific kind of response. The language of the agency’s reports suggests that it perhaps acts as an artificial, political correction in order to better incorporate the Appalachian population of the United States into the rest of the polity.

The *Report by the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission* refers to Appalachia’s case as “a legacy of neglect.” It claims that the general process of development most of the nation followed did not come to fruition in Appalachia. It traces many of these problems to the combination of a reliance on natural resources for economic health and market demand that distorted the best practices for cultivating these resources. The Report states, “Even the first stage of exploitation of the region’s great resources was retarded—by a primitive agriculture and by changing technology and consumer demand within the timber and coal industries.”\(^2\) This problem was exacerbated by the tragic yet generally common story of areas blessed with valuable natural endowments:

> Where a society depends primarily on the extraction of natural resources for its income and employment—as did the people of Appalachia—it is extremely important that a high proportion of wealth created by extraction be reinvested locally

\(^1\) “ARC History,” *The Appalachian Regional Commission*, accessed 14 May 2012, [http://www.arc.gov/about/ARCHistory.asp](http://www.arc.gov/about/ARCHistory.asp)

\(^2\) “Appalachia: a Report by the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission 1964,” 19.
in other activities. The relatively low proportion of native capital did not produce such a reinvestment in large sections of the region. Much of the wealth produced…was seldom seen locally.  

The agency’s perception of the most acute problems of the region as a whole seem to speak directly to colonial theory of West Virginia’s poverty. Years of this kind of neglect resulted in visible poverty throughout Appalachia, though especially prevalent in areas dependent on coal. Stark statistics highlighted the Appalachian gap, as the “Appalachia Report’s” research recorded significant differences between Appalachia and the rest of the nation in 1960 with respect to income, unemployment, savings, housing quality, and population changes to name but a few. Even within these, the counties with the greatest dependence on coal lagged the farthest behind.  

Although the coal industry witnessed a significant spike in production in response to WWII, the Report is accurate in claiming that this region was “left behind.” Even still, it appeared that most of the rest of the nation was only concerned with Appalachia to the extent that people left the region in mass exoduses as these issues grew worse, or until Senator Kennedy visited the region on his Presidential campaign tour. In his book tracing the history and effectiveness of the ARC, Michael Bradshaw discusses the meeting of a hopeful, progressive candidate with the depression of industrial poverty:

> The image of Kennedy, shocked at the sight of shoeless children, made a point about the paradox of poverty and marked inequalities existing within the affluent American society…his promise to deal with such problems provided a crusading basis for an appeal to the national electorate.

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177 Ibid., 20.
178 Ibid., xvi, xvii, 7, 14, 15.
In this moment, cultural images of rural Appalachia intersected with national politics in a new form. Kennedy’s shock found articulation in Michael Harrington’s book meant to bring to light the politically dangerous sides of poverty related to the silencing effects of the poverty that emerged in contrast to the more affluent parts of the nation by the 1940s and ‘50s.  

The connection between Kennedy and Harrington is nearly undeniable, especially in light of comments made by James Sundquist, an early player in the crafting of Kennedy’s poverty legislation shortly after his election. Sundquist comments on the realization that the many small problems like inadequate health care or illiteracy stemmed from one much more pervasive, “Perhaps it was Harrington’s book that identified the target for Kennedy and supplied the coordinating concept: the bedrock problem, in a word, was ‘poverty.’ Words and concepts define programs; once the target was reduced to a single word, the timing became right for a unified program.” Thus, in some respects, Harrington’s analysis that articulated the politically silencing effects of prolonged depression in Appalachia acted as one of the first steps towards these citizens gaining the ability to (re)discover their voices, and thus (re)assert themselves as actors in American society.

Another interesting point emerges at this intersection of poverty, politics, and West Virginia. That is, Kennedy’s commitment also expressed an electoral debt to be paid to West Virginia. In securing West Virginia’s support, Kennedy destroyed doubts that a Catholic could ever win the presidency of the United States, “marking a

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182 James Sundquist quoted in Maurice Isserman’s foreword in *The Other America* by Michael Harrington, xv.
turning point in his drive to the presidency.”\textsuperscript{183} Eller describes the unexpected concerns of West Virginia constituents, “…Kennedy was ready to confront religious bigotry head-on. But the crowds of unemployed coal miners who greeted the senator in places like Welch and Williamson…were less interested in the candidate’s religion than in his plans to relieve their economic distress.”\textsuperscript{184} Thus, this election represented a significant turning point in the legitimized inclusion of those who could actively, publicly and effectively participate in American federal policies.

