

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PLACE AS COMMON AND UN-COMMON WEALTH:
A RELATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF
THE CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPES OF PLACE
AMIDST THE SHIFTING AND MARGINALIZED
GROUNDS OF LETCHER COUNTY, KENTUCKY AND
SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON, D.C.

Kirsten Lee Crase, Doctor of Philosophy, 2014

Directed By: Professor John L. Caughey, Emeritus
Department of American Studies

This dissertation presents a relational ethnographic analysis of how people in two marginalized places that are undergoing significant disruptive change understand the idea of place. The rural eastern Kentucky coalfields community of Letcher County and the urban neighborhood of Southeast Washington, D.C. share in having been structurally and discursively marginalized, both historically and in the present; they also share in having residents who are disadvantaged through the interplay of race, class, geography, and other factors. Both places currently face significant shifts in their social, economic, and structural landscapes. The disruptive shift facing Letcher County is the intensification of mountaintop removal coal mining methods that threaten ecological well-being and inflame longstanding local tensions over livelihood, identity, and the future of the community. The disruptive shift facing Southeast D.C. is increasing levels of redevelopment, as associated with the beginnings of gentrification in the community, and

the heightening of longstanding tendencies toward displacement among the community's most marginalized residents. This study uses interviewing and participant observation to bring the flexibility of ethnography to bear on the complexities and subtleties of how people understand place. The focus of my study is a series of in-depth interviews with four key research participant residents in each community, interpreting their articulations in terms of the relationship between place, marginalization, and change. This study also makes use of a relational approach, juxtaposing and interlacing explorations of both places.

There are many differences in the disruptive changes facing these places and in their general characteristics as communities—Letcher County is a rural, overwhelmingly white community and Southeast D.C. is an urban, overwhelmingly African American community. I argue, however, that broad and foundational resemblances exist between how residents of the two communities think and feel about place in relation to marginalization and change. I conclude that my research participants in Letcher County and Southeast D.C. share broadly similar understandings of what constitutes local well-being, or common wealth, and I demonstrate those parallels by elucidating my participants' conceptual landscapes of place.

PLACE AS COMMON AND UN-COMMON WEALTH: A RELATIONAL
ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPES OF
PLACE AMIDST THE SHIFTING GROUNDS OF LETCHER COUNTY,
KENTUCKY AND SOUTHEAST WASHINGTON, D.C.

By

Kirsten Lee Crase

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2014

Advisory Committee:

Professor John L. Caughey, Chair
Professor Martha Geores
Professor Donald Linebaugh
Professor Angel David Nieves
Professor Mary Corbin Sies

© Copyright by
Kirsten Lee Crase
2014

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of James J. Farrell, St. Olaf College professor of history, American studies, and environmental studies. Professor Farrell first introduced me to the beauty and flexibility of studying culture, and to the joy of exploring the human experience with an open and quizzical mind. He taught me that what we do matters, and that who we touch matters even more. I had dreamed of sharing this moment of completing my Ph.D. with him, but instead, I offer this dedication to his memory and the profound imprint he left on me.

Acknowledgements

There are many, many people without whose encouragement, support, and steadfast belief in me I would not have made it through the dissertation process. There are also a number of people whose willingness to talk with me, give of their time to me, and provide assistance quite literally made this dissertation project possible.

First and foremost, I owe a debt of gratitude to the eight people in Letcher County, Kentucky and Southeast Washington, D.C. who agreed to participate in interviews with me, multiple times, giving not only of their time but also of their profound insights into the workings of everyday life in these two communities. Without each of you this dissertation project would not be what it is, and I cannot thank you enough for having the trust and generosity to share with me as you did. I count all of you not just as research participants but as friends, and I hope what I have written of you here does justice to your own thinking and experiences.

I am also grateful to the fifteen other residents of Letcher County (and Harlan County), Kentucky and Southeast D.C. who also participated in interviews with me, and whose perspectives also contributed to the shaping of this project, even as they are not featured here as key research participants.

My advisor and dissertation chair, Professor John Caughey, provided me with patient, steady, and thoughtful guidance throughout my years of work in the Ph.D. program and on this dissertation. John was always a voice of calm, reason, and patient encouragement amidst the sometimes uncertain process of navigating the waters of academic life and the dissertation process. He was also an indefatigable cheerleader for me, always striking just the right tone in figuring out how best to help me move forward

with my work. I cannot thank him enough for being with me for this whole process and for guiding and encouraging as he did.

I am also deeply indebted to my other committee members. Professor Don Linebaugh not only served as an essential committee member, providing important feedback on early draft material, but he also welcomed me professionally into the Historic Preservation program as an adjunct faculty member during my final years as a Ph.D. student. This provided me not only with a source of funding during this time, but with a most inviting and engaging campus community to be part of. His constant support and cheerful encouragement of me and my work—both in teaching and in scholarship—has been truly invaluable. Professor Mary Corbin Sies introduced me to many of the key concepts relating to place and landscape that are at the heart of this dissertation, and shaped my perspectives and my approach to scholarship in more ways than I can count. Her depth and breadth of engagement with her scholarship and her dedication to her work are truly remarkable, and she has provided invaluable feedback and support throughout my time in the Ph.D. program. Professors Angel David Nieves and Martha Geores have also served as steadfast and supportive committee members, and have influenced my thinking in regard to the shape of my scholarly work in very important ways.

Within the American studies department, I am eternally grateful to Betsy Yuen for her ever-calm and ever-reassuring presence as I neared the stressful final days of the dissertation process, as well as for her tremendous help in securing all the essential logistical details of this process. And in my earlier years as a Ph.D. student, Valerie Brown and Claudia Rector also provided important support. In the Historic Preservation program, Christine Henry was a most wonderful and supportive friend and colleague, and

Ruth Davis-Rogers provided warm assistance in all areas of my work in the program. My former colleagues from the International Student and Scholar Services Office where I worked as a graduate assistant during my first years as a Ph.D. student also provided me with ongoing support and encouragement, most notably Jody Heckman-Bose; Jody's tremendous thoughtfulness and generosity in feeding me and welcoming me to her home for Thanksgiving during my final days of writing helped me make it through those days.

Several people also provided me with much-needed and much-appreciated last-minute assistance as I assembled visual materials for my dissertation. Elizabeth Sanders and Tarence Ray arranged for and shot photographs for me of Summit City, in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Caroline Rubens took photos for me of a Letcher County, Kentucky car adorned with a "Friends of Coal" sticker. And lastly, Lucy Moore formatted and edited several of the maps included here. And in 2009, when I was planning my summer research visit to eastern Kentucky, R.C. Day, Carroll Smith, and Elizabeth Barret were instrumental in helping me find temporary housing.

The friends who have stood by my side and cheered me on as I worked through various stages of the Ph.D. process and neared the finish line are many and most cherished. The loving support and dear friendship of Amelia Wong, Anna Bedford, and Asim Ali was critical to me as I made my way through this process; your friendship, your shared commiseration of the Ph.D. process, and your positive presences made everything more enjoyable and more bearable. Other invaluable and much-treasured day-to-day presences in my life these last few years include Justin Maher, Insiya Jiwanji, Ty Bream, Rob Chester, Jess Harris, Laurie Stenberg, Maritza Gonzalez, Christine Muller, Erika Thompson, Tee Leathers, Christine Henry, Christopher Perez, Claudia Rector, Shanna

Smith, Yi-Jiun Lin, and Michelle Herrera Meadows. The long-distance support and friendship of the following people, and others, has also been invaluable: Megan Davis-DeGeus, Christine Chitambar and Seth Baker, Beck and Teresa Krefting, Brooke Murphy Furimsky, Dan Libbey, Steve and Meg Tvrdik, Susan Langley, Aska Tekawa, Kenny Hyman, Wendy Thompson Taiwo, Lisa Gill, Robb Hernandez, Rebecca Iserman, Priya Kothari, Jason Ho, Robert Salyer, Megan Kobzej, Joy Misra, Chris Strasburg, Michelle Ruse, Bob and Linda Christianson, Lou and Ed Shytle, Meg Griffin, Lou Blanchfield, Neil Van Slyke, Bette Coulson, and others I am undoubtedly forgetting momentarily as I write this.

There are those with whom I wish I could share the moment of completing my Ph.D., but who have sadly passed away in recent years. Two dear professors and mentors from St. Olaf College, where I completed my bachelor's degree in American studies and history, succumbed to cancer in the last few years: Rick Fairbanks, Professor of philosophy, and Jim Farrell, Professor of history, American studies, and environmental studies, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. My very dear uncle Paul Weiler also passed away this past year, breaking my heart and my family's heart, but inspiring us to the end with his neverending positivity and faith in life and love.

And lastly, I have massive hugs of gratitude for my family: my parents Ike Crase and Sedahlia Jasper Crase, my brother Brandon Crase, and my aunt Kathy Jasper Weiler. My mother in particular has been a thoughtful, steadfast, and most sensitive guide and confidant to me throughout the Ph.D. process, and all of them have reminded me with their love and commitment of why I so deeply cherish my family.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Figures	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Conceptualizing and Framing Key Concepts	2
<u>Common Wealth.....</u>	3
<u>Un-Common Wealth.....</u>	9
<u>Conceptual Landscapes of Place.....</u>	10
<u>Marginalization.....</u>	13
Letcher County, Kentucky, and Southeast Washington, D.C.: Background	15
<u>The Historical Marginalization of Eastern Kentucky.....</u>	19
<u>The Historical Marginalization of Southeast Washington, D.C.....</u>	32
<u>Demographic Information and Measures of Well-Being in Letcher County and Southeast D.C.....</u>	45
Theoretical Foundations.....	47
Methodology.....	55
<u>Ethnography.....</u>	55
<u>Cultural Landscape Studies and Historic Preservation.....</u>	68
Review of Relevant Literature on Place, Change, and Marginalization.....	70
Brief Overview of Remaining Chapters.....	76
Chapter 2: Marginalization, Identity, and Place in Letcher County and Southeast Washington, D.C.	78
Materialized Marginalization: Topography and Built Environment.....	78
<u>Topography.....</u>	79
<u>Built Environment.....</u>	84
Boundaries: Agents of Marginalization and Differentiation	89
Marginalization and Insider-Outsider Constructions	93
<u>Place-Based Marking.....</u>	93
<u>Ownership, Belonging, and Authenticity.....</u>	95
<u>Axes of Identity and Marginalization.....</u>	100
Affective Marginalization.....	122
Conclusions.....	129
Chapter 3: Narratives of History and the Environment: Preservationist Values as Place-Based Common Wealth	131
Streams of the Preservationist Ethic: Historical and Environmental.....	136
Historical Preservationist Ethic	137
<u>Positive, “Insurgent” Views of Historical Knowledge and Memory.....</u>	139
Environmental Preservationist Ethic	162
<u>The Language of Environmentalism</u>	164
<u>Streams of the Environmental Preservationist Ethic.....</u>	173
Conclusions.....	183
Chapter 4: Integrative and Participatory Values as Place-Based Common Wealth	186
Integrative Values	187

<u>Historically Oriented Integrative Values</u>	187
<u>Environmentally Oriented Integrative Values</u>	191
<u>Civically Oriented Integrative Values</u>	205
Participatory Values	211
<u>Introducing “Place-Talk”</u>	212
<u>Negative Place-Talk, Un-Common Wealth, and Common Poverty</u>	215
<u>Positive Place-Talk</u>	220
Conclusions	238
Chapter 5: Conclusion	240
Chapter Summaries	241
Relational Implications	245
Other Scholarly Implications	249
Works Cited	256

List of Figures

Figure 1	U.S. map showing Letcher County and Southeast D.C.	15
Figure 2	Mountaintop removal mining site located directly above a residential area in Letcher County. Photo by author.	16
Figure 3	Recently mined coal on a train headed out of Letcher County. Photo by author.	17
Figure 4	View of downtown Anacostia streetscape in Southeast Washington, D.C. Photo by author.	18
Figure 5	View of the construction beginning on St. Elizabeth's East, in the Congress Heights neighborhoods of Southeast Washington, D.C. Photo by author.	19
Figure 6	Map of Letcher County showing its topographical and political landscape. Courtesy of Letcher County Fiscal Court.	20
Figure 7	A car waits for a coal train to pass in rural Letcher County. Photo by author.	23
Figure 8	A coal truck heads south out of Letcher County toward Virginia. Photo by author.	24
Figure 9	Image of a "Friends of Coal" sticker on a Letcher County car. Photo courtesy of Caroline Rubens.	27
Figure 10	View of a massive mountaintop removal site in Wise County, Virginia, just across the state line from Letcher County. Photo by author.	28
Figure 11	Southeast D.C. in the foreground, separated from the federal center and the remainder of the city by the Anacostia River. Photo by author.	33
Figure 12	Two cartographic images of Washington, D.C. and the Ward 8/ Southeast D.C. neighborhood.	34
Figure 13	View of Suitland Parkway, the construction of which in the 1940s severed a number of African American neighborhoods in Southeast D.C. Photo by author.	37

Figure 14	View of the Washington Monument and federal center of Washington, D.C. from an apartment complex in Southeast D.C.'s Barry Farm neighborhood. Photo by author.	38
Figure 15	View from atop Pine Mountain, showing the hill and valley (holler) geography that characterizes Letcher County. Photo by author.	80
Figure 16	Suitland Parkway and the Buena Vista neighborhood of Southeast D.C., showcasing the area's verdant and hilly landscape. Photo by author.	82
Figure 17	An example of restored Victorian-era rowhouses in the Anacostia Historic District. Photo by author.	85
Figure 18	Barry Farm Community housing complex as it currently exists. Photo by author.	86
Figure 19	View of Summit City from the street, downtown Whitesburg. Photo courtesy of Tarence Ray.	228
Figure 20	View of Summit City from the inside. Photo courtesy of Tarence Ray.	229

Chapter 1: Introduction

Place is simultaneously one of the simplest and most complex concepts for describing one's location within the human experience. It is here and there and nowhere, it is now and before and after, it is solid and enduring yet fragile and evanescent, it is ascribed and chosen and happened upon. It is continuously producing and re-producing and un-producing itself, being produced and re-produced and un-produced, and producing and re-producing and un-producing those with whom it is identified. In short, divining exactly how place matters for different people and in different contexts is exceedingly difficult and almost impossible to pin down precisely, even in regard to oneself. But precisely because place matters in so many specific, diffuse, and enigmatic ways, it is worth exploring for the unique, broad-ranging, and often unrecognized role it plays in shaping how we understand ourselves in relation to the world around us.

The "we" and "us" mentioned above provide very little context, however, for understanding how specific individuals or groups of people located within particular constellations of identity groupings conceive of and make sense of place. In this dissertation, I identify two very precise and particular groupings of people, in Letcher County, Kentucky, and Southeast Washington, D.C., and ethnographically explore their understandings, experiences, and practices of place. The groupings of these people consist of their geographical location, the history of marginalization in that location, and the presence of structural changes currently unfolding in those locations. My goal is to make use of relational ethnographic analysis to explore what place means to people in

these two locations given their experiences with marginalization and change in the physical and cultural landscapes of these locations.

Within this broad focus I also address the following questions. What does it mean to examine two locations “relationally?” How does the experience of historical and contemporary marginalization affect experiences of and conceptualizations of place for these residents? How do these residents of these marginalized places understand and interpret the various shiftings currently occurring in their communities? What kinds of conceptual landscapes of place do these residents construct? What are the shared (and unshared) meanings of, and knowledges produced by, those conceptual landscapes? How does the notion of local common wealth relate to residents’ understandings and practices of place? And ultimately, how do place, marginalization, and change intersect with one another in these contexts?

Conceptualizing and Framing Key Concepts

In this section, I introduce the key concepts I will use in this dissertation. “Place” is the conceptual centerpiece of this dissertation, but as I suggest above, it is difficult to address the full complexity of this term without using other related concepts to circumnavigate its complexity and amorphousness. These circumnavigational terms include common wealth, un-common wealth, relationality, conceptual landscapes of place, marginalization, rapid physical and cultural change—identified in the title as “shifting[s], and identity and community, as well as the narratives surrounding common wealth that are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. As we shall see, these include narratives of historical and environmental preservation, integration, and participatory practice. I do not mean to suggest that any of these “circumnavigational”

terms are less complex than “place;” indeed, almost all of these terms are just as abstract as place, and are more arcane and even less likely to be used in day-to-day conversation. Significantly, with the occasional exception of identity and community, these are not terms that are organic to my research participants’ own meditations on place as expressed during our interviews. They are, rather, my own explanatory system—based on careful readings and analyses of my research participants’ meditations—for describing and interpreting the significance of their understandings of place within the larger context of marginalization and structural change. They are my interpretative language for making sense of how place matters to these people, for organizing the ways in which these participants spoke of, with, around, and beyond “place” in their conversations with me. Sense of place in terms of past and present experiences of marginalization and present experiences of rapid structural change is not a simple issue to ask people about; likewise, it is not a straightforward issue for people to address and explore and articulate, either to themselves or others. It is my hope, however, that when used in conjunction with “place,” these terms help to fashion a fuller, more robust, and more concrete portrait of precisely *how* place matters for the residents of these two places. And ultimately, I hope to employ these circumnavigational terms in the service not just of elucidating how place matters for my research participants, but also of suggesting why that “mattering” is significant in a broader sense.

Common Wealth

“Common wealth” is not a term that is organic either to my theorizing or to that of my research participants. Rather, it is drawn from the writings of farmer and social critic Wendell Berry, and in particular from an essay exploring the concepts of conservation

and community in the context of social change of various kinds. Upon reading this essay, I was especially struck by the following statement, and how precisely it identified the key question at the heart of this dissertation project. Berry exhorts his readers, “Always ask of any proposed change or innovation: what will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth?”¹ I had never before seen the term “common wealth” expressed as two separate words, and was intrigued by the adaptability generated through this artful rearrangement of the tangentially related and less flexible concept of “commonwealth.” I was also struck by the fact that “community” was a concept raised with considerable frequency by my research participants, and thus something that deserves some consideration of its own, even as I am not utilizing it as a central organizing principle. Of “community’s” many varied and often contradictory meanings, the one that was most useful here and most closely related to the manner in which most of my research participants utilize it is the sense in which it implies a kind of commonality—even communalism in some instances—and a kind of shared holding of values and assets, both tangible and intangible. Indeed, the “common”-ness suggested in discussions of commonality and communalism, and the “wealth” suggested by discussions of values and assets, hew almost perfectly to Berry’s conceptualization of “common wealth.” Berry’s essay is a short one, without lengthy explanation of his precise understanding of what he means to suggest by the phrase “common wealth.” Many of his writings, however, contain this artful vagueness, which I interpret as an invitation to others to make use of these terms in the ways that make sense to them in their particular contexts, and that is what I am doing here.

¹ Wendell Berry, “Conserving Communities,” in *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 19.

Taking a closer look now at Berry's quote, how is he framing the relationship between "community," "common wealth," and "change" or "innovation?" There is certainly a seemingly simple and obvious kind of cause-and-effect connection between "change" and the state of the object, place, or person that is experiencing the change. The Industrial Revolution, for instance, is an example of an extremely large-scale change and innovation that had profound effects on the people, places, and things—which we might refer to collectively as "communities"—that constituted Western society at that time. The overall state of everyday life in terms of its temporal, spatial, and social organization was dramatically affected by the Industrial Revolution, in ways that both furthered and detracted from the "common wealth" of pre-Industrial society.

