

Chad Montrie, *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

To Save the Land and People studies the movement to abolish or control surface coal mining that gained national attention in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Lucidly written, the book addresses what histories of the modern environmental movement in the United States have largely failed to address: the environmentalism of ordinary people. "The campaign to abolish stripping," says Chad Montrie in the introduction, "was primarily a movement of farmers and working people of various sorts, originating at the local level, and writing its history brings attention to the role played by common folk in the conservation, preservation, and environmental movements" (3). In this regard, he finds that they shared many concerns with the mainly urban middle-class environmental movement, such as preserving natural beauty and ecological integrity, and conserving natural resources. However, they placed greater emphasis on the link between environmental degradation and the threat to economic sustainability, as well as on the preservation of their homes.

The first chapter of the book provides some social, economic, and environmental background to this upland region. Later chapters follow the course of organized opposition to surface coal mining from its first expressions in Ohio and West Virginia in the 1930s, to its increasing importance in the state politics of Pennsylvania and Kentucky in the 1960s, by which point the movement was pushing for the abolition of strip mining altogether. The social basis for banning or controlling 'stripping' (as surface coal mining, or strip mining, was often called) began among locally affected farmers early in the twentieth century. By the 1960s in some states, such as Pennsylvania, existing organizations such as the Grange, Farm Bureau, or the United Mine Workers of America were part of efforts to achieve regulation. In more mountainous areas, especially eastern Kentucky, industry-based organizations were weak, and "small farmers, active and retired deep miners, homemaker wives and mothers, as well as some middle-class professionals and business leaders banded together for the specific purpose of fighting the menace of surface coal mining" (61-2). As students and environmental activists became involved, opposition grew nationally.

Opponents of stripping had limited success in enacting regulatory measures, and they never achieved any outright bans. To bolster regulation and prevent the constant attempts by companies and their political allies to repeal and alter legislation and undermine its enforcement mechanisms, federal legislation was sought. This resulted in The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977, which set minimum standards of regulation that states were required to meet, and empowered the federal government to both approve state enforce-

ment programs and take them over if they failed (177). Reaction to drafts of the law followed a pattern similar to state regulatory laws. Coal operators sought concessions, and when the law passed they made court challenges to it (losing in this case). Environmentalists complained that it was too weak, and sympathetic politicians, President Carter among them, agreed, but argued that it was the best that could be done at the time. Local residents were also unsatisfied because broad form deeds that gave coal operators access to the resource on privately held land were not abolished, nor was the consent of land owners required for coal operators to begin stripping. As regulation of surface mining developed in the following decades it was generally accepted that some federal law in the area was better than none, but it was also admitted that it hadn't done nearly enough to save the land or the people.

The description of efforts to achieve regulation of surface coal mining moves from state to state, in roughly chronological order, and comprises eight chapters – the large majority of the book. Acts of industrial sabotage, the sometimes violent confrontations of opponents and strippers, and the voices of Appalachian residents enliven the story. Revealed more often, though, is the tedium and frustration of fighting an increasingly organized 'coal lobby', armed with enormous bank accounts and expert lawyers, and a multi-leveled state with its various branches, divisions of powers, and legal requirements. The complexity of the problem is partly what defeated opponents of surface coal mining, and this seems connected to the problem referred to in the conclusion as "having to fight the whole system" (201). It is important, then, that this complexity be illustrated, but the book suffers from excessively detailing the history of negotiations over proposed bills, the changing attitudes of administrations, and developments in the bureaucratic approaches to regulation enforcement.

The author discusses at various points some of the underlying patterns that gave rise to strip mining, and supported its perpetuation. Examples of such factors are: Appalachia's position as a resource hinterland in a capitalist economy, the enormous growth in demand for energy, the role of the Tennessee Valley Authority in meeting this demand, and the problem of regulating the exploitation of a resource in multiple jurisdictions. The broad form deed is among the most important aspects of the history of strip mining that the author includes, but the examination of the nature of and debate about such deeds seems too limited. These deeds partly enabled surface coal mining, caused furious protest and much litigation, and are evidence of the capitalist orientation of American society. Land companies aiming to control mineral rights were the main purchasers of these deeds in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and courts continued to find in favour of their legality long after their original purchase. While the landowner remained liable for taxes, the broad form deed conferred upon the holder the right to access minerals under the surface, and often

also granted the right to dump all forms of waste on the land (66). Montrie's discussion of ideology is limited to popularly held notions of the rights of citizens, but the extraordinary privileges held in broad form deeds, and the fact that they were state sanctioned, suggests that the ideology of the free market and *laissez faire* also warrants inclusion.