Sundquist’s statement emerged in the midst of the President’s effort to gather more information on Appalachia and its poverty in order to make good on the promise he made on the campaign trail.\textsuperscript{185} This research revealed that multiple organizations broadly committed to charity and development already labored throughout the region, yet seemed somewhat impotent.\textsuperscript{186} But like the shock resulting from the sobering descriptions in Harrington’s book or the pain on Kennedy’s face in West Virginia photos, a natural disaster and the (lack of) response helped to reveal the stark reality of life in Appalachia. Bradshaw describes the tragedy of devastating floods to strike several Appalachian states in March 1963 with respect to repairing infrastructure, “The poor Appalachian states did not have the funds to raise this aid to the levels necessary to replace the bridges, let alone improve them; therefore, after replacement they would be worse than before the flood.”\textsuperscript{187} Soon after an official committee accountable to the President was formed in late winter 1963 to “…provide

\textsuperscript{183} Eller, Uneven Ground, 53.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{185} Kennedy’s success in West Virginia is partly due to a promise he made in which he stated, “If I’m nominated and elected president, within sixty days of the start of my administration, I will introduce a program to Congress for aid to West Virginia.” Kennedy quoted in Eller, Uneven Ground, 54.
\textsuperscript{186} Bradshaw argues that while these agencies existed, they largely lacked the resources to make much of an impact, The Appalachian Regional Commission, 2.
\textsuperscript{187} Bradshaw, The Appalachian Regional Commission, 32.
‘a comprehensive program for the economic development of the Appalachian
Region…’”\textsuperscript{188} Although before the results of the committee could be published
Kennedy lost his life to an infamous gunshot, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson,
proved similarly committed to eradicating the divisive effects of persistent poverty.\textsuperscript{189}

This committee, consisting of “a representative designated by each of the
Governors of the Appalachian states and a representative of each of the heads of
major Federal departments and agencies”\textsuperscript{190} conducted extensive research in the area
to help evaluate the degree of economic sickness, and provide potential solutions to
alleviate it. The language employed to describe Appalachia like “a region apart—
geographically and statistically”\textsuperscript{191} seems to harken back to Harrington, and indeed it
finds that Appalachia is, “…more striking in its homogeneity than in its
diversity…[yet] rural Appalachia lags behind rural America; urban Appalachia lags
behind urban America; and metropolitan Appalachia lags behind metropolitan
America” [sic].\textsuperscript{192}

Thus, the committee not surprisingly confirmed Harrington’s findings and
Kennedy’s fears, and further acknowledged a physical gap in the federal
government’s concern for the region. In 1964 it found that, “In the last fiscal year,
Appalachia’s 8.5 percent of the population received 4.9 percent of the Federal dollar,
exclusive of trust fund and interest expenditures…this...explains part of the region’s

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{190} Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. in the “Letter of Transmittal” to “Appalachia: a Report by the President’s
Appalachian Regional Commission 1964,” ii.
\textsuperscript{191} Introduction to “Appalachia: a Report by the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission 1964,”
\textsuperscript{xv}.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., xviii.
past distress…”193 This finding in particular statistically confirms the ambiguous effects of the New Deal in the region, suggesting that the structure of the program to generally help the greater United States were ineffective in Appalachia. Recognizing the problems associated with other federal programs and yet shying away from addressing or altering these policies, the committee rather suggests creating an entirely new organization to work in tandem with both the region itself and these other agencies. It states in the closing lines of its chapter on regional development, “We have seen no alternative to a deep Federal involvement in this urgent effort and…commitment of Federal Funds.”194 The report culminates in the committee’s decision that the interrelated problems of Appalachia will best be able to take advantage of its opportunities to develop with the creation of the Appalachian Regional Commission.195 Thus, even with the recognition of the ineffectiveness of bureaucratic operations already in place, this commission finds the most effective solution to be to layer these with another directly focused agency unlike any other in the history of American government.