This initially simple notion of cause and effect takes on added complexity, however, when we complicate the definitions of "community" and "common wealth," and when we recognize that even when narrowly defined, "community" and "common wealth" can be simultaneously life-affirming in some ways and for some people and places *and* life-negating in other ways and for other people and places. The developments spurred by the Industrial Revolution led to higher standards of living and longer lives for more affluent Westerners and helped sow the seeds of the eventual middle class; at the same time, however, these developments led to much more regimented, rigid, and dangerous working conditions for wage laborers and factory workers, and furthermore the pollution and deforestation caused by industrialization destroyed the livability of many communities, even while enabling the development of new communities, such as early suburbs, that were prized precisely for their "healthfulness" and livability. Indeed, the Industrial Revolution, like virtually all large-scale structural shifts, generated

“common poverty” as often as it generated “common wealth.” Historian Philip Deloria provides a useful meditation on the inherently multi-valenced nature of how change differentially affects different kinds of people and groups:

Progressive narratives of “change” rest upon the assumption that what is destroyed is a less desired state, which is replaced by something more desirable. ... Yet, to assert that all people ought to experience such transformations as progressive, positive ‘change’ rather than destruction requires a certain arrogance and power. One person’s positive change is quite legitimately the occasion for another person’s trauma, grief, and wonder.²

All of this is simply to say that these terms, community in particular, can be notoriously slippery when they are left unmoored from any situating attributes of scale or context. I’ve chosen to introduce this particular quote of Berry’s, with its emphasis on “community” and “common wealth,” because these terms—in spite of the endless variations on how they are understood—serve as a basic element of many people’s perspectives on place and of how sense of place operates in their life and experiences. The root of the word “community” is “common,” and “common” is the operative word in the phrase “common wealth” as well. Indeed, there is an ethic of preservation and stewardship (the subject of chapter three)—an ethic of connection and interdependence, of shared wealth, and of the need to care for that wealth collectively that variously undergirds the discussions of place shared with me by my research participants. Environmental justice studies scholar Giovanna di Chiro provides an example of this integrative and holistic kind of understanding of “community,” suggesting that “the place—geographic, cultural, and emotional—where humans and environment converge is

² Philip J. Deloria, “Places Like Houses, Banks, and Continents: An Appreciative Reply to the Presidential Address,” *American Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2006): 26.

embodied in the ideas and practices of ‘community.’”³ Significantly, di Chiro’s definition also blends concepts of nature and culture, which relates to my extended discussion in chapter three of narratives of historical preservation and environmental preservation.

The interpretation of community that I attempt to suggest as most useful for the approach I am taking in this dissertation is drawn from geographer Linda McDowell:

I use it here ... to refer to a fluid network of social relations that may be but are not necessarily tied to territory. Thus a community is a relational rather than a categorical concept, defined both by material social relations and by symbolic meanings. Communities are context dependent, contingent, and defined by power relations; their boundaries are created by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Although these mechanisms may change and so boundaries alter over time, communities are necessarily bounded entities. Whatever the criteria or characteristics of exclusion, certain groups or individuals are inevitably left outside.⁴

With careful precision and with an emphasis on the inherently multifaceted nature of a concept such as this, she argues that “community” as a concept is too often judged by the inflection of particular expressions of community—whether inclusive or exclusive—and that “it remains a useful term as long as its construction through unequal power relations is remembered.”⁵ Indeed, unequal power relations are an inherent component of any notion of “community,” because the term does imply an already given division between those within the community and those without it. It is, in this sense, a concept inherently grounded in relationships and relationality, as she notes above, and the process of its formation and re-formation as a bounded entity is what is of most importance to those

³ Giovanna di Chiro, “Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 318.

⁴ Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 101; Anthropologist Brett Williams also offers a useful set of meditations on the potential benefits and risks of employing the term “community” in the following piece: Brett Williams, “The Concept of Community,” *Reviews in Anthropology* 31 (2002): 339-350.

employing it analytically. This emphasis on relationality and power relations is also significant in the specific context of this research, which explores marginalized geographies that have, by definition, been defined and defined themselves in terms of how they differ from those outside. “The term ‘community,’” McDowell concludes, “should neither be rejected out of hand, nor automatically seen as either a good or a bad thing, but the complexity of its construction and its purpose should be the subject for analysis.”⁶

In addition to these theoretical and etymological underpinnings for my use of the always rather slippery concept of “community,” however, there is a more logistical one as well. I use the term “community” partly because it is a term that was frequently invoked by my research participants—both casually and in more pointed ways—and also because, in the absence of more nuanced yet still colloquial vocabulary for speaking about landscapes and environments in small-scale terms, it becomes a term of convenience, perhaps even a form of shorthand for referring to each of the locales explored in this research. I am acutely aware that using the term “community” at all is always risky, and using it repeatedly as I do in this dissertation may be considered even more problematic, yet I choose to carry along with the term all of its unwieldy baggage and “fogginess,”⁷ simply because it does carry a kind of general locational resonance for my participants in talking about their geographies of home, and because it conveys the kind of small-scaledness that characterizes both of the locales studied here. Following from this scale-based application, McDowell contends that “by community I mean places

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Museum studies scholar Amelia Wong uses the phrase “the fog of community” to capture the inherent challenges of working with discourses of community in her Ph.D. dissertation: “Museums, Social Media, and the Fog of Community” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2011).

at an intermediate scale: a locality or residential area within a city, for example, or rural and single-industry villages.”⁸

Un-Common Wealth

“*Un*-common wealth” is a term that I have fashioned from Berry’s “common wealth” to refer to those instances when the “wealth” in question is not shared in common or with any sort of communal intention, but is instead privatized, restricted, or otherwise based on exclusionary access or even exploitation. To refer again to the example of the Industrial Revolution as a major societal cataclysm, un-common wealth can be seen in the wealth that accrued to very small numbers of factory owners, merchants, and other industrialists, in contradistinction to the extremely limited wealth that accrued to the workers whose physical labor formed the backbone of the Industrial Revolution’s manufacturing explosion. The wealth that accrued to the industrial barons—both in tangible and intangible forms—existed as un-common wealth precisely because it was of necessity accessible only to a very small number of privileged people; it was by definition exclusive and exclusionary, and in fact depended for its existence on the labor of the very people who would be excluded from the wealth accruing from their labor. In this sense, then, the wealth of the industrialists is un-common wealth, and the exploitation of the general populace of laborers is common poverty. In the context of this research, there are myriad examples of un-common wealth and common poverty being generated, most obviously in regard to the nature of the changes taking place in the two communities. In focusing on the individual perspectives of a cross-section of residents, however, I am choosing to explore in greater depth the actual (or more closely

⁸ McDowell, 97.

approaching actual) common wealth being stewarded and nurtured by the people interviewed here. I will indeed address the structural un-common wealth and common poverty that shape the many factors of marginalization affecting these places, and I will also address some of the individual expressions of un-common wealth and common poverty voiced by my research participants; indeed, there are a number of understandings of place voiced that are more explicitly individualized, and not grounded in a notion of interdependence or connection. Nevertheless, because the core of what I learned from these participants centered around interdependence and connection and was quite clearly “common wealth,” or much closer to that pole of the spectrum than to the “un-common wealth” pole, common wealth will be my primary focus.

Conceptual Landscapes of Place

“Conceptual landscapes of place” is a somewhat blended term that I have fashioned to suggest the ways in which the research participants in this project navigate between understandings of how their community, or place, currently exists, notions of how it may have existed in the past, and visions of how it might come to exist in the future. Conceptual landscapes are generally described as the conceptual or discursive visions that exist in an interacting and overlapping relationship with the so-called “actual” material existence of the landscape, acting on and with the material landscape in a continuously recursive manner. Cultural geographer Richard H. Schein has written very compellingly about the role of landscape in mediating between discourse (the conceptual “version” of the landscape) and materiality (the physical “version” of the landscape). Schein describes discourse and materiality as mutually constitutive, and defines the lived cultural landscape itself as “discourse materialized,” thus collapsing the space that is

generally presumed to exist between the discursive, or conceptual landscapes, and the material landscape. His understanding of the lived cultural landscape is as being at once fully conceptual and fully material, as “an articulated moment in networks that stretch across space” and that also shift continuously across time.⁹ Similarly, historical archaeologist Anne Yentsch speaks of historical landscapes as consisting of both “the world-as-lived” and “the world-as-thought.” She explains her views on the importance of recognizing the simultaneous discursive and conceptual realities of landscapes as follows. While she writes from the specific context of historic houses and the historic built environment, this argument for seeing “the world-as-lived” and “the world-as-thought” as equally real and as mutually constitutive applies just as well to contemporary landscapes.

Until historical archaeologists confront the fact that historical experience consists of both the world-as-lived and the world-as-thought and find a means to analyze this dialectical process as it affects objects, they will remain imprisoned by the limitations of their data. In the physical layouts of old houses, we can see the world-as-lived only in fragmentary form; we can begin to see the world-as-thought when we conceptualize house plans as incorporating both real space and imaginary space expressing social order.¹⁰

In giving primacy to the term “conceptual landscape,” my intention is not to privilege the “discursive” reality of the landscape over the material reality, or in Yentsch’s terms to privilege “the world-as-thought” over “the world-as-lived.” Rather, it is to emphasize the agency of the people who “live” the landscape in question and bring it daily to life in its ever-shifting existence. It is the “conceptual landscapes” of those

⁹ Richard H. Schein, “The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, no. 4 (1997): 662-663. See also the following works by Schein: Schein, “A Methodological Framework for Interpreting Ordinary Landscapes: Lexington, Kentucky’s Courthouse Square,” *The Geographical Review* 99, no. 3 (2009): 377-402; Schein, “Normative Dimensions of Landscape,” in *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, eds. Chris Wilson and Paul Groth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Anne Yentsch, “Legends, Houses, Families, and Myths: Relationships between Material Culture and American Ideology,” in *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, ed. Mary C. Beaudry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 17.

people who inhabit and quite literally build and re-build their lived landscapes that I explore in this dissertation. More specifically, it is their “conceptual landscapes of place” that help give life to the visions and realities of place and of common wealth that the residents of these places articulate. And so it is in this vein that I utilize the phrase “conceptual landscapes of place” to represent the (necessarily limited) agency of these residents of marginalized places to participate in enacting their sense of place and their vision of common wealth into the “discourse materialized”—the everyday lived reality—of their community.

Significantly, it is also for the reasons stated above that I choose to use the term “*conceptual* landscapes of place” rather than “*cultural* landscapes of place.” While the enactment of visions of common wealth into materialized discourse and into everyday lived realities is undoubtedly a function of *cultural* landscapes of place, and it is most obviously a *cultural* process just as much as it is a conceptual one, the term “cultural” takes on a somewhat more broad-ranging inflection when used in conjunction with “landscape” than the work I am doing in this project. I focus here in greater depth on the ideas and thoughts of the people in the landscapes in question than on the larger interaction between those thoughts and ideas (and subsequent practices) and the physical and material structures of the landscape. To explain this in the language of cultural landscape studies scholar Jeremy Korr’s model for cultural landscape study, I devote greater attention to the “human” agents of what he defines as the three-way dynamic within a cultural landscape between humans, artifacts, and nature. Korr explains his model as follows:

Cultural landscape study takes the two agents from material culture—humans and artifacts—and adds a third agent, nature, thus creating a three-way relationship.

Merging the anthropocentric “culture” with the nature-bound “landscape,” and invoking material culture’s emphasis on the dynamic relationships between humans and artifacts, creates the interdisciplinary cultural landscape.¹¹

My approach here is slanted somewhat in the direction of the “anthropocentric” that Korr mentions above, and in fact corresponds almost perfectly to the fourth operation of his study model, focused on “the concept of cognitive landscapes, or landscapes of the mind.” Korr describes this fourth operation as “attempt[ing] to understand the perceptions of the landscape and its components by the different people who altered it or did not alter it.”¹² I choose ultimately to utilize the phrase “*conceptual* landscapes of place” over Korr’s “*cognitive* landscapes,” simply because I see the term “conceptual” as suggesting a broader embrace of the full range of cognitive and affective processes that make up “the world as thought.”¹³

Marginalization

In chapter two I explore in detail the process by which the concepts of marginalization and identity—as expressed in the discourse of the residents represented in this dissertation—help shape conceptual landscapes of place. While marginalization is not a term that most of the participants themselves use, it is most definitely implied and threaded through their reflections on living in communities that are impoverished, structurally disadvantaged, and riddled with negative stereotypes. As a grounding for my exploration of these discourses in chapter two, I define marginalization as an iterative process between geography and the identity-based prisms of race, class, and “status”—which I am employing as a descriptor for those categories of identity defined by my

¹¹ Jeremy Korr, “A Proposed Model for Cultural Landscape Study” *Material Culture* 29 (1997): 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ Yentsch, 17.

research participants as existing outside the general orbit of “race” and “class,” as they understand those concepts. In my formulation of marginalization, geography plays a key role. This is namely because geography also plays an important role in understandings of place and place-based identity, and because the particular geographical parameters and popular conceptions of the two places explored here contribute significantly to their history of marginalization, neglect, and exploitation. I draw inspiration in my definition of marginalization from geographer Clyde Woods’ notion of how marginalized people and places co-produce each other within the context of our exploitative neoliberal economic system. Significantly, it is this exploitative neoliberal economic system that undergirds the extractive ethic of both mountaintop removal coal mining and redevelopment and gentrification, and that contributes to both Letcher County and Southeast D.C.’s ongoing marginalization. Woods discusses marginalization and its socio-spatial qualities as follows:

The social-spatial dynamic in blues geography enables us to understand how marginalized people in marginalized places, such as African Americans in the Mississippi Delta, the South Bronx, South Central Los Angeles, or New Orleans, are central to an understanding of the origins and evolution of neo-liberalism despite their exclusion from the critical literature on this very subject.¹⁴

Through exploring the relationship between geography and the prisms of race, class, and “status,” I delve into some of the expressions of marginalized identity that characterize my research participants’ understandings of place-based identity in both locations. This includes the ways in which geographical marginality and the marginality imposed by race, class, and “status” interact to create a unique formulation of marginalized identity. It also includes the ways in which belonging, ownership, and

¹⁴ Clyde Woods, “‘Sittin’ on Top of the World’: The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, eds. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007), 59-60.

notions of insider-ness and outsider-ness are negotiated in marginalized contexts such as these.

Letcher County, Kentucky, and Southeast Washington, D.C.: Background

The two locations explored relationally in this dissertation project are the coalfields communities of Letcher County, Kentucky and the redeveloping neighborhoods of Southeast Washington, D.C. See Figure 1 below for a map of the United States showing both of these locations.



Figure 1: United States map highlighting Letcher County, Kentucky and Southeast Washington, D.C. These are both places whose landscapes are shifting—physically, culturally, and discursively—and whose continued existence as livable communities is being threatened. The change, or shift in the landscape, affecting life in Letcher County is the intensification in recent years of mountaintop removal mining, an extremely destructive form of coal mining, and the attendant physical and social dislocations it has brought

with it. See Figure 2 below for a view of a mountaintop removal mining site located directly above a residential area in Letcher County, and Figure 3 for a view of recently-mined coal on a train headed out of Letcher County.



Figure 2: Mountaintop removal mining site located directly above a residential area in Letcher County.
Photo by author.



Figure 3: Recently mined coal on a train headed out of Letcher County. Photo by author.

The change, or shift in the landscape, affecting life in Southeast Washington, D.C. is the advent of processes of redevelopment and gentrification and the increase in displacement among the most impoverished residents of this predominantly low-income and African American community.¹⁵ See Figure 4 below for a view of downtown Anacostia, the area of Southeast Washington D.C. that is currently experiencing the most widespread redevelopment, and Figure 5 for a view of the construction beginning on St. Elizabeth's East, a mixed-used community planned for the District-owned portion of the grounds of

¹⁵ It should be noted that displacement is not a new phenomenon in Southeast D.C., with the restructuring processes associated with the HOPE VI Program and New Communities Initiative having displaced numerous public housing residents in recent years. It is also not a new phenomenon among the African American community of Washington, D.C. as a whole—indeed, many older residents of Southeast D.C. were displaced from their homes in Southwest D.C. and Georgetown as part of mid-twentieth-century urban renewal projects.

the former St. Elizabeth's Hospital complex, located in the Congress Heights neighborhood.¹⁶



Figure 4: View of downtown Anacostia streetscape in Southeast Washington, D.C. Photo by author.

¹⁶ The other portion (west campus) of the former St. Elizabeth's Hospital complex is owned by the federal government and is being developed as the new headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security. See the section below on the historical marginalization of Southeast Washington, D.C. for greater detail on both the federal- and District-owned portions of the former complex.



Figure 5: View of the construction beginning on St. Elizabeth's East, in the Congress Heights neighborhood of Southeast Washington, D.C. Photo by author.

In the sections below, I outline the histories of marginalization in these communities, along with the more recently occurring shifts.

The Historical Marginalization of Eastern Kentucky

Letcher County is located on the eastern edge of the state of Kentucky, as shown in the map of the United States in Figure 1 above, and in the heart of the central Appalachian mountain range. See Figure 6 below for a map of the topography and major communities of Letcher County.

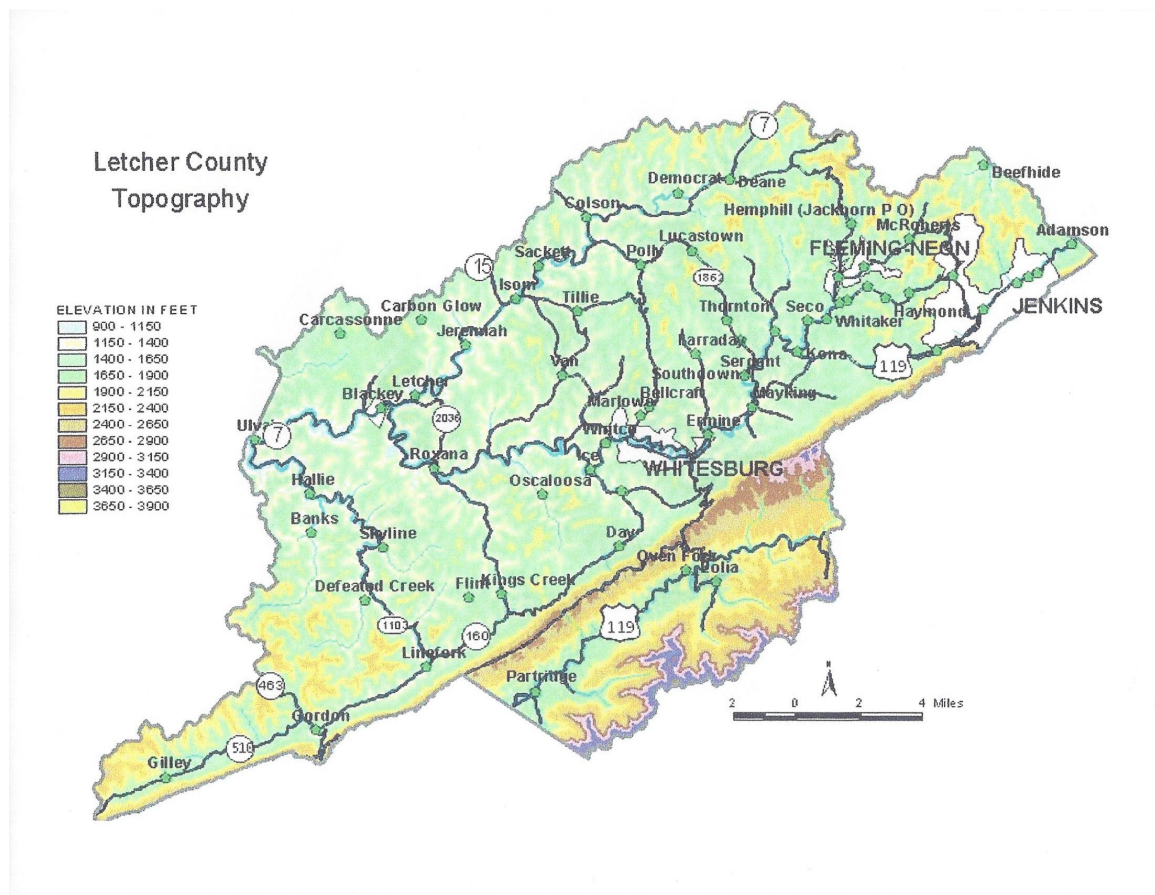


Figure 6: Map of Letcher County showing its topographical and political landscape. Courtesy of Letcher County Fiscal Court.

