



Combating Mountaintop Removal: New Directions in the Fight against Big Coal

Bryan T. McNeil

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Critically examining the fierce conflicts over an intense and increasingly prevalent form of strip mining, *Combating Mountaintop Removal: New Directions in the Fight against Big Coal* documents the changing relationships among the coal industry, communities, environment, and economy from the perspective of local grassroots activist organizations and their broader networks. Drawing on powerful personal testimonies of the hazards of mountaintop removal in Boone County, West Virginia, Bryan T. McNeil shows how Appalachian community coalitions have fostered important connections in their opposition to coal mining practices. Focusing on the grassroots activist organization Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW), composed of individuals who have personal ties to the coal industry in the region, the study reveals a turn away from once-strong traditional labor unions. With the decline in membership and political power of the United Mine Workers union in West Virginia, citizens have turned to alternative forms of activism to coordinate opposition to mountaintop removal mining, centering mainly on the industry's effect on community and the environment. The shift toward community organizing, particularly around environmental concerns, represents an effort to address social issues in a new space outside of organized labor. By framing social and moral arguments in terms of the environment, these innovative hybrid movements take advantage of environmentalism's higher profile in contemporary politics, compared to that of labor. In investigating the local effects of globalization and global economics, *Combating Mountaintop Removal* tracks the profound reimagining of social and personal ideas such as identity, history, and landscape and considers their roles in organizing an agenda for progressive community activism.

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