Unlike the individual alphabet agencies of the New Deal, the mission of the Appalachian Regional Commission was to attack the underlying thread connecting these problems: persistent poverty. The Report identifies how the establishment of a new bureaucratic organization aids in alleviating Appalachia’s poverty problem:

The activities of the Commission will provide a concentration of technical effort on the solution of key problems suffered generally by the region, by its subareas and by its towns. These basic problems have grown faster than the areas, the towns themselves, and unless confronted now by a capable and special attack, they threaten to destroy the possibility of recovery within the region.196

193 “Appalachia: a Report by the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission,” 28.
194 Ibid., 30.
195 Ibid., 59.
196 Ibid., 61.
Thus, the committee’s research indicated the current state of Appalachia made it impossible to recover without a focused, concerted effort and special attention from the federal government.

Furthermore, the President’s committee recognized Harrington’s point regarding the silencing effects of poverty on this region. The Report articulates the ultimate motive for establishing the Appalachian Regional Commission in its final lines, “In the years ahead, the Appalachian program will be many programs, unified only by their singleness of focus: the introduction of Appalachia and its people into fully active membership in the American society.”197 The core concern of the government here is with the inability of American Appalachians to fully exercise their political voices because of the physical hindrances poverty and isolation pose to them, despite the fact that what seemed to have struck Kennedy was the abject poverty of these citizens.

The investigation by this Committee displays an interesting aspect of the federal government’s role in creating or correcting equal opportunities for all of its citizens, and recognizing when the states may lack the resources to perform this function themselves. In the name of a more powerful voice in federal government affairs the report articulates the roles of the state and federal governments in a way that places the voice of Canovan (and rather America)’s people ahead of jurisdictional questions. It states, “…the absolute necessity for coordinated action between the States and Federal Government. State and Federal prerogatives have been set aside in

197 Ibid., 65.
the concentrated effort to prepare this report.” 198 And yet, the Report sees the most reliable way to tap the preferences of the Appalachian people is through their state power, “Although by majority vote the Board may develop programs for the regions, it may not impose any program upon an unwilling State, nor may it commit to any such program by its action alone the financial resources of any State nor of the Federal Government.” 199 This is further evidenced by the long-term financial structure of the program, which was designed to be a “grant-in-aid” style, whereby the federal government augments local funds, although this restriction was to be lifted in the short term due to the obvious dearth of local funds. 200

Thus, the Appalachian Regional Commission established in 1965 is the result of a unique, multilateral effort on the part of both the states and federal government to address the needs of the specific individuals in the region as it pertains to their ability to fully participate in the American polity. Still, the actual boundaries of the ARC’s ultimate constituency somewhat challenges this notion, as in all but one of its thirteen states (West Virginia), the ARC’s jurisdiction extends over only a select number of counties.

The passage of the Appalachian Regional Development Act to officially create the Appalachian Regional Commission in 1965 marked a new frontier in the creation of regional public policy. Its structure was (and is) completely unique to any other organization; thus its implementation acted as a kind of bureaucratic experiment in development policy, testing the traditional conceptions of state and federal power dynamics and responsibilities.

198 Ibid., 57.
199 Ibid., 61.
200 Ibid., 63.
An additional encouragement of state autonomy comes in the form of the creation of local development districts (LDD) throughout the region to act as the ARC’s partners in the field. The idea behind creating these LDDs was to, “…create citizens’ councils to advise it on general or specific regional problems, and it should work with appropriate local organizations or jurisdictions in carrying out projects of the regional program.” Further requiring that “each state, not the Federal Government, will be responsible for authorizing the creation of any local organization of the development district character and for determining standards for their organization structure, programs, and powers,” solidifies the intention to keep the program a federal-state-local partnership. This way, as much power as possible with respect to the specific manners of development remains in the hands of the states, and more importantly, the Appalachian citizens.