Native Americans who lived for millennia in the mountains of eastern Kentucky generally used the area that is now Letcher County as seasonal hunting grounds.¹⁷ The European Americans who arrived in the area beginning in the late eighteenth century, along with smaller numbers of African Americans, primarily practiced small-scale subsistence agriculture.¹⁸

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, eastern Kentucky and other areas of the Appalachian mountain region were in general much less developed than most

¹⁷ R. Barry Lewis, "Mississippian Farmers," in *Kentucky Archaeology*, ed. R. Barry Lewis (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 150-151.

¹⁸ Chad Montrie, *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

other areas of the eastern United States. This was due to their later settlement, the unsystematic process of establishing local governments in these areas, and the remote, mountainous, and difficult-to-navigate topography. Nevertheless, families and communities managed to support themselves and create important social structures in these early years; in 1880, the region contained the greatest concentration of noncommercial family farms found anywhere in the nation.¹⁹ When the wave of industrialization sweeping the nation began to reach eastern Kentucky in the late nineteenth century, however, it dramatically unsettled these longstanding traditions of agriculture and self-reliance. Speculators and industrial barons from railroad and other large landholding companies descended on the region in these years, hoping to develop extractive industries in timber and coal. Soon after, coal in Letcher County and eastern Kentucky in general began to be extracted in large amounts, and over the next few decades coal mining became a mainstay of local life, as evidenced by the development of numerous Letcher County coal company towns.

While the coal industry and the industrial jobs it provided was in some ways a welcome development in eastern Kentucky, it also established a pernicious trend of using legal loopholes to extract land and property rights from residents, generally without their knowledge that they were giving up these rights. The broad form deed was the instrument of most of these transfers of land rights from local residents to coal and railroad companies. The beauty of this instrument for industry was that it left to residents the surface use, and tax liability, of their property, while transferring to land agents “all of the

¹⁹ Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 16. For more on life in pre-coal-industry-Appalachia, see Montrie, *To Save the Land and People*, and John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

mineral wealth and the right to remove it by whatever means necessary.”²⁰ Therefore, many of the farmers who signed away the mineral rights to their property in these early years had no understanding that decades or even generations later, those same companies could return and evict them from their property in order to access the “mineral rights” below it. This was indeed what happened to many families in Letcher County. The late Charlie Whitaker, a retired teacher and lifelong resident of Letcher County, explained the long shadow cast by this earlier era of property transfers as follows:

The thing that hurt us the worst, though, was our ancestors sold off the mineral rights, to big companies, and with absolutely no restrictions. If there was something under your house they wanted, they could come in and take it. ...They’d sell it for, say, like fifty cents an acre.²¹

These late-nineteenth-century land transfers greased the legal and economic engine of the mid-twentieth-century explosion of strip, or surface, mining.²² That explosion in surface mining has continued to the present day, and now includes the technique that is of most interest for this project, that of mountaintop removal mining.

In spite of the fact, then, that the mining of coal in Appalachia was a relatively recent development associated with the industrialization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is commonplace among both residents and observers of Appalachia to claim both the mineral itself and the mining of it as a time-honored and almost hallowed component of their local and regional identity. According to Melissa,²³ one of the research participants featured in this dissertation, “we completely set our lives around a black rock. That’s what we live for here, and we love it and hate it at the same time.”

²⁰ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 55.

²¹ Charlie Whitaker, interview by author, digital recording. Blackey, Ky., 22 July 2009. Sadly, Charlie died just three months after my interview with him and his wife, Joyce.

²² Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

²³ Pseudonyms have been used for each of my eight key research participants.

Indeed, in today's Appalachia, coal is virtually equivalent to the mountains themselves in materially framing and shaping life in the region. See Figures 7 and 8 below for images of the omnipresent sight of coal transport out of the county.



Figure 7: A car waits for a coal train to pass in rural Letcher County. Photo by author.



Figure 8: A coal truck heads south out of Letcher County toward Virginia. Photo by author.

The omnipresence of coal and the coal industry in Appalachia is evidenced by the fact that the region is commonly referred to both in geographical terms—the Appalachian mountain region—and in terms of mineral extraction—the Appalachian coalfields. And furthermore, just as the length of the coal industry’s involvement in local history is easily mythologized, exaggerated, and shrouded in nostalgia, so, too, are residents’ memories of the industry’s role in their community’s history. Residents today who lament the loss of jobs in the coal industry, the ravaging environmental effects of mountaintop removal practices, and other ills associated with the industry’s contemporary existence often speak nostalgically of an earlier era in which jobs were plentiful, environmental damage was minimal, and most people wholeheartedly supported the coal industry. Less frequently mentioned, however, are the negative historical aspects of the coal industry’s presence: the fractious and sometimes bloody battles between miners, company owners, and union

officials; the absolute control maintained by company bureaucrats over everyday life in coal company towns; the financial and emotional stress of the constant boom and bust cycle of the coal industry; or the very real losses of long-time family property and environmental damages wrought by early strip mining practices.

This historical discourse alone—both in its positive and negative interpretations—would make for an intense backdrop to everyday life in Letcher County, but its potency has been compounded by the evolution of the coal industry over the last twenty-five years, aggravating most of the problems historically associated with life in mining communities. The contemporary discourse of coal is even more complex and volatile than the historical discourse, precisely because it incorporates that older discourse in its totality, yet also inflects it with a newer discourse centered around mountaintop removal techniques, and around the increasing resonance of such issues as globalization and transnationalism, environmental health and well-being, and the ever-increasing reach of corporate power.

The combination of the profound material and discursive impacts of the newer mining techniques with the above issues and conditions has led to a situation in which many residents' sense of local agency, control, and self-efficacy is very low, while correspondingly the sense of being threatened, ignored, and violated is very high. There is a palpable sense of frustration, powerlessness, uncertainty, and unrest expressed in the words of many Letcher County residents when they speak of the current state of their community and their sense of what its future holds. That sense of vulnerability is conditioned by historical experiences with the coal industry and with persistent poverty, as well as a growing awareness of the ever-increasing dependence of the community and

region as a whole on an enormously powerful energy industry. The sense of frustration and instability, furthermore, is conditioned by the cognitive dissonance that occurs when an entity (the coal industry) that is ostensibly keeping individual residents and the community as a whole afloat also threatens their most basic possessions, both tangible and intangible—homes, historic landscapes, ecological resources, and ultimately safety, health, and well-being. This is the reality of the contemporary coal industry in eastern Kentucky—an industry that uses mountaintop removal mining to shatter the very ground on which residents live while simultaneously and continuously assuring residents that this is the only way for them to even begin to prosper as a community.²⁴ See Figure 9 below for an image of a “Friends of Coal” sticker on a Letcher County car—evidence of the increasingly bitter, and conflicted, war of words over the place of coal mining in the communities of eastern Kentucky and other areas of the coalfields region.²⁵

²⁴ Sociologist John Gaventa provides a provocative exploration of how large industries in Appalachia have worked systematically to cultivate dependence among local residents: *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). See also Dwight B. Billings, “Supporting ‘Conscious Hearts’ and Oppositional Knowledge in the Struggle Against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 14, no. 1/2 (2008): 20-27; and Stephen J. Scanlan, “The Theoretical Roots and Sociology of Environmental Justice in Appalachia,” in *Mountains of Injustice: Social and Environmental Justice in Appalachia*, eds. Michele Morrone and Geoffrey L. Buckley (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).

²⁵ See <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/links.html> for information on some of the corporate sponsors of the “Friends of Coal” campaign. Accessed January 19, 2014.



Figure 9: Image of a "Friends of Coal" sticker on a Letcher County car. Photo courtesy of Caroline Rubens.

What precisely does mountaintop removal—this newer method of mining that has contributed to and aggravated feelings of instability and threat—entail? It is often referred to colloquially as “strip mining on steroids,” and indeed a brief background on conventional surface mining will help to elucidate its more extreme cousin. Conventional surface, or strip, mining has been practiced systematically in the Appalachian coalfields for many decades. Surface mining can be distinguished from the better known method of underground, or deep, mining, in that it involves accessing coal seams by cutting into and removing portions of the surface level rather than tunneling deep into the earth. The

colloquial term for surface mining, which is simply “stripping,” also suggests the physical reality of this kind of mining; it involves literally “stripping” or “skinning” the surface of the earth to reach coal deposits located close to the surface. The physical reality of “strip” mining also involves far greater damage to landscapes and the built environment, obviously, and to the health of the surrounding environment. This includes human environments that may be dependent, for example, on water sources polluted through the disposal of surface mine waste into local waterways, or that may be located in the path of mudslides and floods generated by mining-induced erosion. See Figure 10 below for a view of a massive mountaintop removal just across the state line in Wise County, Virginia.



Figure 10: View of a massive mountaintop removal site in Wise County, Virginia, just across the state line from Letcher County. Photo by author.

In addition to these geological and environmental disruptions, the growth of surface mining also exacerbated chronic problems of unemployment and poverty. Surface mining is less expensive and more profitable precisely because it employs fewer workers than underground mining in the coal extraction process. It is much more dependent on machinery and mechanization than underground mining, and less dependent on the labor and skill of workers. This translates to fewer mining employment opportunities in areas where surface mining dominates.

In light of the growing awareness of the damage—ecological, economic, and cultural—wrought by surface mining, a number of residents began to speak out against the practice in the 1960s and 1970s. This initiation of an activist environmental movement also happened to coincide, during the flux of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with a heightened awareness of regional identity and distinctiveness, and with civil rights movements taking place throughout the nation. A number of Appalachian folk heroes and artists emerged from this anti-strip mining movement, many of them laying claim as they protested strip mining not only to a rich legacy of Appalachian art and craft but also to a newer legacy of resistance and stubbornness—finding its roots in the union activism associated with underground mining in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.²⁶

In spite of these efforts, however, the practice of strip mining did not abate in the decades following the 1970s—indeed it became more and more prevalent. The more destructive and all-encompassing “mountaintop removal” form of surface mining was also introduced to eastern Kentucky in the 1970s. It attracted little attention until the late

²⁶ For a beautiful description of how folk singer and eastern Kentucky native Jean Ritchie was motivated by the sight of strip mining waste to write her well-known song “Black Waters,” see the following collection of oral histories: Silas House and Jason Howard, *Something’s Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 39.

1980s, however, when technological developments made it less expensive for coal companies to undertake. From this point on, it became a favored means of mining coal in eastern Kentucky.²⁷

The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines mountaintop removal, in rather benign terms, as “a surface mining practice involving the removal of mountaintops to expose coal seams, and disposing of the associated mining overburden in adjacent valleys.”²⁸ For another perspective on how mountaintop removal is understood, the activist organization Kentuckians for the Commonwealth defines the practice in much greater detail than the EPA, and also inflects it with a more ominous tone:

Multiple thin layers of low-sulfur coal underlie the mountains of southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky, and are occasionally found in southwestern Virginia and Tennessee. To extract this coal in the cheapest way possible, companies first raze the forests and scrap[sic] away the topsoil, usually saving neither for future use (although required to do so by law). Next they blast up to 800 feet off the tops of mountains with explosives up to 100 times as strong as the ones that tore open the Oklahoma City federal building. Giant machines then scoop out the layers of coal. In most cases, millions of tons of “overburden”—the former mountaintops—are pushed into the narrow adjacent valleys, thereby creating “valley fills” that permanently destroy the streams below.²⁹

As the above description of mountaintop removal suggests, it is a complex and highly damaging extractive process, much more so than conventional underground mining and even than older forms of surface mining. One mountaintop removal site can encompass thousands of acres and can take as long as a decade to fully mine, causing severe disruptions in the ecological health of the surrounding areas, as well as any homes

²⁷ Montrie, 17, 23.

²⁸ <http://www.epa.gov/region3/mtnstop/index.htm>, accessed November 30, 2013.

²⁹ <http://www.kftc.org/our-work/canary-project/campaigns/mtr/MTR-generalinfo>, accessed November 30, 2013.

or communities located nearby.³⁰ A number of steps are involved in the actual process of “removing” the mountaintop. First, the land is cleared of all trees and other vegetation, and then explosives are used to break up the rock and earth below the surface. The coal industry refers to this rock and earth that is dynamited from the tops of mountains as “spoil” or “overburden.” Once enough of this so-called overburdening spoil has been removed to reach coal seams, the coal itself is then extracted and cleaned.³¹ The “spoil” is then dumped into nearby valleys, with the result that nearly 2000 miles of headwater streams in the Appalachian region have now been buried.³² Furthermore, cleaning the coal produces a residue called slurry, which is usually impounded in “slurry ponds” or injected into abandoned underground mine shafts. Slurry ponds often leak, and they have occasionally broken free from their impoundment and flooded nearby communities and waterways. A slurry pond spill in 2000 just north of Letcher County released 306 million gallons of toxic waste into a nearby river, causing profound ecological damage in addition to damaging municipal water systems and causing extensive property damage.³³ Injecting slurry into abandoned mine shafts also carries the risk that the slurry will leak into nearby water sources.

Ultimately, the negative impacts of mountaintop removal on surrounding communities are manifold, and include severe scarring of the physical landscape;

³⁰ Government Accountability Office, Report to Congressional Requesters, *Surface Coal Mining: Characteristics of Mining in Mountainous Areas of Kentucky and West Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Accountability Office, 2009), accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1021.pdf>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Environmental Protection Agency, “EPA Issues Comprehensive Guidance to Protect Appalachian Communities from Harmful Environmental Impacts of Mountaintop Mining.” Washington, D.C.: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, April 1, 2010, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://tinyurl.com/3heqoz>. Also cited in David C. Holzman, “Mountaintop Removal Mining: Digging into Community Health Concerns,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, 11 (2011): A477.

³³ Robert Salyer, *Sludge*, 42 min., Appalshop Films, Whitesburg, Kentucky, 2005.

pollution of water sources; damage to plant and animal habitats; loss of mining jobs in already economically deprived communities; and damage to the built environment, cultural heritage, and livability of the area³⁴ In addition to these visible effects, there are also more intangible consequences that take place at the discursive level of place and identity, accentuating divisions between residents and often forcing them to make painful choices between livelihood and human relationships.³⁵

The Historical Marginalization of Southeast Washington, D.C.

The area known variously as Far Southeast D.C., East Washington, East of the River, River East, and simply Southeast D.C. is the Washington, D.C. community I will be exploring here. Establishing the precise boundaries of this community is a somewhat difficult and nebulous process, mainly because of the abundance of jurisdictional and geographical boundaries that crisscross the city of Washington, D.C. The city is divided into four directional quadrants, and this is obviously the source of the moniker “Southeast D.C.” The city is also divided on the basis of population into eight wards, each of which has one representative on the D.C. City Council. And lastly, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers serve as important boundaries, with the Potomac separating Washington, D.C. from the state of Virginia and the Anacostia acting as a boundary within the city, separating the area often referred to as “East of the River,” etc. from the rest of the city. See Figure 11 below for a view of Southeast D.C. in the foreground, separated from the federal center and remainder of the city by the Anacostia.

³⁴ Shirley Stewart Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004* (Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2007), 118-140.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-59.



Figure 11: Southeast D.C. in the foreground, separated from the federal center and the remainder of the city by the Anacostia River. Photo by author.

Each of these boundaries plays a role in defining the community I am considering here: that community is located fully within the southeast quadrant, it corresponds more or less to the recently redrawn boundary lines of Ward 8, and it is located on the east side of the Anacostia. For the purposes of simplicity and clarity, and also because the name given to the community is sometimes itself a point of contention among residents and a source of confusion among non-residents³⁶, I refer to the community in question simply as “Southeast D.C.” See Figure 12 below for two cartographic images of Washington, D.C. and the Ward 8/Southeast D.C. neighborhood.

³⁶ The entirety of Washington, D.C. located east of the Anacostia River is frequently and inaccurately referred to by non-residents, even those from other parts of the city, as “Anacostia.” Anacostia *is* one small neighborhood located east of the river, and one of my research participants in fact resides in this neighborhood. Nevertheless, the community of Southeast D.C. as a whole, as I am framing it here, is never referred to by residents as Anacostia.

Ward 8 / Southeast D. C.

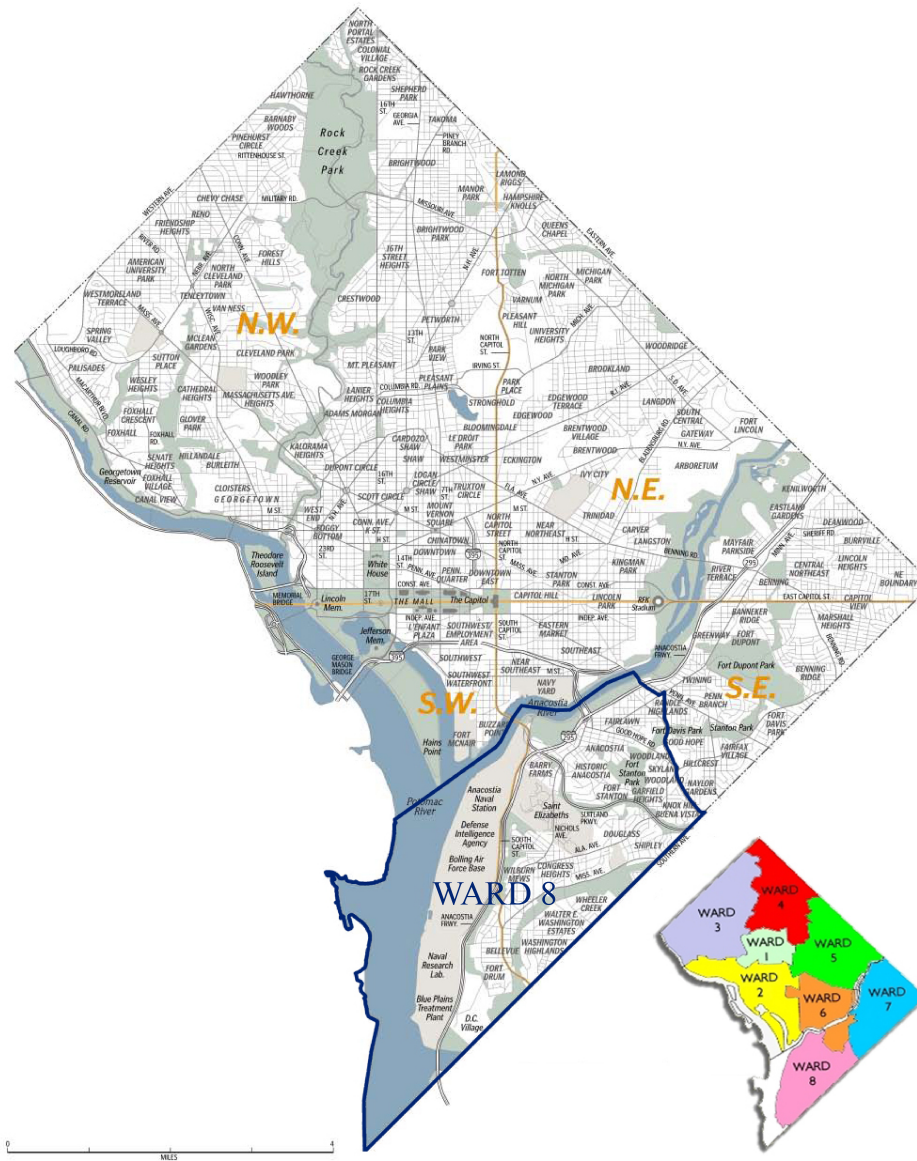


Figure 12: Two maps of Washington, D.C. showing the location of the Ward 8/Southeast D.C. neighborhood according to both quadrant and ward divisions.