To Save the Land and People is strongest when it explains the basis for opposition to strip mining. Removing vegetation cover and topsoil to mine coal deposits near the surface was enormously destructive. Strip mining deforested land, caused erosion of slopes that led to landslides (some of which destroyed homes and villages), the silting and acidification of streams, muddying of wells, and when blasting was done it endangered nearby buildings by cracking foundations and sending rock downhill. A variety of surface mining methods were used, and their effects varied, but in virtually all cases, no matter where or when, operators made little or no attempt at reclamation. Supporters of strip mining minimized its negative influence on the environment, and argued that better methods were improving its environmental record. Against charges that stripping destroyed natural beauty, they responded that this was a fair price for creating jobs and sustaining the local economy. The last argument was a potent weapon in a region that was chronically underdeveloped, but Montrie demonstrates that opponents of surface coal mining understood that it was facetious. By the latter half of the twentieth century surface mining was mechanized, requiring relatively little labour, so its value as an employer was limited. In addition, the practice contributed little in terms of taxes since it was transient and because in removing the productive capacity of land, it lowered land assessments.

Clearly, the environmental and economic reasons for opposing strip mining overlapped considerably, and in many cases the reasons for opposing operators were felt viscerally because they affected people so directly. Montrie argues that an essentially political ideology held at the grassroots shaped popular anger, and gave the movement to oppose stripping the impetus to act, justifying its objectives, and providing it with arguments to use to advance its cause. Citing historians of American political traditions, he claims that this ideology was a mix of the Lockean natural right to oppose tyranny, with the republican faith in the institution of private property as the key to good social order and individual welfare (5). There is ample evidence throughout the book for this characterization, provided by readings of local newspapers, records of meetings and correspondence of various kinds, and interviews. Religion was at least one other resource for opponents of strip mining, as one petition to the Governor of Kentucky in 1960 showed when it condemned stripping "in our steep mountains" for all of its negative effects on farming and daily life, and because it destroyed "the natural beauty which God has so lavishly placed in our region" (65-6).

It seems that stripping was seen by its opponents as an attack on the home, strictly and broadly defined. Strip mining sometimes literally threatened houses, but it could also alter a whole community, causing economic and social hardship in the long-term. Non-residents of Appalachia could also see the problem in terms of community, using the idea of citizenship as meaning ownership of the natural heritage of the whole country, and the idea of the nation as a community of shared interests in which the plight of people threatened by surface coal mining was important for all Americans. Future studies of the history of strip mining will hopefully build on Montrie's efforts, expanding on its social dimensions and on how environmentalism was conceived by different social groups.

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Peter Hegedus, *Inheritance: A Fisherman's Story* (First Run / Icarus Films, 2003).

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the West moved quickly to prove that *laissez faire* economics could transform the moribund satellite states of Eastern Europe from decrepit relics of Cold War exploitation into profitable members of the global capitalist system. Western companies rapidly filled the vacuum left by Soviet withdrawal. For such companies, the benefits of investment were enormous: the communist system had left an industrial infrastructure, built without expensive mechanisms to ensure environmental protection or worker safety, a mass of cheap labour ignorant of the value of their work in a Western context and eager for employment, as well as an almost complete absence of environmental legislation to hinder their efforts.

Such conditions were inherently profitable – they were also fraught with the potential for catastrophe. In early 2000, a premature thaw caused an earthen dam to break near a gold mine operated by an Australian and Romanian conglomerate. The flooding waters cascaded through the company's nearby (and poorly constructed) waste ponds releasing 100,000 tons of cyanide into the Tisza River. What followed was the worst environmental disaster in Europe since Chernobyl. The documentary *Inheritance: A Fisherman's Story*, portrays the consequences of this disaster through the eyes of one Hungarian fisherman, Balazs Meszaros.

Less concerned with the impact of the disaster on the environment, the documentary focuses its attention on how it transformed one man's relationship to the river and his place in the local community. We watch Balazs, a stubborn