While the structural organization of the ARC is vital to the way it operates and how it forms its policies, it is completely powerless without funding. The 1964 Report lays out the methods for funding the ARC and its projects: “The administrative expense of the Commission will be shared on a 50-50 basis by the State and Federal governments after the second year of operations. During the initial 2 years, these expenses will be borne through Federal appropriations.” The request for funding in 1965 consisted of 1 million dollars for “Administration,” 1.7 million for “Technical assistance” and 9 hundred thousand dollars for “Research,” for a total of a 3.6 million dollar federal allocation to begin the program. By 2011, the total

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201 “Appalachia: a Report by the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission 1964,” 59.
202 Ibid., 59-61.
203 Ibid., 61.
204 Ibid., 61.
dollar amount of funds grew to just over 5.47 million dollars, a modest total when compared to other federal agencies. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, an agency that often contributes funds to many of the same projects as the ARC, had a total budget of nearly 43.6 million dollars.\textsuperscript{205}

Thus, the structure of the ARC emphasizes state and local involvement in addition to the federal responsibility of coordination. By guaranteeing each state a role in the leadership of the ARC as well as deeming them the liaison between the LDDs and federal dollars, the organization’s structure prevents the ARC from becoming “too federal” of an agency, a quality that would significantly undermine the agency’s goal for holistic, grassroots development. This quality further displays the nature of the relationship between the state and federal governments this agency in particular is designed to cultivate. The shared responsibilities and emphasis on state agency to help funnel federal dollars shows a clear meshing of responsibilities between the spheres of government. Furthermore, the commitment to state autonomy highlights an interesting juxtaposition to Jefferson’s idyllic vision of Americana self-sufficiency captured in the lifestyle of the West Virginian pre-development of coal.

Established to respond to Appalachian poverty by way of holistic development spurred from the bottom-up through a federal-state-local partnership, the Appalachian Regional Commission is an experiment in regional government policy. Its structure acts as both a benefit to its overall purpose, by actively engaging the states and local communities, as well as a detriment, by being severely constrained by its small size.


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CONCLUSION

Popular culture celebrates the natural beauty of West Virginia. Artists such as John Denver nearly deify the state’s landscape and his conception of the region’s culture in his iconic song “Take Me Home, Country Roads.” Denver’s association of heavenly paradise with the geography of West Virginia pleasantly eases the listener into considering the state’s impressive precipices to shelter the singer—or whoever else appreciates their beauty. Lyrics such as “Life is old there/Older than the trees,” soon followed by “Country Roads, take me home” describe a place of consistent comfort in a statically wholesome place. Yet another song written about this place within its mountains paints an opposite image. Merle Travis’s song, “Dark as a Dungeon” flips Denver’s heavenly description on its head with his lines:

It’s dark as a dungeon and damp as the dew,
Where the danger is double and pleasures are few,
Where the rain never falls and the sun never shines,
It’s dark as a dungeon way down in the mine.

Such celebration vis-à-vis utter despair in descriptions of the same place demonstrates a particular struggle within American popular culture with respect to West Virginia and central Appalachia at large. It is simultaneously beautiful and ugly, peaceful and violent, heaven and hell. It is where Americans preserve the dream of independent farmers and families, and where we turn to extract the necessary resources to build the impressive results of industrialization. It is both part of and apart from the United States.

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Americans are not completely blind to this combative dichotomy. Especially as poverty resulting from this extractive industrial practice left the people of West Virginia utterly impoverished and stripped them of the ability to regain the independent lifestyles of decades past, this contradiction became more and difficult to ignore. The federally financed research and eventual implementation of the Appalachian Regional Commission attempts to rectify this by federally financing state-guided efforts at holistic development.

This struggle exemplified through the above creative works and attempt to remedy via the ARC represents through the specific setting and economic circumstances of West Virginia a physical reincarnation of an ideological debate begun with the nation’s founding. This thesis attempted to draw this connection, beginning with debates between Madisonian federalists and Jeffersonian anti-federalists. Although the nation adopted a relationship between state and federal spheres of government that more closely resembled the former’s view, the final product reflected a compromise between the two. However, the final implementation of the Constitution was not the official end to these arguments. They carried over via different outlets, whether through the cultural desire to preserve a part of the Jeffersonian image of independent frontiersmen in the literal spaces of West Virginia, or in violent warfare between the northern and southern parts of the nation as these debates were rehashed.