In the early decades of the seventeenth century, at the time of the British arrival in the area that would later become Washington, D.C., the area now comprising Ward 8 and Southeast D.C. was dominated by the Nacotchtank Indians, and had served as a

population and trade center since as early as 9500-1200 BCE.³⁷ By the end of the seventeenth century, however, increasing numbers of British colonists were settling in the area, and the Nacotchtank had lost most of their land. Tobacco plantations, fueled by slave labor, dominated the area for most of the eighteenth century, and by the closing years of that century, when Washington, D.C. was being established as the new nation's capital, the seeds of contemporary Southeast D.C.'s conflicted relationship with the city as a whole were already being sown.³⁸

In a manner not entirely dissimilar from the Appalachian region and its relationship with the rest of the United States, Southeast D.C. has long had a conflicted relationship with the larger entity to which it belongs, that of the District of Columbia. Indeed, Washington, D.C. would never have included territory east of the Anacostia at all had Thomas Jefferson not made a last-minute suggestion as the boundaries of the new district were being finalized. Jefferson's suggestion was that—for reasons both of symmetry and for added protection from an attack on the city—the district ought to include territory located east of the Anacostia and west of the Potomac.³⁹ This enabled the district to form a perfect geometrical diamond centered on the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, although the residents of what is now Arlington County, Virginia were never pleased about being part of the district, and in 1846 this portion of the district was retroceded to the state of Virginia.⁴⁰

³⁷ Portia James, "'The Most Pleasant and Healthful Place in All the Country:' The History of Settlement and Land Use Along the Eastern Branch," in *East of the River: Continuity and Change*, ed. Gail S. Lowe (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010), 19.

³⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

³⁹ Don Alexander Hawkins, "Anacostia's Developmental Geography," in *East of the River*, 52.

⁴⁰ Louise Daniel Hutchinson, *The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930* (City of Washington: Published for the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum of the Smithsonian Institution by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 91.

Southeast D.C. has thus always been physically separated from the rest of the city (and indeed, also from neighboring Virginia and Maryland, by waterways and steep bluffs respectively). It was also legally separated from the central federal district of Washington for much of its early existence; its official title until 1871 was “Washington County,” and it followed the laws of the state of Maryland, to which it originally belonged.⁴¹ It differs from much of the rest of the city in terms of its topography, which is much hillier and more difficult to overlay with a city plan than most other areas.

More recently, policies enacted in the twentieth century worked to materialize—in the form of local transportation and residential infrastructure—the geographical separation of Southeast D.C., via the Anacostia River, from the other parts of the city. These policies, enacted by both the federal and local governments, involved freeway construction and residential “urban renewal.” The construction of controlled-access freeways cut through the heart of the community and in fact severed a number of longstanding neighborhoods completely in two. See Figure 13 below for a view of Suitland Parkway, which split apart several African American neighborhoods when it was constructed in the 1940s.

⁴¹ Ibid.; see also The Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, *The Black Washingtonians: The Anacostia Museum Illustrated Chronology* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2005), 105-108



Figure 13: View of Suitland Parkway, the construction of which in the 1940s severed a number of African American neighborhoods in Southeast D.C. Photo by author.

Even more pernicious than freeway construction was the mid-twentieth century suite of policies legislating “urban renewal” in Washington, D.C. and other cities around the country.⁴² The stated goal of urban renewal policies was to clear central city areas of their impoverished slums and ghettos, and to do away with the so-called urban blight caused by such areas. “Urban blight” has been recognized by many scholars and activists in the years since these policies were enacted, however, as a coded way of describing low-income, largely minority (generally African American) neighborhoods—in short, “urban blight” was as much a description of undesirable groups of people as it was of deteriorating neighborhoods. Indeed, the fact that most residents who were dislocated

⁴² See the following for a good overview of the policies and practices associated with urban renewal: June Manning Thomas, “Urban Renewal,” in *Encyclopedia of Urban America: The Cities and Suburbs* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 826-829. See also Janet L. Smith, “Public Housing Transformation: Evolving National Policy,” *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, eds. Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006).

through urban renewal ended up in new concentrations of hastily built, poorly planned, and geographically isolated pockets of public housing complexes, rather than in thriving communities that maintained their old networks of support and allowed them to stay in the area, indicates that a central goal of these policies was to isolate and hide, as much as possible, low-income and minority populations. See Figure 14 below for a view of the Washington Monument and the federal center of Washington, D.C., as seen through the wrought-iron fence bars of an apartment complex in the Barry Farm neighborhood of Southeast D.C.



Figure 14: View of the Washington Monument and federal center of Washington, D.C. from an apartment complex in Southeast D.C.'s Barry Farm neighborhood. Photo by author.

In the District of Columbia, much of the displacement occurred in the southwestern quadrant of the city, along with the traditionally African American areas of

Georgetown.⁴³ Subsequently, the vast majority of these poor and minority displacees ended up in haphazard public housing complexes across the Anacostia River in Southeast D.C., where the largest amount of vacant land in the District was located.⁴⁴

Anthropologist Brett Williams argues that the District of Columbia was motivated not just by the desire to make downtown areas safe for capital by purging them of African Americans and minorities, but also by the desire to “protect” the monumental core of the capital city. She contends that as these populations were forcibly displaced to Southeast D.C., the Anacostia River came to serve as “D.C.’s Iron Curtain”:

Washington was planted on the world stage after World War II. Developers, the District commissioners, and the *Washington Post* argued that a world power should be enshrined in a shining city whose buildings evoked both power and classical democracy. So the District commissioners purged Washington’s central core of African Americans. The state exercised its powers of condemnation, eminent domain, and write-down ... to bulldoze and package land in large, profitable parcels for redevelopment.⁴⁵

In addition to the politics of urban renewal, freeway construction, and displacement, the twentieth century also saw an acceleration of the politics of neglect and abandonment of Southeast D.C. by the local and federal governments. As long ago as the closing decades of the nineteenth century, even white citizen’s groups in Southeast D.C. (and at that time the area consisted of both white and African American neighborhoods) had to agitate in order to receive basic infrastructure and amenities that were implemented much earlier in other parts of the cities. Paved roads, modern sewer

⁴³ See the following works for more on the mid-twentieth-century urban renewal projects affecting Southwest D.C. and parts of Georgetown: Constance McLaughlin Green, *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 322-326; and Francesca Russello Ammon, “Commemoration Amid Criticism: The Mixed Legacy of Urban Renewal in Southwest Washington, D.C.” *Journal of Planning History* 8, no. 3 (2009): 175-220.

⁴⁴ Francesca Russello Ammon, “Commemoration Amid Criticism,” 202.

⁴⁵ Brett Williams, “Life Inside a Watershed: The Political Ecology of an Urban River,” in *East of the River*, 125-126. See the following as well for a similar argument: Howard Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

systems, and transportation systems linking them to the rest of the city did not come to Southeast D.C.'s white neighborhoods until the turn of the twentieth century; for the area's African American neighborhoods, however, these increasingly basic features of modern urban life were nonexistent until the 1950s and 1960s, and even 1970s in some cases.⁴⁶ Historian Louise Daniel Hutchinson notes that in spite of the revered "sage of Anacostia" Frederick Douglass having written to District commissioners in 1894 asking that a damaged retaining wall on his property be repaired, the wall in question was astonishingly left in disrepair for nearly a century before finally being fixed in 1976.⁴⁷

Furthermore, not only were African American residents of Southeast D.C. the last citizens of the city to receive electricity, modern sewer systems, and other basic elements of contemporary urban infrastructure, but because the community's population expanded so rapidly as a result of urban renewal and its massive reshuffling of African Americans from Southwest Washington and Georgetown into Southeast D.C., those infrastructural elements that had so belatedly arrived began quickly to buckle under the pressure of a growing population, poor planning and implementation, and lack of maintenance. Curator and historian Portia James describes the conditions of many of the newly developed Southeast D.C. neighborhoods in the 1970s and 1980s as follows:

Despite the expanding population and the increasing pressure on social and recreational services, local officials often offered fewer services, few new public facilities, and little development of infrastructure. Schools, employment centers, police services, garbage and trash removal, shopping centers, public libraries and recreational facilities, health care centers, child care facilities, and transportation were not planned to keep pace with the demands of residents. Unemployment, drugs, and crime plagued many of the neighborhoods.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ James, "'The Most Pleasant and Healthful Place in all the Country,'" in *East of the River*, 42.

⁴⁷ Hutchinson, *The Anacostia Story*, 137.

⁴⁸ James, 48.

As with other central city areas across the country that were selected as sites of concentrated public housing complexes during urban renewal processes of the 1950s and 1960s, Southeast D.C. also experienced “white flight” to nearby suburbs and became increasingly homogeneous racially. Until the mid-twentieth century, Southeast D.C. had been an area of both white and black neighborhoods, but starting with the development of public housing complexes in the 1950s, the white population of the area dropped sharply, from 82.4 percent of the area’s population in 1950, to 67.7 percent in 1960, and finally, in its most precipitous drop, to 14 percent in 1970.⁴⁹ In Washington, D.C. as a whole, by 1971, 91 percent of the students in the D.C. public school system were African American.⁵⁰

Washington, D.C.’s status as a “chocolate city” with a significant majority of African American residents was firmly solidified in the decades following the late 1960s, but in recent years the proportion of African American residents relative to other racial groups has dropped. In Southeast D.C., however, as will be noted below, the high proportion of African American residents remains strongly intact. Indeed, many long-term residents of Southeast D.C. still speak of their surprise at seeing non-African Americans in their community. Sharon, one of my Southeast D.C. research participants, explains her reaction at seeing non-African Americans (whites in particular) in her neighborhood:

Any black person in this community would tell you the same thing. We will be driving, I will be driving down the street, and I still say, Oh my God, there’s a white person running with their dog! I mean, because you’re not used to it, it was never like that before!

⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

⁵⁰ The Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and Culture, *The Black Washingtonians*, 300.

In spite of the fact that Southeast D.C. is not experiencing shifts in its racial demographics, like many other areas of the city, it is experiencing the beginnings of the gentrification processes that have transformed neighboring African American communities such as U Street, Columbia Heights, and H Street Northeast in recent years. Small but growing numbers of young, middle-class African Americans have recently begun to move into Southeast D.C., attracted both by the low cost of housing and, in many cases, by the prospect of being able to be part of the fabric of a majority-African American community.⁵¹ These new residents have also attracted the attention of longer-term residents, and as will be seen later in this dissertation, that attention is often not entirely positive.⁵² Significantly, just as has happened in other African-American-majority neighborhoods, most notably Harlem, the influx of upwardly-mobile new residents—even and sometimes especially those who share the same racial affiliation as long-term residents—generally leads to tension and disputes on the basis of ownership and belonging. In short, the politics of African American gentrification is not entirely dissimilar to that of white-led gentrification, particularly in the realm of socioeconomic and educational factors.⁵³

In addition to the recent small influx of middle-class African Americans into Southeast D.C., there has also been a significant expansion in the development of an arts

⁵¹ See the blog <http://www.congressheightsontherise.com/> for a useful perspective on how many of these recent arrivals in Southeast D.C. view their role in the community. Accessed November 30, 2013.

⁵² See the following piece from the *Washington City Paper* regarding the discomfort of defining oneself as a “black gentrifier:” Shani O. Hilton, “Confessions of a Black Gentrifier: When Demographic Change Doesn’t Involve Color,” *Washington City Paper*, March 18, 2011, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/40564/confessions-of-a-black-dc-gentrifier/>.

⁵³ See the following for explorations of African American gentrification: Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Sabinha Robin Prince, “Changing Places: Race, Class, and Belonging in the ‘New’ Harlem,” *Urban Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2002): 5-35; Michelle Boyd, “Defensive Development: The Role of Racial Conflict in Gentrification,” *Urban Affairs Review* 43, 6 (2008): 751-776; Monique M. Taylor, *Harlem Between Heaven and Hell* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

scene in the community. In 2005 a community arts center known as Town Hall Education, Arts, and Recreation Center (The Arc) opened in Southeast D.C., and it continues to thrive as a source of arts classes and programming for local residents.⁵⁴ In early 2007 an art gallery known as the Honfleur Gallery was opened, and in spite of initial doubts about whether it could survive in Southeast D.C., it is also currently thriving.⁵⁵ Southeast D.C. also welcomed in late 2010 a small-business incubator called The Hive in the Anacostia business district, and more recently in 2012, owing to the success of The Hive, another incubator space known as The Hive 2.0 opened in the same area.⁵⁶ In Figure 4 on page 18, the storefront of The Hive can be seen along the left side of the streetscape.

The increasing presence of young, middle-class residents and a burgeoning local arts scene are not the only signs of impending gentrification in Southeast D.C. The ongoing conversion of the former St. Elizabeth's Hospital complex into the new headquarters of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and an adjacent retail complex is another indication; indeed, the Homeland Security headquarters construction

⁵⁴ Marc Fisher, "Ward 8's Arc Floats Above the Skepticism," *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2005, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/409931535.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Apr+26%2C+2005&author=Fisher%2C+Marc&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Ward+8%27s+Arc+Floats+Above+The+Skepticism>.

⁵⁵ Rachel Beckman, "Making a Place for Art in Anacostia: A New Gallery Wants to Give SE A Boost, But Not Everyone Paints a Rosy Picture," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2007, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410218703.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Jan+11%2C+2007&author=Rachel+Beckman+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writer&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Making+a+Place+for+Art+in+Anacostia%3B+A+New+Gallery+Wants+to+Give+SE+a+Boost%2C+But+Not+Everyone+Paints+a+Rosy+Picture>.

⁵⁶ "In Pictures: The Hive Grand Opening and Holiday Party," *Congress Heights on the Rise*, December 17, 2010, <http://www.congressheightsontherise.com/search?q=the+hive>. Accessed April 12, 2011; Mohana Ravindranath, "Entrepreneurs East of the Anacostia Share Space at The Hive 2.0," *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2012, accessed December 1, 2013, [http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/1265735508.html?FMT=FT&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Dec+31%2C+2012&author=Ravindranath%2C+Mohana&desc=Entrepreneurs+east+of+the+Anacostia+share+space+at+the+Hive+2.0+\(Posted+2012-12-31+06%3A07%3A21\)&pf=1](http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/1265735508.html?FMT=FT&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Dec+31%2C+2012&author=Ravindranath%2C+Mohana&desc=Entrepreneurs+east+of+the+Anacostia+share+space+at+the+Hive+2.0+(Posted+2012-12-31+06%3A07%3A21)&pf=1).

project represents the largest federal building project in the Washington area since the construction of the Pentagon.⁵⁷ And in spite of slowdowns associated with the 2008-2009 economic recession, the D.C. government's Anacostia Waterfront Initiative envisions major revamping and revitalization in the coming decades in the neighborhoods along the Anacostia River.⁵⁸ Existing alongside all of these developments, furthermore, is the increasingly precarious situation of public housing residents in Southeast D.C. With significant reductions in the numbers of public housing units available in Southeast D.C., as part of the national HOPE VI program and the D.C.-based New Communities Initiative,⁵⁹ these developments and "revitalizations" promise to make Southeast D.C. ever less inviting for marginalized and impoverished residents.⁶⁰ Indeed, numerous residents have already been displaced as a result of public housing shifts, and with

⁵⁷ Mary Beth Sheridan, "Planning Agency Approves Homeland Security Complex; Preservationists Fear Effect on St. Elizabeth's Campus," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2009, accessed November 30, 2013, <http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410334688.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Jan+9%2C+2009&author=Mary+Beth+Sheridan+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writer&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Planning+Agency+Approves+Homeland+Security+Complex%3B+Preservationists+Fear+Effect+on+St.+Elizabeths+Campus>. For an overview of the Department of Homeland Security headquarters construction project, see <http://www.stelizabethsdevelopment.com/index.html>. For an overview of the planned retail complex and mixed-use community adjacent to the new Department of Homeland Security headquarters, see <http://www.stelizabethseast.com/>. Accessed January 15, 2014.

⁵⁸ The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative is a 30-year, \$10 billion plan initiated by the D.C. Government in 2000. See <http://planning.dc.gov/DC/DMPED/Projects/Anacostia+Waterfront+Initiative> and <http://www.anacostiawaterfront.org/> for more details on the program. Accessed January 15, 2014.

⁵⁹ The HOPE VI program was established in 1993 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and was tasked with "proposing a National Action Plan to eradicate severely distressed public housing." For more information, see http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/hope6. Accessed January 15, 2014. The New Communities Initiative is "a comprehensive public-private partnership designed to improve the quality of life for families and individuals living in four neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. ... Designated New Communities exhibit high rates of poverty and unemployment, as well as blight and deterioration of the housing stock." For more information, see <http://www.dc.gov/DC/DMPED/Projects/New+Communities?nav=2&vgnnextrefresh=1>. Accessed January 15, 2014.

⁶⁰ For an assessment of the HOPE VI Program and its displacing effects on impoverished residents of D.C., see Sherri Lawson Clark, "Where the Poor Live: How Federal Housing Policy Shapes Residential Communities" *Urban Anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2002): 69-92. For a more general assessment of HOPE VI, see Susan J. Popkin, "The HOPE VI Program: What Has Happened to the Residents?" in *Where Are Poor People to Live?* and Janet L. Smith, "Mixed-Income Communities: Designing Out Poverty or Pushing Out the Poor?" in *Where Are Poor People to Live?*

increasing discussion of Southeast D.C. as the “last frontier” for development in Washington, D.C., this trend of displacement seems like to grow.⁶¹

Demographic Information and Measures of Well-Being in Letcher County and Southeast D.C.

As of 2012, the population of Letcher County was 23,952. Significantly, this figure represents a 2.3 percent decrease just since 2010, indicating that population loss is a considerable problem in an already sparsely populated rural area. Racially, Letcher County in 2012 was 98.7 percent white, with the next largest racial group, Latinos, comprising a mere .7 percent of the population. Foreign-born residents also constitute an almost non-existent percentage of the population, at just .4 percent of Letcher County residents for the period 2007-2011. In terms of socioeconomic status, the median household income for the period 2007-2011 was just \$29,564, and the percentage of residents living below the poverty level for that period was 26 percent. Educationally, 70.1 percent of residents age 25 or older held a high school diploma or higher for the period 2007-2011. Rates of higher education are low, however, with only 10.3 percent of residents age 25 or over holding a bachelor’s degree or higher for that period.⁶² In terms of measures of health and mortality, the premature death rate in Letcher County is, astonishingly, close to four times the national average. The rate of occupational fatalities

⁶¹ Eugene L. Meyer, “A Comeback Story Decades in the Making,” *The New York Times*, January 30, 2008, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/realestate/commercial/30district.html>.

⁶² The figures listed above are all drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau’s State & County QuickFacts page on Letcher County: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/21/21133.html>, accessed December 1, 2013.

is also very high, at just over twice the national average, suggesting the danger of the coal mining work that employs a significant proportion of Letcher County's residents.⁶³

The following demographic figures for Southeast D.C. will all be drawn from data on Ward 8, which is the closest jurisdictional approximation for what I am referring to as "Southeast D.C.". As of the 2010 census, the population of Ward 8 was 73,662, while the population of Washington, D.C. as a whole was 601,723.⁶⁴ The city's ward boundaries are redrawn every ten years on the basis of updated census data as part of an effort to keep each of the eight wards roughly equal in population. As a result of this, ward population figures are not as revealing of shifts in the actual numbers of residents as they might be. Racially, Ward 8 in 2010 was 96.6 percent African American, with tiny minorities of Latinos (1.35 percent), whites (.91 percent), and others. In this sense, it is almost the mirror opposite of Letcher County in terms of its relative populations of African Americans and whites. And in terms of how Ward 8's racial demographics relate to those of the rest of Washington, D.C., it remains much more heavily African American than many other areas of the city, which has overall seen precipitous drops in its percentages of African American residents in recent decades.⁶⁵ In 2010 Washington, D.C.

⁶³ These two figures were drawn from the Kentucky Health Facts website (http://www.kentuckyhealthfacts.org/data/location/show.aspx?loc=67#src_3), which is maintained by the Kentucky State Data Center at the University of Louisville (<http://ksdc.louisville.edu/>). Both sites were accessed December 1, 2013.

⁶⁴ All of the figures in this section were drawn from data compiled in the *District of Columbia Census 2010 Atlas*, which was accessed electronically at <http://dc.gov/DC/Planning/DC+Data+and+Maps/DC+Data/Reports/DC+Census+2010+Atlas/DC+Census+2010+Atlas> on December 1, 2013. The data in this publication was broken down according to census tract rather than ward, but I was able to aggregate that data from each of the census tracts located in Ward 8 to come up with these figures. All of this data refers to the 2010 census.

⁶⁵ See the following news stories on the recent drops in the African American population majority in Washington, D.C.: Alex Kellogg, "D.C., Long 'Chocolate City,' Becoming More Vanilla," *National Public Radio*, February 15, 2011, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/15/133754531/d-c-long-chocolate-city-becoming-more-vanilla>; Natalie Hopkinson, "Farewell to Chocolate City," *New York*

as a whole was 50.7 percent African American, 34.8 percent white, and 9.1 percent Latino. Ward 8's average income in 2010 was slightly lower than that of Letcher County for a similar period, at \$24,858, and it was dramatically lower than the average 2010 income of Washington, D.C., which was \$58,526. The percentage of Ward 8 residents living below the poverty line in 2010 was somewhat higher than that of Letcher County, at 36.1 percent. Educationally, 74.5 percent of Ward 8 residents over the age of twenty-five had a high school degree or higher, slightly higher than Letcher County's 70.1 percent rate but well below the overall D.C. rate of 86.5 percent. Rates of higher education among those age twenty-five and over were exactly the same as those of Letcher County, at 10.3 percent of the population, and drastically lower than the overall D.C. rates, which were 49.2 percent.⁶⁶

Theoretical Foundations

A metaphor is ... a line drawn between two things, a mapping of the world by affinities and patterns, which is to say that a constellation is a metaphor for a metaphor. And the word metaphor in the original Greek means to transport something. So metaphors are, like constellations, navigational tools to travel by. They let us enter a world of resemblances and kinships, in which we can approach the unknown through the known, the abstract through the concrete, the remote through what comes to hand. ... We are constantly drawing the world together in terms of resemblances and recastings, and the job of artists is to draw the lines anew to startle us, wake us up, see the secret route there or where we've always been. Same stars, different constellations.⁶⁷

Times, June 23, 2012, accessed December 1, 2013,
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/opinion/sunday/farewell-to-chocolate-city.html?_r=0.

⁶⁶ See the following article for a fascinating overview of health disparities in the U.S. as viewed through the lenses of race, socioeconomic status, and geography. The authors identify eight different groupings, referred to as "Eight Americas," and explore measures of health and well-being between these groupings. America 4 ("poor whites living in Appalachia and the Mississippi Valley") and America 8 ("blacks living in high-risk urban environments") show similarities very much like those visible in the demographic information presented above. Christopher J.L. Murray, Sandeep Kulkarni, and Majid Ezzati, "Eight Americas: New Perspectives on U.S. Health Disparities," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 29 (2005): 4-10.

⁶⁷ Rebecca Solnit, *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007): 165-166.

In the introductory pages of this chapter, I made use of the phrase “circumnavigational tools” to describe some of the key concepts that I will be employing throughout this dissertation as a means of elucidating how my research participants understand and practice the idea of place. I also use in the title of my dissertation the term “relationality.” In the above quotation from writer Rebecca Solnit’s beautiful *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*, these notions of “circumnavigational tools” and “relationality” come together, and suggest the ways in which ideas of relationality and of movement, or “practice,” as I generally refer to it, form the theoretical underpinning for my research. Place is the “star” (or perhaps “sun”) at the center of the “constellation” of this project, to use Solnit’s terms, but relationality and practice are the orbits within which this sun moves, animated of course by the concrete articulations and practices of the actual people and places whose experiences are being explored here.

The concept of relationality is one that has taken on increasing currency in recent years as interest in globalization, transnationalism, neoliberalism, and other totalizing processes as explanatory schemes has grown. More and more, scholars tend to frame their work in terms of larger intersections, relationships, and systems, rather than attempting to explore one particular issue in isolation. Stated otherwise, there is a growing acceptance of the “ecological” principle that everything affects and is related in some way to everything else, and thus must be understood as a kind of web of relationships. This is hardly a new idea within the humanities or social sciences, and

indeed can be traced back to Max Weber's contention that all humans exist within an interconnected web of constructed relations.⁶⁸

The value of contextualizing a particular issue is also not at all a new one, but the intention to privilege the contextualization as something more than mere background description is a new and growing trend. Indeed, when relationships and connections between the object of focus and the "world out there" beyond the object become just as important, or even more so, than the basic, seemingly essential qualities of the object itself, relationality as a way of framing the world can clearly be seen.⁶⁹ Suddenly it is impossible to look only at one star or planet in isolation or to attempt to define them without reference to the surrounding planetary bodies. Single objects and essences are not sufficient; these objects and so-called essences exist of necessity in relation to other seemingly discrete and fully self-contained objects and essences. Indeed, what has long been called the "definition" or "essence" of an object comes to be understood more and more as fundamentally rooted in the relationship between that object and its environment. There can be no star or planet without other stars and planets, without constellations, and without solar systems.

⁶⁸ Cited in Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 5.

⁶⁹ For an early and influential example of the privileging of relationships over essences within cultural analysis, in this case historical analysis, see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991). In this study, Cronon presents an environmental history not of Chicago as a discrete entity, but of its relationship with its rural hinterland. He contends that this city (and by extension all cities) could never have been seen as a discrete entity at all were it not for this web of geographical and material relationships within which it existed. Another important example of scholarship that privileges relationships over essences, and that does so in innovative ways, is Clyde Woods' *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (London: Verso, 1998). Wood's study devises a "blues epistemology" rooted in the historical experiences and practices of African Americans in the Mississippi Delta, demonstrating how it can be used to explore the overlapping and mutually constitutive relationship between aesthetics and politics within marginalized communities. A third source that has been useful in shaping my thinking on relationality is Bruce Braun's *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). This work draws from theorists Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of "assemblages" to explore how race and identity are often constructed via their relationship to physical environments.

The theoretical framework of relationality, understood as the imperative to explore all cultural productions first and foremost in terms of how they exist in relation to other cultural productions, is a central theoretical underpinning of this dissertation project. Indeed, it is the reason for my choice of a comparative, or relational, approach in exploring the practices and understandings of cultural productions in two distinct geographical locations. Drawing from Solnit's description above of a metaphor as "a line drawn between two things, a mapping of the world by affinities and patterns," I likewise have fashioned this project not in terms of a solitary point of origin in any one place, but in the lines drawn between and beyond various places and processes, and in the mappings—sometimes unexpected and irregular—that can occur when these lines are sketched in unfamiliar ways. I do not mean to suggest by borrowing Solnit's image of drawing lines between two things that there exist fixed or tidy relationships, connections, and mappings between places. Indeed, linearity is not my intention, but rather the active practice involved in drawing connections—whether straight or jagged or circular or hexagonal—between the places and things and processes that constitute our world. I am most intrigued by Solnit's assertion that "the job of artists is to draw the lines anew to startle us, wake us up, see the secret route there or where we've always been." My goal in situating the Appalachian coalfields of rural eastern Kentucky alongside the urban, African American core of Washington, D.C. is precisely to draw the lines—the possibilities for connection—in new and unfamiliar ways, and in so doing to perhaps suggest connections and narratives that might not otherwise be visible.

In addition to drawing new paths of connection between these two places, I also aim to practice relationality by the process in which I structure the narrative of this

dissertation. By organizing my chapters in terms of broad themes and understandings of place and common wealth, and by explicitly interweaving ethnographic interview material from both locales as I discuss these themes, my goal is to sidestep any temptation to present my analysis in terms of “defining” each place. My interest is in illuminating the flows of continuity, even if disjointed continuity, between the words and understandings expressed by residents of these two places. It is not to suggest that they are either “the same,” or “different,” but rather that they are of necessity related, connected, and enmeshed in conversations that are simultaneously local and much broader in scope. This shared set of connections and conversations has much to do with their common status as more or less “marginalized” places consisting of “marginalized geographies;”⁷⁰ nevertheless, these relationships are at times constructed precisely by the differences and discontinuities that characterize these two places, and in that vein I attempt to show that relationship and connection are not solely dependent on similarity.

It is also important to note that while I do want to highlight the distinction between the notion of relationality that I am employing and more straightforward notions of comparison, I also want to recognize that a considerable body of very rich comparative scholarship has provided inspiration for my interpretation of relationality. Indeed, most good ethnographic scholarship is innately comparative, if not more radically relational, in its use of thoughtful and complex practices of comparison as a means of providing “perspective by incongruity.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ See the following work, cited earlier in this chapter, for an insightful exploration of various kinds of marginalized geographies, and in particular of the marginalized “black geographies” of the black diaspora: Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007).

⁷¹ A phrase used by the late American studies scholar James J. Farrell (an undergraduate mentor of mine) to suggest the value of two differing perspectives in individually illuminating each.

In returning again to the Solnit quote with which I opened this discussion, I want to explore now the second major theoretical foundation of this research: that of approaching “place” in terms of its active capacities, in terms of its implementation itself as a kind of practice. Solnit stresses action, agency, and “doing”-ness in positing that “we are constantly *drawing* the world together in terms of resemblances and recastings, and the job of artists is to *draw* the lines anew to *startle* us, *wake* us up, *see* the secret route there or where we’ve always been.” [emphasis added]. We are engaged in action—drawing, startling, waking, seeing, and much more—and thus continuously reshaping the grounds on which place is conventionally defined as residing. There is also a great deal of relationality and connectivity involved in this understanding of place as practice, as geographer Doreen Massey suggests below in her groundbreaking “A Global Sense of Place:”

If one moves in from the satellite towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one’s head, then each “place” can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is, indeed, a *meeting* place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.⁷²

In describing Massey’s “extroverted” notion of sense of place, as she refers to it, geographer Tim Cresswell provides his own explanation of what it means to think of place as “active” and “practiced.” According to Cresswell, “place in this sense becomes an event rather than a secure ontological thing rooted in notions of the authentic. Place as an event is marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence.”⁷³ And in what perhaps best captures my own understanding and usage of place as a concept

⁷² Doreen Massey, “A Global Sense of Place,” *Marxism Today* 38 (1991): 24-29.

⁷³ Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 40. See also Cresswell, “Introduction,” in *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*, eds. Ginette Verstraete and Cresswell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 25.

imbued with great (and often unrecognized) potential for action, practice, and the shaping of conceptual and material worlds, Cresswell says the following:

Thinking of place as performed and practiced can help us think of place in radically open and non-essentialized ways where place is constantly struggled over and reimagined in practical ways. Place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an *a priori* label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice.⁷⁴

The conversation on place as practice is rapidly growing among contemporary scholarly work employing these “activated” conceptions of place in original work, and also very promisingly, in terms of new analyses of the work of earlier theorists, such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Gaston Bachelard, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others.⁷⁵ This is a conversation I look forward to joining and participating in through this dissertation project.

In concluding this discussion of theoretical frameworks, I also want to say a word about the relationship between theory, between the generally marginalized status of the research participants who have lent their words and ideas to this project, and between the impulse to search for and explore relationality and agency in cultural production. Several theorists in recent years have, somewhat controversially, utilized the concept of “love” within their formulations of how and why scholarly work ought to happen, and what role such an affective concept as this might play in the supposedly dry realm of scholarly work. bell hooks is one who ventures into the territory of love, devoting an entire monograph to the role of love in all realms of scholarly, popular, spiritual, and personal

⁷⁴ Cresswell, *Place*, p. 39.

⁷⁵ The following is a selection of the most significant theoretical works on place by these scholars: Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper, 1962); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962).

life. In the following excerpt she explains her admiration for the bold and unapologetic privileging of love as an active practice of politics in the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr., Erich Fromm, Thomas Merton, and others:

There is always an emphasis in their work on love as an active force that should lead us into greater communion with the world. In their work, loving practice is not aimed at simply giving an individual greater life satisfaction; it is extolled as the primary way we end domination and oppression. This important politicization of love is often absent from today's writing.⁷⁶

Chela Sandoval also privileges love as a political concept. In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, she lays out an extremely detailed and systematic set of methodologies for “developing a theory and method of oppositional consciousness in the postmodern world.” Sandoval identifies this methodological system as “the methodology of the oppressed,” and places at its center the concept of love as a political and intellectual agent.⁷⁷ According to Sandoval, “these theoretical methods comprise a hermeneutics for identifying and mobilizing love in the postmodern world as a category of social analysis.”⁷⁸ In presenting here my ethnographic research conducted with marginalized people residing in marginalized places, I strive to adhere to both hooks’ and Sandoval’s prescriptions for employing “love as an active force,” and for working to identify love, even if only implicitly, as an active source of affect and of politics in the expressions and practices of my research participants.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 2000), 75-76.

⁷⁷ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ For an additional example of an analysis of “love” as an active ingredient of thoughtful scholarship, particularly ethnographic scholarship, see Virginia Dominguez’s exploration of what she calls “the politics of love and rescue.” Dominguez, “For a Politics of Love and Rescue,” *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 3 (2000): 361-393.

Methodology

Ethnography

In exploring understandings of place and change within the historically marginalized communities of Letcher County and Southeast D.C. I utilized primarily ethnographic methods and techniques, harnessing the inherent flexibility and malleability of the ethnographic research process to help illuminate the subtle contours of understandings of place and change. Drawing in particular on forms of ethnography that emphasize identifying, analyzing, and interpreting the conceptualizations of so-called “cultural insiders,” I sought to explore and represent the complex ways in which the residents of each community think and feel about their places of residence, how they are assessing and reacting to the changes currently occurring there, and how the idea of place manifests itself in their reactions to those changes.

The following are some examples of ethnographic work that inspired my approach to this research, and that make use of a form of ethnography geared toward elucidating understandings of ideas such as place, home, and belonging. Mitch Duneier’s *Sidewalk*, Barbara Myerhoff’s *Number Our Days*, Steven Gregory’s *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*, Brett Williams’ *Upscaling Downtown: Stalled Gentrification in Washington, D.C.*, and Keith Basso’s *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* all provided evocative and carefully crafted ethnographic interpretations of notions of home and belonging in a variety of different contexts.⁸⁰ These authors also spoke directly to the process of how

⁸⁰ Mitchell Duneier, *Photographs by Ovie Carter, Sidewalk* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999); Barbara G. Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979); Steven Gregory, *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press,

they themselves interacted with their research participants and how this shaped their interpretive and analytical practices, providing important methodological insight as I was preparing to begin research in Letcher County and Southeast D.C. Gabriella Gahlia Modan's *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place* and Rhoda H. Halperin's *Practicing Community: Class Culture and Power in an Urban Neighborhood* were both useful in providing examples of interactions and tensions between varying factions within a neighborhood context, and Mary Pattillo's *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* and Sabiyha Robin Prince's "Changing Places: Race, Class, and Belonging in the 'New' Harlem" provided especially useful insight into some of the discourses potentially being used by my research participants in Southeast D.C.⁸¹ Historian Joy Parr's multi-disciplinary exploration of a series of incidents of displacement and environmental injustice in terms of how residents of the affected areas understood and literally felt and "sensed" those experiences was also invaluable.⁸²

Wanting to familiarize myself with the fabric of everyday life in both Letcher County and Southeast D.C. as much as possible, I spent significant periods of time in both areas, attending community meetings and other activities, visiting cafes and other local gathering places, attending performances and art and museum displays, and simply walking and driving through the communities as much as possible. In Letcher County I

1998); Brett Williams, *Upscaling Downtown: Stalled Gentrification in Washington, D.C.* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988); Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

⁸¹ Modan, Gabriella Gahlia, *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Rhoda H. Halperin, *Practicing Community: Class Culture and Power in an Urban Neighborhood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Sabiyha Robin Prince, "Changing Places: Race, Class, and Belonging in the 'New' Harlem," *Urban Anthropology* 31, 1 (2002): 5-35.

⁸² Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953-2003* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

made a six-week visit that allowed me the time necessary to meet residents, begin to interact with them and set up interviews, and then gradually expand my social circle in terms of who I was interacting with and the kinds of events I was attending, and to conduct follow-up interviews. I followed a similar procedure in Southeast D.C., but it wasn't necessary for me to actually stay there due to my much closer geographical proximity to that community than to eastern Kentucky.

In both places, I spent considerable time conducting participant observation and striving simply to get as nuanced a “feel” for the place as was possible given the limitations imposed by my own identity—both in terms of my ability to understand what I was seeing through the lens of my own subjective identity and in terms of my research participants’ interpretation of my identity as it related to them. While this participant observation work was essential in grounding me in the everyday life flows of these places, along with reading deeply and widely the current news and social media productions of these two communities, my primary focus was on locating, developing rapport with, and interviewing a small number of residents in each place.

Overall I interviewed fifteen residents of Letcher County and eleven residents of Southeast D.C., with the discrepancy in numbers owing to several residents in Letcher County asking that their spouses be interviewed along with them. These initial interviews were in every case compelling and evocative in their own way, but naturally they involved differing levels of rapport and smoothness of flow, and as a result allowed for varying conversational depth and complexity. While in some cases I persisted in working with people with whom rapport was more difficult to establish, at least into a second interview, in general I focused more on cultivating my ethnographic relationship with

those with whom rapport was established a bit more quickly. Based on this differentiation and also on logistical issues of scheduling, I began to narrow my ethnographic field. Eventually I settled on eight residents—four from Letcher County and four from Southeast D.C.—who became key participants and provided the body of ethnographic material that is presented and interpreted in this dissertation. Because I wanted to elicit rich, complex, and multi-layered articulations of these residents’ understandings of place, marginalization, and change in related to the current state of their communities, I needed to interview these individuals repeatedly and in depth, returning multiple times for follow-up interviews and also communicating with them via phone and email for occasional additional clarification. In this set of ethnographic practices I drew on what has been called the person-centered approach to ethnographic interviewing.⁸³

The eight interviewees I chose to highlight all most definitely exist as what is often referred to in ethnographic research as “insiders” within the community in question, in that they all live in or very close to either Letcher County or Southeast D.C., they all relate to their respective community unequivocally as “home,” and they all spend (and have spent throughout their lives, in all but one case) substantial amounts of time there. Significantly, however, each of these people was also a kind of ethnographic “outsider” within their respective community as well, in the sense of having somewhat higher levels of education than the average person living there, slightly more mobility in terms of being able to travel and live elsewhere if so desired, and fluency with large-scale,

⁸³ See the following for overviews and evaluations of this set of ethnographic practices: Robert I. Levy and Douglas W. Hollan, “Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation,” in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. H. Russell Bernard (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1998), 333-364; Douglas Hollan, “Developments in Person-Centered Ethnography,” in *The Psychology of Cultural Experience*, eds. Carmella C. Moore and Holly F. Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); John L. Caughey, *Negotiating Cultures & Identities: Life History Issues, Methods, and Readings* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 9.

national-level, and generally (but not uniformly) somewhat left-leaning cultural and political discourses. In this sense, each of my highlighted research participants exists in their respective home community as a kind of simultaneous “insider” and “outsider,” as an insider-outsider. There are a number of advantages of working ethnographically with such insider-outsider residents, provided of course that they are sufficiently “inside” the general local narratives and practices of that locality. First and foremost, because such people have experience in “translating” and moving between the particular “culture” of their home community and other areas, particularly those that are less uniformly marginalized than the two communities being explored here, they generally have developed a language of sorts that is comprehensible both to those who are more purely insiders and to those who are more purely outsiders. Furthermore, the experience of moving between these various versions of cultural location often primes such insider-outsiders to think in complex ways about what it means to think in terms of how place, home, and identity, and possibly marginalization as well, shape and co-produce each other. Indeed, all of my research participants spoke in some way about the experience of framing their “home” cultural experience in terms of more mainstream, “outside” notions of identity and community, and while it should be noted that it is certainly not necessary for one to have spent time outside one’s home community in order to engage in this kind of thinking, the experience of being away from home does tend to encourage such thinking.