The preceding pages intended to trace the narrative of these arguments as they were physically and politically redefined and re-fought over the boundaries of contemporary West Virginia. The development of the coal industry proved an
interesting and essential addition to this narrative, especially given its contribution to the industrialization of the northeastern portions of the nation. The ultimate creation of an agency catered not to a highly focused or specific goal but rather of the general and holistic development of this region through mixed roles of state and federal involvement—yet primarily relying on state-by-state input—stands as a fascinating climax to this study and speaks to the malleable theory of American federalism.

Certain themes shed additional light on this continued, never resolved debate on the proper implementation of federalism in this country. The way this debate played out over the mountains of West Virginia via the development of coal gave way to unintended consequences—quite clearly seen with the implementation of New Deal policies during the Great Depression. The timing of the growth of coal as it occurred shortly after West Virginia gained independent statehood, during which time some of the state’s most powerful leaders held direct interests in the coal industry, contributed to state policies that supported its rapid development and helped to lead the state down a somewhat inevitable path whereby coal was King. Along the way, political institutions were layered on top of each other until a devastating degree of poverty emerged. Although the people of West Virginia by this point led existences almost completely dependent on a single industry, the state and federal responses to these issues in the form of a directed federal effort to provide aid in the name of protecting the voice of the people of Appalachia pointed to the maturation of the political system in the favor of including the people of the hills.

As a final note, this last point does not intend to argue that ARC fixed the state’s political problems or eradicated corruption, especially on local government
levels in West Virginia. Huey Perry’s memoir of his experiences in Mingo County in the years just following the ARC’s implementation recorded this persistent problem. In describing his apprehensions in accepting the position of director for the Economic Opportunity Commission in Mingo Country, he assures the reader that the deep ties of local corruption in politics were still very much so active:

During the next few days, I gave serious thought to the approach that community action would take in Mingo. It appeared that I had two alternatives: Either I could work with the existing political establishment in the county and satisfy their wishes or I could ignore them as much as possible and take the program directly to the people. If I chose the latter approach, then it was obvious that the greatest resistance would eventually come from the entrenched Democratic machine.208

Just as the poverty of its miners, political practices and attitudes are slow to change. However, the experiences, workings, and adaptations of local, state, and federal governments over this time period—and indeed even the inclusion of Perry in the local political practices—suggest that while powerful, corruption is not permanent. Indeed, commenting on the ultimate meaning of Perry’s work, Jeff Biggers writes, “And herein lay the crisis for the old guard: Perry was slowly building a participatory democracy that would overthrow decades of corruption.”209

Furthermore, ill implemented good intentions or myopic policies must not be mistaken for corruption. The persistent problems plaguing the foothills of West Virginian mining communities are complicated, and are calling new leaders with refreshing approaches to eradicating this debilitating poverty to action. One of these people working in the same town as Perry but decades later comments on his

209 Jeff Biggers, introduction to “They’ll Cut Off Your Project,” by Huey Perry, xix.
philosophy to development as it operates in his organization, the JOBS Project. Eric Mathis states:

Our approach is an economic one which calls into question the basic assumptions of the system as a whole by interlocking employees’ and community stakeholders’ creative capacity with those of the local elite thus interlocking the very survival of the modern-day coal town, with the interests of the people.210

Modern approaches to poverty relief and economic development as exemplified by Mathis seek not to extract justice from any ill doings of the coal industry through financial retribution or personal verbal attacks, but rather attempt to recognize the path that has thrown the coal towns of West Virginia and central Appalachia into this sluggish poverty. By harnessing the power of the local community with help from different spheres of political power and financial assistance, they hope to build these towns into communities that stand in stark contrast to those of their past—certainly in terms of economic diversity, but perhaps more importantly, in a way that displays the people of the communities’ will. They seek to build communities that reflect the democratic power of their residents.

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210 Eric Mathis quoted in Jeff Bigger’s introduction to “They’ll Cut Off Your Project,” by Huey Perry, xxvii.
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