Another advantage of working ethnographically with “insider-outsiders” relates to the quality of the interaction between ethnographer and research participant. To the extent that the researcher’s own identity positions him or her as an “outsider” to the

community being explored, as was the case with me, local residents who are more familiar with the experience of interacting with non-residents, and particularly those non-residents whose identities differ from the general range of local identities in significant ways, these residents may be more open to speaking with and being interviewed by outsider researchers. And within the context of the interview, they may feel more comfortable and less aware of any perceived discrepancies in the identity-based power differentials between themselves and the researcher. The markers of such identity differences can be as obvious as race, age, and gender, or as subtle as clothing style, mannerisms and personal carriage, accent and dialect, etc. Significantly, the researcher may also feel more comfortable and less aware of those perceived discrepancies in interviews with insider-outsider participants; indeed, I found myself worrying less about how I was negotiating and making sense of the differences between me and the particular research participant in those situations in which I was working with people who were more insider-outsider in their cultural location.

The potential disadvantages of working with so-called insider-outsider participants represent in many ways the opposite expression of the advantages noted above. First and foremost, there is the risk that such participants' ease in speaking in a sort of cross-cultural language will dilute the reality of everyday marginalized life experiences in those places, or that the insider-outsider participants will adjust their explanations of life in that place to conform to their perceived understandings of what the researcher might expect to hear from them.⁸⁴ Perhaps even more worrisome is the risk

⁸⁴ Significantly, this tendency is not limited to interactions with insider-outsider participants. The potential that research participants will respond in interview settings in ways they assume the ethnographer wants them to respond, rather than in their own more immediate or undistilled ways, is a risk with all ethnographic research, regardless of the cultural locations of the researcher and the research participants.

that their relatively lesser levels of marginalization and their greater familiarity with operating within a broad range of cultural contexts fundamentally alters their identities in ways that make them less fully “authentic” representatives of local cultural identities. There is merit to this argument, but only to the extent that one is conceiving of the “cultural locations” and “cultural identities” of the places being explored in highly singular and monochromatic ways. Indeed, the entire notion of insider-outsider status is premised to some degree on the idea of cultural boundaries firmly separating the conceptual and geographical space “inside” and “outside” the community in question. It is certainly far from my intention in this project to establish a monolithic “culture” that represents the purest distillation of identity and authenticity in these respective places; rather, I seek to open a small window into the life experiences and cultural understandings of a small, invariably non-representative group of residents. The fact that many of my research participants have spent time living outside their home communities and generally have college degrees does not make their experiences of living in these places any less real or authentic; they are different from less-educated residents who may live in more remote parts of the county and very rarely travel to other areas, but the difference consists not in the purity, or lack thereof, of their alignment with constructions of local “typicality,” but rather in the particular arrangement of their constellation of identities. Furthermore, every one of the more purely “typical” residents of Letcher County and Southeast D.C. also possess their own, equally unique constellation of identities that make them something other than the flat stereotype of “typicality.”

Highlighting this issue of the relative insiderness and outsiderness of my research participants is not an attempt, therefore, to reify conventional notions of authenticity or

cultural boundaries. It is important to discuss, nonetheless, because particularly in marginalized and somewhat isolated communities such as these—in terms of both cultural and geographical location—the notion of who is “from” and “of” the community in question carries more weight than in places where there is a more fluid and generally diverse mix of identities represented in the population living there. As discussed earlier, these places have an uneasy historical relationship with those from “outside,” whether they be associated with government or business or scholarly interests or something else entirely. Patterns of abuse and exploitation at the hands of those from other places and with far-flung loyalties—including the developments now taking place in both communities—have engendered an understandable lack of trust and even outright suspicion of those who are not known and cannot be vetted for by trusted insiders. This theme will emerge repeatedly throughout my dissertation and is significant in terms of providing one framework for understanding both the identities of my research participants and the local cultural discourses they navigate. It is not, however, the only or even necessarily the most important factor shaping my research participants’ identities and cultural understandings.

*Profiles of Letcher County Research Participants*⁸⁵

Melissa is a young, white woman in her mid-twenties, who at the time these interviews were conducted lived with her parents in the Letcher County town of McRoberts. McRoberts is a former coal mining company town, and Melissa’s family has deep roots in the mining profession. Her father was an underground coal miner before retiring, and her brother currently drives a truck that transports coal removed from

⁸⁵ As noted earlier, pseudonyms have been used for all of my research participants.

mountaintop removal sites to locations outside the county. Melissa attended college for a short time a few hours away in Tennessee, but returned home before finishing the degree she was pursuing in broadcast journalism. At the time of my interviews with her, she was working as an intern with the local film and arts center known as Appalshop,⁸⁶ and was about to begin a position as local outreach coordinator for the state activist organization Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

Theresa is a young, white woman in her early thirties who lives with her husband in downtown Whitesburg, the county seat and largest town in Letcher County. Theresa was born and raised one county over and across the state line in rural Wise County, Virginia, as the only child of an Appalachia-born father and a New England-born mother, also Jewish, who met her husband while serving as a young Vista volunteer in the area in the late 1960s. Theresa attended college and earned a bachelor's degree in Massachusetts, which she enjoyed but describes as never really feeling like home, and like Melissa, returned home soon after to work as an intern with Appalshop. After producing a film on federal prison construction in the Appalachian region and initiating a popular ongoing radio program that connects local prisoners with their far-flung families, Theresa met and married her husband, also a native of the region, and the two of them opened a multi-purpose coffee shop, restaurant, bar, and music and art venue in downtown Whitesburg. She has become well-known locally as the proprietress of this locale, called Summit City, which attracts large numbers of both local residents and those visiting the area (primarily because of contacts with Appalshop).

⁸⁶ Founded in 1969 as a development project of the War on Poverty, Appalshop is a non-profit arts and education center located in Whitesburg. See <http://appalshop.org/> for further details. Accessed January 15, 2014.

Keith is an upper-middle-aged white man who lives with his wife in the small Letcher County community of Oscaloosa. Keith served in the U.S. Navy in the late 1960s and early 1970s after graduating from high school, and returned home to begin work as a coal miner, following in the footsteps of his father and both grandfathers. He has worked as a coal miner and mine electrician since 1973, interrupted only by his thirteen-year tenure as county judge-executive of Letcher County, a high-level local position in eastern Kentucky which approximates that of mayor. Keith was notably less affluent than former (and future) judge-executives in Letcher County, and he was also less responsive to the directives of the powerful local coal industry. He became known as something of an activist during his three terms as judge-executive, and despite his lifelong affiliation with the conservative branch of the Republican party, he fought for and secured such conventionally left-wing causes as an increase in the minimum wage, a county recycling program, and smoking bans. In his time since serving as judge-executive, he has returned to his old position as a mine electrician and is also active in anti-mountaintop removal and anti-fracking efforts with the organization Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.⁸⁷

Joyce is an upper-middle-aged white woman who lives with her husband in the small Letcher County community of Blackey. Joyce was born and raised in that community and has lived there for most of her life, with the exception of her years attending college in a nearby community and at the University of Kentucky in Lexington, and the initial years after her marriage when she and her husband (also from Letcher County, though they met in college) lived and worked in Lexington. The impetus for moving back to Letcher County was that Joyce's father had died and she wanted to be

⁸⁷ In his mid-sixties, Keith would like to have retired several years ago, but he and his wife would not have enough funds to live on if he did so, so he continues the hard labor of working in underground coal mines.

closer to her mother; she also contends, however, that she had always assumed she would come home after college and a few years somewhere else. Joyce and her husband both spent their careers as teachers in the Letcher County school system, and they have two grown children and numerous grandchildren. Now retired, Joyce spends most of her time looking after her grandchildren and participating in a local quilting group.

Profiles of Southeast D.C. Research Participants

Kwame is a young, African American man in his late twenties who lives and works in Southeast D.C. He was born in Southeast D.C. and has lived there and in adjoining areas of Washington and nearby Prince George's County, Maryland for most of his life. He also spent a brief period working in North Carolina while he was a student at a community college in Maryland. Kwame's family has deep roots in the Washington area, and he is very committed to this region and to telling the stories of the African American residents who have long lived there. Kwame currently works as an artist, earning money through the sale of paintings, murals, fabric design, and other kinds of art, and he is also a sort of self-described artist-activist. He is involved with several local arts organizations catering to underprivileged D.C. youth, and is the founder of one such group. He also recently produced a film about the history of the Barry Farm neighborhood in Southeast D.C., and served for several years on the D.C. Commission on Arts and Humanities.

Michael is a young, African-American man in his early thirties who lives in Southeast, D.C. and at the time of these interviews worked as an attorney and accountant in nearby Alexandria, Virginia. Michael was raised in a military family that moved frequently both within and outside the U.S., so he hesitates to term himself as truly being

“from” anywhere, but he now considers the Washington area as fully his home, and in particular the Southeast D.C. neighborhood where he lives, that of Historic Anacostia. Michael is one of a growing number of primarily young, middle-class, African American newcomers to Southeast D.C., many of whom have become very involved in local leadership and other activities. Michael himself is very involved in local politics and community organizations, having founded two different neighborhood organizations and launched a short-lived bid for mayor of D.C. in 2008. He is a regular presence at community meetings and other events, and is very devoted to regenerating Southeast D.C. as a less marginalized community.

Sharon is a middle-aged, African American woman in her mid-fifties who lives and works in Southeast D.C. She has lived in this area since she was a child, when she moved here with her parents from Texas. She attended college and earned a master’s degree in social work at the University of Michigan, and returned to Southeast D.C. immediately afterward to begin a career as a social worker. She worked for a number of years with the D.C. Department of Social Services, becoming very familiarized with the decrepit living conditions experienced by many of Southeast D.C.’s poorest residents, and remains active on local boards and commissions dedicated to improving the quality of life in her community. While her stated goals for the community’s future are somewhat similar to those of Michael above, she identifies as an “established resident” of the community, in distinction to those like Michael who have moved in more recently and are generally younger and more educated (though Sharon is herself quite well educated). She currently serves as an outreach coordinator in the office of former D.C. mayor and current councilperson Marion Barry.

Ruth is an upper-middle-aged, African American woman who lives just outside Southeast D.C. in Prince George's County, Maryland. She was born and raised in Southeast D.C. and grew up in a family that was part of the affluent leadership of the African American community of Segregation-era Southeast D.C. She earned a bachelor's degree from Howard University and has worked as an artist and historian for most of her career. She is deeply interested in the family histories and community histories of African Americans, particularly with regard to her own home community. She recently published a collection of photos and oral histories spotlighting the Segregation-era life of African Americans in her home neighborhood of Hillside/Barry Farm. In spite of moving to nearby Prince George's County soon after graduating from Howard, Ruth remains very active in local community life and is in Southeast D.C. several days a week. She claims that she would love to move back if it ever returned to how she knew it as a young person, but she views the community as significantly more troubled than it was during her time growing up there. For that reason she chooses to participate actively toward greater local well-being, but not to actually reside in the community.

Self-Reflexive Profile of Myself as Researcher

In order to provide a sense of how my own identity relates to that of my research participants, I offer here a brief outline of my own background and identity. I am a middle-class white woman in her early thirties, originally from Iowa but currently residing in suburban Maryland just outside Washington, D.C. I share a racial status with my Letcher County participants, and also bear a surname that is familiar in that area, as my father was born in Letcher County and lived there until the age of seventeen.⁸⁸ I differ

⁸⁸ Significantly, however, no family members with whom I am in contact have lived in Letcher County since my grandparents left the area in the mid-1960s.

markedly from all of my Letcher County participants, however, in my regional and geographical affiliations, in my lack of fluency with local dialects and accents, and in the fact that I did not grow up in a marginalized community. I also differ from all of them, to varying degrees, in terms of my educational status. In the Southeast D.C. context, I differ from all of my research participants racially, which is significant because it means that I do not share with them the daily experience of race-based marginalization. I also differ from them in my lack of fluency with local dialects, just as in Letcher County, and in the fact that I did not grow up in a marginalized community. I do share with several of them, however, in terms of our advanced levels of education and our professional status. I also share with all of them a general knowledge of the Washington, D.C. region where all of us live, though their knowledge of Southeast D.C. in particular is vastly greater than mine.

Cultural Landscape Studies and Historic Preservation

I did not, strictly speaking, employ cultural landscape studies or historic preservation methodologies in conducting this dissertation research; there are no detailed descriptions or cultural analyses of specific cultural landscapes or built environments here, certainly not of the specificity and depth that would qualify as materially grounded cultural landscape studies scholarship. There are also no close explorations of change over time in a specific site or landscape, or of how a particular place is understood in terms of its historical marking or commemoration, as would be expected in scholarship specifically grounded in historic preservation methodologies. In spite of these significant deviations from standard cultural landscape studies and historic preservation

methodologies, nevertheless, I do consider this work to be strongly situated within the broad conceptual parameters of these two fields.

The primary and most obvious means through which I have situated this work in these two fields is by centering my ethnographic fieldwork and interpretation squarely on the concepts of place and change, both of which are at the heart of scholarship on cultural landscapes and the preservation of historic environments and narratives. It should also be noted that these concepts of place and change lie at the heart of scholarship in the closely related field of cultural geography, and my work here in many ways mirrors the approaches taken in much qualitative geographical work. From all of these fields I have drawn the insistence on privileging place in exploring, conceptualizing, and making sense of cultural productions and practices. From these fields I have also drawn the insistence that material, conceptual, and affective dimensions of place always be examined in terms of the continuous flow of shifts and changes that punctuate, form, and re-form all places.

I have also situated this research methodologically in the field of cultural landscape studies, in particular, through my emphasis throughout the research process on seeking to frame my ethnographic conversations and analyses on place within the flexible and conceptually rich discourses of contemporary cultural landscape studies. More specifically, I have organized my explorations of place around the active and embodied practices of everyday meaning-making and engagement that constitute my research participants' understandings of and experiences with their particular places. I have also worked to understand those practices of meaning-making and engagement in terms of their relationship to other cultural processes and dynamics, such as the specific trajectories of the histories of marginalization and exploitation in both Letcher County

and Southeast D.C. This emphasis on both engagement and interconnectivity is a common feature of much contemporary cultural landscape studies scholarship, as it works to represent the active relationships between material, conceptual, and affective dimensions of everyday life. Furthermore, in employing the concept of “conceptual landscapes of place” throughout this dissertation, and as a key framework for making sense of how my research participants understand and relate to place, I acknowledge the profound resonance of “landscape” as a means of understanding how and what place means for people, in a both literal and figurative sense.

With regard to historic preservation, the conceptual highlighting throughout this dissertation of history and memory in relation to place suggests the extent to which historic preservation has enlivened this research. The narratives of history, memory, and identity that animate historic preservation as a field are prominent features of perspectives surrounding both of the processes of change that I am exploring in these communities. And in the ethnographic conversations between my research participants and me, values of preservation, stewardship, and the nurturing of memory and heritage emerged as central themes of my participant responses. To the extent that this project explores understandings of history and memory as cultural resources for all communities, and for marginalized communities in particular, it is very much within the methodological terrain of historic preservation.

Review of Relevant Literature on Place, Change, and Marginalization

The general literature covering place, in the many dimensions and contexts in which it is studied and interpreted, is vast and extremely multi-disciplinary. The field that has perhaps generated the most scholarship on place as a concept in the sense that I am

using it in this dissertation—as a way of thinking and feeling and understanding identity—is, not surprisingly given its emphasis on place and space in general, that of cultural geography. Starting in the last quarter of the twentieth century in particular, cultural geography began to grapple with place as a sensibility and a framework for viewing oneself and the world in ways that had rarely been done outside the arts prior to this time. An especially notable figure from this early era, in terms of how I am conceptualizing and utilizing place, is Yi-Fu Tuan. In his 1974 study of place and what he calls “environmental perceptions, attitudes, and values” Tuan introduces the concept of topophilia, which he describes as “a general framework for discussing all the different ways that human beings can develop a love of place.”⁸⁹ He further characterizes topophilia as “diffuse as concept, vivid and concrete as personal experience,”⁹⁰ foreshadowing the ways in which many contemporary scholars of place, myself included, speak of the simultaneous diffuseness and immediacy of place as a concept of everyday experience and understanding. He furthermore emphasizes the affective as well as conceptual dimensions of place understandings, describing topophilia as “the *affective* [emphasis added] bond between people and place or setting.”⁹¹ While we might quibble with Tuan’s unquestioning assumption that people in general will develop “love” for or an otherwise qualitatively positive bond with their place of residence or with their sense of being “at place” and “at home” in the world, his scholarship was critical in

⁸⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: a Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), xii.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

encouraging work that looked at place phenomenologically in terms of how people understand and experience it.⁹²

Coming from the field of philosophy but also providing important insights into new ways of thinking about and with place in terms of the experience of it is the philosopher Edward Casey. In several books from the early- and mid-1990s, Casey explored place in terms of its philosophical and psychological underpinnings, striving “to thrust the very idea of place, so deeply dormant in modern Western thinking, once more into the daylight of philosophical discourse.”⁹³ Drawing from theorists ranging from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, Luce Irigaray, and others, Casey stressed the significance of the body in thinking about place, contending that “thanks to our body, we are in that place and part of it,” and that “we cannot be implaced without being embodied.”⁹⁴ This notion of place being inextricably implicated not just in *where* we are as people and as cultural agents but also *who* and *how* we are—through our material and variously marked bodies—is a critical component of my approach to place in this dissertation.

With their important concepts of lived space and thirdspace, respectively, French theorist Henri Lefebvre and planning scholar Edward Soja have also shaped my thinking on place in significant ways.⁹⁵ Lefebvre’s insistence on loosening the spatial binaries that

⁹² See also Setha M. Low, “Symbolic Ties that Bind: Place Attachment in the Plaza,” in *Place Attachment*, eds. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low (New York: Plenum Press, 1992), 166-167.

⁹³ Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997): xi. Also influential is Casey’s *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 214, 233.

⁹⁵ Lefebvre’s concept of lived space is laid out in *The Production of Space*. Soja lays out his concept of thirdspace in the following two works: “Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination,” in *Human Geography Today*, eds. Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999) and *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

have characterized much traditional geographical thinking have inspired me to approach place in unconventional ways. Indeed, his understanding of place as engaged, inhabited, and even practiced has inspired me to think of place more actively and performatively. Likewise, his expansion of the binaries traditionally associated with place and space, along with Soja's related notion of thirdspace, have encouraged me to think relationally about place.

As discussed above in my explanation of the theoretical foundations of this dissertation, cultural geographers Doreen Massey and Tim Cresswell have also had crucial influences on my general understandings of place. Massey's suggestion that place[s] "be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" helps inform my understanding of place as active and relational.⁹⁶ Also extremely significant for me, and in a similar vein, has been Tim Cresswell's articulation of place as "the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than an *a priori* label of identity," and as "provid[ing] the conditions of possibility for creative social practice."⁹⁷

The specific place-based focus of this project is the nature of disruptive change within marginalized communities. As of yet there is relatively little scholarly work on this important issue. The concept of "NIMBY"—or "Not In My Backyard," has been frequently studied in recent years, and often in terms of residents' sense of place and attachment within their community, which presumably is facing some sort of threat or disruptive change. Significantly, however, while these studies are attentive to the complex conceptual and affective dimensions of place-based thinking in relation to

⁹⁶ Massey, "A Global Sense of Place."

⁹⁷ Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction*, 40.

change, they are overwhelmingly focused on affluent residents within generally affluent areas. There is a small body of studies that explore related concepts of identity, belonging, community, etc. within marginalized places that are facing change, but few that explicitly consider place as the key lens for interpreting those changes, and specifically place-oriented ethnography.⁹⁸ One study that does carefully and thoughtfully explore place and change through the lens of ethnography is American studies scholar Bruce Johansen's dissertation exploring residents' understandings of the revitalization of downtown Silver Spring, Maryland. Significantly, however, downtown Silver Spring is not as fully marginalized an area as either Letcher County or Southeast D.C., but is rather an interesting and very heterogeneous amalgamation of a range of class-based (and also racial) identities.⁹⁹ While Johansen's work emphasizes place and change very strongly, but with less focus on marginalization as an inherent characteristic of the place in question, another very fine place-based exploration—*A People's Guide to Los Angeles*—explores place and marginalization in great depth, but with less emphasis on change.¹⁰⁰

There is also a large literature within the field of environmental justice studies that explores disruptive changes within marginalized communities, but again, it is rare for such studies to explore these changes explicitly in terms of experiences and understandings of place. Indeed, much environmental justice scholarship presents

⁹⁸ Some useful scholarly works exploring the role of memory in marginalized communities facing disruptive changes include Steven Gregory's *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community* and Julie Sze's "Environmental Justice, Urban Planning, and Community Memory in New York City," in *Echoes from the Poisoned Well: Global Memories of Environmental Injustice*, eds. Sylvia Hood Washington, Heather Goodall, and Paul Rosier (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2006). Both Gregory and Sze emphasize the role of memories of past marginalizations in shaping "purposeful acts of memory" directed at contemporary marginalizing practices.

⁹⁹ Bruce Johansen, "Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland." (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Laura Pulido, Laura R. Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng, *A People's Guide to Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

quantitative measures of well-being as opposed to qualitative explorations of how residents of the affected communities understand the changes affecting them.¹⁰¹ It is also worth noting that the vast body of interdisciplinary work on gentrification has begun to make greater use of ethnographic scholarship, and in particular of ethnographic scholarship that prioritizes the thoughts and experiences of the generally more marginalized long-term residents of communities undergoing gentrification. Sociologist Mary Pattillo's ethnographic exploration of the experience of gentrification and revitalization from the perspective of both established and newly arriving residents in a Chicago neighborhood—all of whom are African American—is a particularly compelling example of this genre.¹⁰²

A few environmental historians, most notably Joy Parr, have begun to explore the intricacies of how change is experienced and felt and made sense of in particular localized instances of rapid change. Parr's collection of case studies exploring ethnographically and through the analysis of historical records the experience of living through several major structural and environmental changes to the built environment of Canada in the mid-twentieth century stands as an evocative and exquisitely written exploration of the multi-faceted material, affective, and conceptual dimensions of living through those changes for the residents of the communities in question.¹⁰³ Like many of the sociological and geographical studies of "NIMBY" situations and other related types of events mentioned above, however, her work does not specifically target marginalized

¹⁰¹ One of the earliest and best-known works in this quantitatively-oriented environmental justice literature is Robert Bullard's *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

¹⁰² Mary Pattillo, *Black on the Block*.

¹⁰³ Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953-2003* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

residents or marginalized communities, and is more focused on providing fine-grained analysis than on exploring how dynamics of marginalization and change relate to one another. Furthermore, her study does not explicitly consider place as a framework, even as it exists as a kind of unspoken centerpiece of the book.

The novelty of my dissertation project, in contributing to this very large and diverse body of scholarship on place, is twofold. First, I am exploring the ethnographic significance of place in the context of both change and marginalization. And second, I am exploring this dynamic relationally, from the interwoven perspective of how place emerges as a locus of understanding within two differently situated marginalized communities experiencing very different kinds of changes. It is my hope that this dissertation project will represent and encourage a kind of scholarship that makes use of a single initial thematic thread—in this case that of place—to weave together with other key threads a narrative of ever-growing complexity but underlying order, suggesting ultimately the ways in which the familiar can serve to “de-familiarize” and the “de-familiar” can serve to familiarize.

Brief Overview of Remaining Chapters

In chapter two I explore the concept of marginalization in terms of how it relates to place and identity, analyzing my research participants’ articulations of how they understand the role of marginalization in shaping their individual identity and their sense of their community’s collective place-based identity. In chapters three and four I unpack the idea of “common wealth” as suggested by the values expressed by my research participants, orienting each chapter around a particular set of “elements” of common wealth. In chapter three I examine the preservationist value expressed by all of my

research participants, looking at how they articulate it in terms of both historically- and environmentally-oriented preservation. In chapter four I examine my research participants' holistic, broad-based understandings of what characterizes place-based common wealth and how it can best be preserved, nurtured, and generated. And in my concluding chapter, chapter five, I return to the key issues I've discussed in this introduction, exploring how my analyses in chapters two through four have spoken to, elucidated, and in some cases complicated the questions that animate this research project.

Chapter 2: Marginalization, Identity, and Place in Letcher County and Southeast Washington, D.C.

Marginalization is a significant factor shaping life in both Letcher County and Southeast, D.C. It is significant in a demographic and structural sense, as indicated by the measures cited in the previous chapter noting the generally low quality of education, health care, access to adequate housing, and other basic elements of the local social and physical infrastructure in both communities, along with low levels of income and high rates of poverty. Marginalization is also significant in a conceptual sense, in terms of how it shapes residents' understandings of the general marginalization of their community as well as their own individual experience of that marginalization. It is in this conceptual sense that I explore marginalization in this chapter. Whether or not they use the term "marginalization," how do my research participants understand the generally underprivileged status of their community as a whole, and how do they see their own experiences and identities as reflecting that lack of privilege? How does their understanding of "marginalization" and their own experience of it shape their sense of identity? And most importantly, how does place thread through these understandings of marginalization and identity? This chapter is organized thematically by the different place-based lenses my research participants employ in discussing marginalization, identity, and place.

Materialized Marginalization: Topography and Built Environment

Perhaps the most basic way of relating to a place is in terms of one's impression of the materiality that comprises its physical topography and built environment. In my

conversations with my research participants about their feelings toward and experiences with the physical components of their communities, several spoke extensively about their sense of the significance of the concrete materialities of their community, particularly as they relate to, reflect, and actively shape the experience of marginalization.

Topography

In Letcher County, coal miner and former county official Keith speaks about the natural contrast between valley hollows, or hollers, and the summits of the area's small mountains as one of the definitive features of everyday life in this area:

You know, you go up there [to the top of a mountain] and it's flat ground, and to people that live in the hills, flat ground's kindly a novelty, and it's pretty, and, you know, you get grass growin' on it, you can see a long ways, you know. Where I live [in a holler] we never see a sunset, you know. The shade comes over, three or four o'clock, and then it gets dark but we never see the sunset. But up on tops of mountains you can actually see sunsets, and it's pretty nice to go up high and see a sunset, or a sunrise for that matter, and, you know, it's kindly attractive to be up in a place like that.

From Keith's perspective, one's location in Letcher County, and in the eastern Kentucky mountains in general, is always shaped in relation to the nearby mountains—whether one is above, below, or among the mountains. In a literal sense, the ability to see, and the things one is able to see—such as the rising and setting of the sun, or the full horizon—are fully circumscribed by the mountain topography. And the fact that this is a reality of one's field of vision in a mountain landscape also shapes one's reactions to and experiences of the things that can or cannot be seen. As Keith notes, “to people that live in the hills, flat ground's kindly a novelty,” and “it's pretty nice to go up and see sunsets,” since for those who live in hollers (which is the vast majority of Letcher County's residents, and certainly of its middle- and low-income residents) “it gets dark but we never see a sunset.” See Figure 15 below for a view from atop Pine Mountain, the

highest point in Letcher County and a frequently mentioned point of reference by my Letcher County research participants.



Figure 15: View from atop Pine Mountain, showing the hill and valley (holler) geography that characterizes Letcher County. Photo by author.

Interestingly, Keith leads into this meditation on physical perspective in mountain areas via a discussion of some of the effects of mountaintop removal. One of those effects is the elimination of the mountain peaks he describes above and the creation instead of flat ground atop mountains, resulting in plateau-like formations that are denuded of all vegetation except basic grasses. The fact that this kind of completely level landscape and the view it affords is rare in eastern Kentucky is presented by coal industry proponents as a benefit of mountaintop removal. While Keith acknowledges that these high-altitude stretches of level ground can be “kindly a novelty,” and that the vistas visible from them are undoubtedly “pretty,” he rejects the subsequent coal industry argument that flattened

mountaintops can readily serve as sites for new homes and buildings. He contends that “for housing it’s almost useless, you know,” noting that “if you look at where the populations are, they’re all down in the streams. ... that’s where everybody lives, and it’s really hard to live on top of a mountain.” Indeed, the logistics of building in rural mountaintop areas, which include the difficulties of roads, sewer and water systems, and electrical wiring, to say nothing of the subsidence that often takes place when buildings are constructed on reclaimed mountaintop removal sites, renders mountaintop construction more or less unfeasible for all but the very affluent.

In Southeast Washington, D.C., artist and historian Ruth also speaks relationally about viewsapes and vantage points, but in this case in terms of the relationship between Southeast D.C. and the rest of the city, located on the opposite side of the Anacostia River. Highlighting some of the notable features of this community, Ruth suggests that the tree-framed views of the capitol and monuments provided from the hilly terrain of Southeast Washington are one of its more prominent features:

It’s different, and in a way sheltered, but which has this asset, which is the views. And, you know, they’re slowly taking down the trees, as they develop it, because one of the things it’s been known for, it was, I think, the greenest ward in the city at one time, and in a minute it’s gonna be like the Serengeti.

See Figure 16 below for a view of Suitland Parkway and the Buena Vista neighborhood of Southeast D.C. that showcases the verdant hilliness of the area’s landscape.



Figure 16: Suitland Parkway and the Buena Vista neighborhood of Southeast D.C., showcasing the area's verdant and hilly landscape. Photo by author.

Like Keith's description of viewsapes, this excerpt from Ruth is likewise framed in terms of her perspective on the rapid development that is shaping everyday life in Southeast D.C. much in the way that intensified mountaintop removal is shaping everyday life in Letcher County. Suggesting a sense of both past and present marginalization, Ruth and Keith discuss defining and cherished elements of their communities' physical landscapes in terms that are laced with sadness and frustration. This sadness and frustration is borne of the fact that those cherished features are at one level being commodified and figuratively reduced—in the sense of being reduced to talking points in the marketing blitzes surrounding mountaintop removal and urban redevelopment—and at another level, *literally* being reduced to physical non-existence in

the case of both Appalachian mountains and the lived built environment of Southeast D.C.

It is significant that as residents and natives of communities that have faced marginalization historically, both Keith and Ruth discuss these features of their environments from a literally “marginal” position—from the position of looking upon something else from the margins or from outside. In speaking of the concept of “black geographies” as a framework for spatialities of marginalization in black and African American communities throughout the black diaspora, geographers Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods suggest the significance of the “marginal” positioning of black communities and “black geographies,” and potentially of other subaltern groups as well:

One trajectory consists of the ways in which essentialism situates black subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere (on the margin, the underside, outside the normal), a spatial practice that conveniently props up the mythical norm and erases or obscures the daily struggles of particular communities. A second trajectory has to do with how the lives of these subjects demonstrate that “common-sense” workings of modernity and citizenship are worked out, and normalized, through geographies of exclusion, the “literal mappings of power relations and rejections.”¹⁰⁴

These trajectories of marginality and geographies of exclusion are significant in shaping the vantage points from which my research participants speak, as residents of marginal places who are associated with the marginality of those places. These trajectories and geographies are also significant in shaping residents’ perspectives on place, identity, and marginalization—how they conceptualize their own position within these places in ways that are both materially and discursively marginal. And these

¹⁰⁴ Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, ““No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,”” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, eds. McKittrick and Woods (Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007), 4.

trajectories and geographies shape residents' impressions of the materiality of the places themselves—both the physical topography and the built environment.

Built Environment

In the following excerpt, accountant and attorney Michael shares his general love for Victorian-era houses, and his specific love for the Victorian-era houses of the Historic Anacostia neighborhood, which is a designated historic district:

I really love those neighborhoods with the old Victorian houses, but, you know, I'm priced out of all of that right now, so, I wanted something comparable. So one day, you know, I just happened to be driving around Anacostia, and I was like, this is the perfect neighborhood for me, and I decided to move.

Interestingly, in stating that he is “priced out of all of that right now” in reference to “those neighborhoods with the old Victorian houses,” he implies that the Southeast D.C. neighborhood where he now lives, which is comprised precisely of those “old Victorian houses,” is somehow not quite as genuine or authentic a specimen of that type of neighborhood as those of his ideal. He seems to suggest that it is in fact the affordability of his Victorian neighborhood that makes it only “comparable,” or perhaps not as fully representative of this ideal neighborhood type as a more affluent Victorian neighborhood would be. In this explanation of what drew him to Southeast D.C., therefore, we see hints of a simultaneous affirmation and marginalization of the built environment of the community, and potentially of the people and history associated with that built environment. See Figure 17 below for an example of some of the Victorian-era housing in the Anacostia Historic District.



Figure 17: An example of restored Victorian-era rowhouses in the Anacostia Historic District.
Photo by author.

From a different perspective, artist and filmmaker Kwame highlights in the following excerpt the historical pattern of marginalization and neglect that has characterized much of the housing, particularly the public housing, in Southeast D.C.:

And so you come to Barry Farm¹⁰⁵ and you ask Ms. P. [one of the long-time elderly residents], how was Barry Farm when you first moved here? It was like, okay, you know, Barry Farm when I [Ms. P.] first moved here was beautiful, it was community and continuity, it was this and that. And then you look at it now. It's crazy.

He suggests that the state of Barry Farm as a public housing community in its early days—both physically and perhaps socially as well—was far superior to the state it is currently in. Indeed, the severe deterioration of this and other public housing complexes in Southeast D.C. is something mentioned by all four research participants

¹⁰⁵ Barry Farm is a neighborhood in Southeast Washington, D.C. It is known both for the public housing complex that has existed there since 1954, and to which Kwame is referring in the above quotation, and for being the site of a community settled in 1867 by African Americans formerly held as slaves.

there. These complexes are also a perennial focus of local and federal attempts to “improve” and “clean up” the neighborhood, as discussed in the previous chapter. These efforts translate more often than not into the demolition of housing complexes deemed too deteriorated to repair, and the subsequent displacement of many residents. Sadly, this longstanding pattern of disinvestment, neglect, and eventual abandonment and demolition has only been intensified by recent proposals for redevelopment and “revitalization” of the community. See Figure 18 below for an image of the Barry Farm Community housing complex as it currently exists.



Figure 18: Barry Farm Community housing complex as it currently exists. Photo by author.

Like Kwame, retired Letcher County teacher Joyce also notes the effects of abandonment and physical deterioration, and the difficulty of working to improve these conditions, particularly in an area where marginalization and poverty are so omnipresent. The excerpt below comes from her response to a question about some of the ways

residents might support themselves within a local economy that is “post-coal-industry”—whether because of restrictions on mining or because of the depletion of all available coal. She identifies the historical built environment and the many material objects that illuminate the region’s rich cultural heritage as potential economic resources that could be utilized toward cultural tourism. She acknowledges, however, that even small efforts such as this require financial resources that are more often than not lacking:

I have a friend who, she said they would like to put in like a little soup-and-sandwich restaurant in the old C.B. Caudill Store. They would love to put it in there, you know, and have all the old antiques and things that he left [C.B. Caudill], and she said they’d like to put in like a little craft store beside it, you know, kind of like Cracker Barrel on a lesser note. But, you know, it takes a fortune. They’d have to do all kinds of renovations, they’d have to put in a septic system, have to get water in it, so she said it would be at least a \$50-\$75,000 investment, and it’s just hard for ordinary people to have that kind of money, or to take such a chance.

Artist and community organizer Melissa provides an even more striking example of the challenges involved in maintaining the built environment of impoverished and often remotely located coalfields communities, particularly when coal industry activities inflict regular damage on those communities’ built environments. In the excerpt below, she describes some of the damaging effects of mountaintop removal on homes and buildings in her community, and the extent to which experiencing these kinds of assaults on the physical and built environment has come to be seen as commonplace:

But you just don’t even realize that it’s different. It was like this foreign concept to me that people outside of here didn’t automatically know what a miner was when I said it, or had no idea what it felt like for their house to be shaken from an explosion [caused by blasting at nearby mountaintop removal sites]. ... When the explosions happened no one said anything, that was just a way of life. And we lived in a double-wide which made it worse, and then, like, in a way, I think my family blamed themselves because we lived in a double-wide, not a house, and that’s why it was shaken off its foundation easier. My dad drove a coal truck, so, you know, you don’t speak out against what’s putting food on your table.

Melissa weaves together here issues of mountaintop removal's damage both to the built environment and to the cultural and economic environment of the community. While assaulting the physical and built environment of Letcher County, the coal industry also acts as a monopolizing local industry that serves as the area's largest employer while simultaneously failing to provide enough financial compensation to many of its employees—such as Melissa's father—to allow them to live comfortably. And that is to say nothing of the shame and sting of poverty and backwardness that surround the image of the “double-wide” trailer, and the implication that those who cannot afford a conventional house are to be blamed for their own situation. Indeed, as Melissa suggests, her family had internalized some of this vicious and circular illogic of victim-blaming in surmising that having their house repeatedly knocked off its foundation by mountaintop removal blasting was partially their own fault, since they lived in a double-wide trailer. And ultimately, the reality of the abuse inflicted by the coal industry (at multiple levels) dared not be spoken, since her father worked as a coal truck driver, and “you don't speak out against what's putting food on your table.”

It is important that there are virtually no instances of residents of either Letcher County or Southeast D.C. speaking about the physical topography and/or built environment of their communities without doing so in terms of how it has deteriorated or been damaged. Michael's quotation above on Victorian houses is one of the few exceptions to this, but it is still framed in terms of marginality, even if that marginality doesn't relate directly to the physical condition of the built environment. It would be misleading to suggest that residents see nothing in their physical landscape that is positive or beautiful or resonant, however. There are many residents of Letcher County

and of Southeast D.C. who see much in their communities that is or has been or has the potential to be attractive and meaningful and even wealth-generating, but is not currently being stewarded. On the other hand, there are also some residents of Letcher County who see beauty and prosperity in the flattened mountaintops and buildings constructed atop them, and some residents of Southeast D.C. who see beauty and prosperity in the higher-priced condominium and townhome communities increasingly being built in their neighborhoods.

Boundaries: Agents of Marginalization and Differentiation

One element of the conceptual landscapes of these two communities that *is* currently being stewarded is that of boundaries. The concept of boundaries can be understood in a variety of ways. In its most basic material sense, a boundary is some kind of physical separation between people or places. In this formulation, the mountains that dominate Letcher County's landscape, as well as the hills that punctuate Southeast D.C. and the river that separates it from the city's more affluent sectors, are all basic boundaries that characterize life in these two places. Such boundaries may or may not align with political and/or cultural entities, but in many cases they do. Mountain ridges form Letcher County's boundaries with neighboring counties to the north, south, and west, and with the state of Virginia to the east. And in Southeast D.C., the Anacostia River forms the community's border to the north, while the Potomac River separates it from the state of Virginia to the west, though for all practical purposes the inaccessible Bolling Air Force Base separates civilian Southeast Washington from the Potomac.

As noted in the previous chapter, the city of Washington is also subdivided politically into eight wards, which are re-drawn after each census to ensure that each one

represents roughly equal numbers of Washington residents. For the last several decades the two wards that have generally comprised Southeast D.C.—and certainly the Southeast D.C. that is located “east of the river”—have been Wards 7 and 8.¹⁰⁶ Many residents of Southeast D.C. identify strongly with one or both of these wards, and recent ward boundaries have solidified the Anacostia River as the major dividing point between them and the rest of the city. According to social worker and Ward 8 official Sharon, the river is *the* central dividing line between what she considers her community and what she sees as the rest of the city. She refers to her community as “this side of the river” and “over here” throughout our conversations, and also notes the significance of the river in delineating ward boundaries. Says Sharon, “The river clearly divides Ward 8 from the rest of the city. Ward 8 and Ward 7—well part of Ward 7—but Ward 8 in particular because our whole ward is located on this side.” And as noted in the previous chapter, even though I refer to the community I’m exploring as “Southeast D.C.” for the sake of convenience, and because that is how it tends to be represented within the larger Washington, D.C. area, it is important to keep in mind that the moniker “Southeast” does not map seamlessly onto the actual boundaries of Southeast Washington as an official quadrant of the city. Indeed, in response to a question about whether residents of her community think of the parts of the southeast quadrant that are located on the west side of the Anacostia River (such as Capitol Hill and the newly renovated area surrounding the Washington Nationals baseball stadium, which opened in 2008) as part of “their”

¹⁰⁶ For the reasons that all of my research participants reside in (or formerly resided in) Ward 8, and that the major redevelopment projects in this area are also located in Ward 8, I have focused on that community in particular (specifically with reference to the demographic data presented in the previous chapter) as opposed to both Wards 7 and 8, even though both are part of the area known as “Southeast D.C.” or “East of the River.”

community, Sharon gives an emphatic no.¹⁰⁷ “But it’s so funny you should ask that,” she continues, “because Ward 8 is actually divided into Southeast and Southwest, and a lot of people even here don’t know that.”

In a somewhat similar vein, Letcher County entrepreneur Theresa emphasizes the significance of the political boundary lines that separate county from county and state from state in rural eastern Kentucky, particularly in terms of how one’s home county confers a sense of identity or ownership, or lack thereof, upon residents:

A lot of people here, my relationship with Whitesburg is funny, because a lot of people completely assume that I’m an outsider, cause I don’t have very much of an accent, and they don’t know my family, they don’t have anywhere to place me, and they’re always like, Oh, where are you from? And I’m like, Wise County.¹⁰⁸ And then they’re like, Oh. Wait, what? And then there’s still like an outsider thing because it’s not Letcher County, but it’s, you know, enough that you count.

Several elements of this quotation from Theresa are worth elaborating upon. First, in laying out the reasons she understands her relationship with Whitesburg to be “funny,” she dives headfirst into the elaborate and complicated metrics that determine insider and outsider status in small rural areas such as Letcher County. Furthermore, her use of the term “outsider,” and of phrases such as “they don’t have anywhere to place me” and “it’s ... enough that you count,” suggests the significance of this boundary-oriented component of Letcher County identity. Official political boundaries are obviously of great significance, since the fact that Theresa hails originally from a different county means “there’s still like an outsider thing because it’s not Letcher

¹⁰⁷ See the D.C. quadrant map in Figure 12 on page 34 for a view of how the city’s southeast quadrant encompasses territory both east (primarily) and west (a small chunk) of the Anacostia River.

¹⁰⁸ Wise County, Virginia borders Letcher County on its southeastern side, and is very similar in terms of its socioeconomics and its geography. It is, nonetheless, still a different county, and furthermore, part of a different state.

County,” even if it’s “enough that you count.” The word “count” in this sense suggests a degree of acceptance based on a kind of shared local or regional identity.

Also very important, however, are the less tangible kinds of “boundaries” that people create to differentiate members of “their” community from members of some “other” community. Of these, Theresa mentions accent and dialect, familiarity with one’s social and familial networks, and a more generalized ability to “place” the people in the community in terms of specifically where they live and to whom they relate. From her perspective, she is seen in her community as enough of an outsider that she cannot always easily be “placed,” yet enough of an insider that she can be acknowledged as a member of a kind of extended, if less intimately known, regional family.

Accent and other subtle markers are also considered significant in Southeast D.C. in terms of how they signify a person’s relationship to the community. Sharon suggests that most residents of Southeast D.C. do not identify themselves as being “from” Southeast D.C., “because Southeast can also be Capitol Hill” or others among a growing number of newly affluent areas of Washington located within the southeast quadrant but west of the Anacostia River, as noted above. She adds a caveat to this rule, however, grounded in the subtleties of everyday language:

And so, it’s kind of funny, but it’s true; they refer to this area as *Sou-feast*, because some people don’t speak “the King’s English.” So rather than saying *Southeast* they say *Sou-feast*. “F”-e-a-s-t. So when you say it like that, then it’s okay.

Sharon uses the phrase “then it’s okay” to describe the import of the subtle difference between standard, “King’s English” pronunciations of the word “southeast” and the pronunciation characteristic to Southeast D.C. Those who use the local pronunciation of “Sou-**Feast**” indicate that they have some degree of insider cultural

knowledge, and can thus be categorized as “okay,” just as Theresa can be categorized as “count[ing]” in Letcher County. Markers such as accent and dialect suggest familiarity with the social and demographic boundaries of marginalized communities such as these, and as such are very significant in determining where one falls on the spectrum of insider and outsider status.

Marginalization and Insider-Outsider Constructions

Threaded through this discussion and the quotations cited above has been the subject of one’s status relative to the community in terms of insider standing. To speak of boundaries and definitions at all, of course—whether tangible or intangible, official or unofficial—is already to speak implicitly of insider and outsider status. Indeed, to be “within” the boundaries or definitions of any entity is to suggest that there is necessarily a counterpart existing “with-out” the specified boundaries and definitions. The concept of insider and outsider status will continue to be a central frame of reference for my research participants, particularly in terms of how they make sense of their own identity and marginalization vis a vis their perceptions of others in their community.

Place-Based Marking

I argue that it is precisely *because* of the historical marginalization that has characterized life in these two places, and the discursive constructions that have given rise to stigmatizing representations and stereotypes, that the notion of assigning and negotiating insider and outsider status becomes such a pertinent issue. In Letcher County and Southeast D.C., and in other communities that have been marginalized and stigmatized both materially and discursively, association with these communities carries a great deal of significance. Indeed, places such as these vary from mainstream, middle-

class America and from mainstream, middle-class global society today in ways that engender the complex and heady brew of fascination, contempt, mystique, pity, exoticization, and problematizing that has historically “othered” places and given them the so-called “color” that more mainstream places are not thought to possess.¹⁰⁹

The people who are born into or choose to live in “othered,” “underdog” places such as these, therefore, tend to be marked by them, much in the way that race, class, gender, sexuality, and other components of identity “mark” those who represent the “different” or “other” expression of each of those features.¹¹⁰ In the case of place-based marking such as this, it is the marginality attached to the place and its representations that also attaches to the people who are of and within that place. And as I noted above, that marginality—as understood and defined by those who reside in the more mainstream “center”—is intimately interconnected with desires, fears, curiosities, and nostalgia regarding “otherness.” The marginality of communities such as these—of which rural, low-income Appalachian communities and urban, low-income African American communities are prime examples—seems to suggest a materiality, a rawness and grittiness, a kind of cultural or even spiritual authenticity and purity that is seen as lacking in other places.

Such associations with place-based marginality admittedly tell us more about the identities of the people making the associations than the marginalized people themselves. Nevertheless, in the iterative circular fashion in which discourse and culture function, these associations do matter for the people who live as the representation of them. Indeed,

¹⁰⁹ See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

¹¹⁰ For more on this “othering” process and its damaging effects, see Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). Also useful is Edward Soja’s recent work on spatiality as an important component of identity: Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

they matter both in terms of residents' own perceptions of their identity and the identity of their place, and they matter in terms of how the associations affect the material realities of life in that place. To be associated with a marginal place such as this, as all of my research participants are, is to be marked from the outside with the "place-ness" of the place—its discursive adhesive power—and as a result, residents' constructions of identity become inextricably intertwined with constructions of what it means to be marginalized and othered via place.

The complex and mutually reinforcing process of interchange between place-based marking that is imposed from the outside and place-based constructions that emerge from residents themselves suggests the difficulty of escaping dichotomies of inside and outside, of self and other, and of structure and agency when engaging with issues of place and identity. Indeed, even in framing these communities as "marginalized," as I am doing in this dissertation, I am imposing a spatial metaphor that implies a separation between center and margin. My goal here is not to deconstruct the metaphor, though, useful as that may ultimately be, but rather to demonstrate its ongoing salience for residents of communities such as these. Notions of belonging, ownership, and authenticity become very important for the residents featured here as they discuss their understandings of identity, marginalization, and place in relation to their communities.

Ownership, Belonging, and Authenticity

While several of my research participants explicitly reference their own place-based identity as a kind of balancing between insider and outsider status in their community, Theresa explores it more explicitly and robustly than any of the others. In the

following excerpt, she provides a sophisticated overview of the many dimensions of the dynamic in Letcher County of insider and outsider, both as she experiences it herself and as she understands the process in general:

I think about this all the time, I mean, as soon as you were saying what your project was all about, I was like, cause I think about it, talk about it, I'm always actively engaged with this question, and a lot of my sort of peers and friends are, too, you know. We really, really talk about what does it mean to be from here, those of us who are from here. We talk about what does it mean to come into this place if you're not from here and the sort of insider outsider dynamic and how does that function, who owns it and who can define it, I mean it's the most meaty question. And I think the whole, this region's history and the coalfields history being so complicated and so kind of, I mean, being so routinely fucked by outsiders, (laughing) for lack of a more nuanced way to say that, that of course this place has an incredibly fraught relationship with the idea of from here or not from here, and how is that defined, and how that plays out in daily life. So it's really, you know, this is a very active conversation in everybody's lives, and some people are maybe more aware of how active the conversation is in their lives, but, it's a constant kind of awareness and navigation.

It is clear from this excerpt that notions of insider and outsider status, and of “the idea of from here or not from here,” are of considerable significance and interest for Theresa. As someone who has experienced the “insider’s view” of growing up in the Appalachian coalfields as well as the “outsider’s view” of venturing to New England to attend college and live for a year following college, Theresa has certainly experienced this as an active dynamic in her own experiences. Furthermore, she also maintains regular familiarity with the process of interaction that takes place between both the long-term and short-term residents of Letcher County who mingle together in her bar and coffee shop and continually negotiate and reformulate the axes of insider-ness and outsider-ness as it pertains to this community. While she occupies a uniquely informed position for observing and negotiating these issues, it is also clear that she is only one of many residents who regularly wrestle with and analyze these highly “fraught” and “meaty

question[s],” even if, as she suggests, “some people are maybe more aware of how active the conversation is in their lives.”

Theresa’s quotation above also identifies two of the key power dynamics that lie at the heart of this discourse of insider and outsider status in Letcher County: first, the question of “who owns it [the identity of this place] and who can define it;” and second, the historical pattern of “being so routinely fucked by outsiders” as a critical foundation for the enduring resonance of this issue in Letcher County and the Appalachian coalfields as a whole. Both of these power dynamics—one grounded in claiming and defining identity and the other in historical patterns of exploitation and marginalization—relate closely to issues of ownership. Residents of Letcher County and the surrounding areas have long been constricted and oppressed by powerful outside forces, and as a result they view the solidity of their ownership of their community as tenuous, and thus in need of fierce maintenance and protection.

Melissa also speaks frequently and eloquently about the insider-outsider discourse in Letcher County, and about the power dynamics that continue to animate it. In the following excerpt, she discusses the concepts of authenticity and belonging as they play out in the context of interactions between “native” eastern Kentuckians and newer, usually temporary residents, who come through the area briefly for purposes of study or activism:

I want all this attention on it and I want people to realize what’s going on [mountaintop removal and other issues of social and environmental justice that often draw volunteers, activists, and organizers to eastern Kentucky], but I also don’t understand like how people can come in and work without, there’s this movement going on I feel like where people come in and they want, it’s almost like they want the identity of being from here. Like it’s people coming here searching for an Appalachian identity that’s not really theirs, and almost like this thing where “I’ve been here and I’ve done this and you haven’t and I’m not even

from your community,” and, you know, it’s almost like this arrogance that you deserve the Appalachian title more than I do even though I’ve lived here my entire life, because maybe I haven’t read this Appalachian author or maybe I haven’t, you know, dressed a certain way.

The visitors and temporary residents Melissa mentions above are not exploiting Appalachian resources and well-being in the bald and brutal manner of the industries themselves; in fact, they often come to the region with the intention of working *against* the exploitation and destruction of these industries. Nevertheless, as Melissa notes, the issue of cultural exploitation is a much thornier one, and one that has shaped Appalachian life for almost as long as the more obvious exploitation of mining and other extractive industries.

Missionaries, teachers, and social workers have been coming to Appalachia since the late-nineteenth-century, as have scholars and aficionados of traditional Appalachian music and other elements of its folk culture, which have long been a source of fascination to mainstream American society.¹¹¹ With each generation of visitors, however, there arises a similar set of tensions over what amounts to a kind of commodification of Appalachian identity—the conversion of the cultural “trappings” of Appalachian identity and “authenticity” into a kind of cultural currency that non-Appalachian visitors can experience or even graft onto their own identities before returning home. While this may be a “real” process of identity transformation in one sense, it causes problems and concerns for residents. Most notably, outsiders can do all of this without having to work through the very real material negotiations of identity, loyalty, and belonging that face residents who cannot leave, or choose not to leave, at the end of a summer or work term

¹¹¹ See David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) and Allen Batteau, *The Invention of Appalachia* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

or research visit. This is a particularly salient point when visitors practice civil disobedience in ways that potentially causes harm to low-income workers; for example, disabling mining equipment or blocking entry to a mining operation. As Melissa points out in the quotation below, those who have fewer stakes in the day-to-day struggles over social and economic well-being in Letcher County can afford to take more risks in their activism, and indeed, they aren't compelled to consider the immediate and unintended consequences of such efforts:

You can come in and you can do so much civil disobedience and you can do so much protesting and cause so much of a stir and emotional mess that, but in the end you get to leave, you get a plane ticket out, and I have to stay here and be against coal mining and deal with whatever bad baggage you've left behind. ... I think if people want to come in and help it's needed, I think there just needs to be this acknowledgement that you can't come in and *take* the identity, you can't come in and *force* a lifestyle. You have to listen to what's going on and you have to work *with* who's here, and you have to encourage people, because otherwise you're fighting everyone.

In both this excerpt and the previous one, Melissa implies a kind of figurative "theft" of local identity, a theft that relates in complex ways to the commodification of identity that I suggested above. It relates, first, to the practice of visitors assigning standards of authenticity to particular notions of Appalachian identity. As Melissa suggests, "it's almost like this arrogance that you deserve the Appalachian title more than I do even though I've lived here my entire life, because maybe I haven't read this Appalachian author or maybe I haven't, you know, dressed a certain way." And it relates, second, to the assumption that having set the standards of authentic local identity, one can claim that identity for oneself, as Melissa describes: "I've been here and I've done this and you haven't and I'm not even from your community."

Axes of Identity and Marginalization

Critical to the discourse of insider-outsider differentiation is the longstanding marginalization that characterizes life in both Southeast D.C. and Letcher County and helps generate power differentials both among residents and between residents and outsiders. Earlier in this chapter I spoke about certain places and regions being deemed “marginal” or “other” by mainstream culture and discourse, but of course this process does not happen in a vacuum. Places are defined as marginal and other, and subjected to marginalized treatment, because of complex practices of power allocation that are justified in the name of recognizing and protecting markers of identity such as race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and others. More specifically, these practices of power allocation are justified in the name of recognizing and protecting the *normalized* version of each marker of identity—i.e. whiteness, middle-class-ness, maleness, straightness, cisgenderedness, etc.¹¹² Those places that are or historically have been inhabited by people who do not represent the normalized version of these identity markers—often in multiple and overlapping ways—are the places that tend to be deemed marginal. This is one of the primary reasons that marginalization and identity are so closely intertwined.

Residents of each community, as represented by my research participants, understand and define the marginalization that exists within their communities in different ways. There is wide variation from person to person, and some general variation from place to place. Nevertheless, there is a common thread that involves centering their formulations of marginalization and identity with a complex, subtle, and wide-ranging amalgamation of identity factors that is perhaps best captured by the catch-all term of

¹¹² Omi and Winant’s concept of racial formation is useful here in understanding how all markers of identity interact with power and normativity: Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

“status.” While the residents featured here do speak occasionally in the more precise and discrete terminology of “race,” “class,” “gender,” and “age/generational difference” in particular, they more often combine elements of these categories in ways that are specific to their community, and sometimes even to their individual experiences. Ultimately, their own formulations of these power-based identity categories are grounded more in their sense of where power lies than in whether or not that power lies in conventional identity-based differentiations or not.

While remaining attentive to the ways in which my research participants articulate their notions of identity and marginalization, and the specific language that they use to do so, I also attempt to read between the lines and tease out their allusions—some veiled and others perhaps subconsciously expressed—to the categories of race, class, and age or generational difference. In the sections below, I examine the following categories of identity: age and longevity of residence in the community, race, and class. I explore them in terms of how they serve, along with other categories of identity, as axes along which the insider-outsider dynamic is positioned, and along which notions of belonging, ownership, and authenticity are negotiated.

Age and Length of Residence

In Southeast D.C., notions of belonging and ownership crop up frequently during conversations about local identity and community engagement, particularly around the issue of longevity in the community. One of the central fault lines along which residents align themselves and their fellow residents has to do with time and “age”—both in the sense of literal age and of length of time living in Southeast D.C. Southeast D.C. has long

been a site of regular movements of populations in and out,¹¹³ but since roughly the mid-twentieth-century, the people moving in have rarely done so by choice, and the people moving out have almost always done so by choice. It is only within the last decade that a significant number of people with the affluence and means to exercise choice in deciding where they will live have begun to move *into* Southeast D.C. For existing and longer-term residents, recognizing that their community suddenly seems to be desirable to newcomers with means has entailed a shift in residents' own sense of local identity, and in their sense of what their position in the community is and might possibly become. Their well-worn notions of who the people in the community are, how they relate to each other, and what it means to live here, to come here, or to leave here all must be reformulated. Indeed, their sense of what the pressing challenges in the community are and who is most deserving of resources to address those various challenges must also be reformulated. The questions and the discomfort that have accompanied the process of gentrification since it first emerged as a significant and intensifying feature of the urban landscape in the West relate to the fact that at its roots, gentrification uncovers the pulsing heartbeat of power that beats within any community, regardless of how poor or disenfranchised or marginalized it may be. It uncovers the power of ownership, and in an ironic twist, taps it as one last extractive resource before ultimately taking control of the community. Marginalized and disadvantaged as they are, the large low-income population of Southeast D.C. can at least claim its ownership of Southeast D.C. as "our community," as "our place." But when that identity and sense of "our-ness" begins to be claimed and potentially usurped by new residents, and significantly by more affluent new

¹¹³ See demographic history outlined in chapter one.

residents with greater access to both material and discursive resources, problems arise. These new claims on the community raise questions of how power and identity work together, and of whether sharing one's place-based identity with newcomers who bring a much greater power differential to the table poses risks for those being asked to share.

All four of my Southeast D.C. research participants speak at length about the significance of differences within the community based on age and length of residence in Southeast D.C. Their perspectives and emphases vary, however. Both Sharon and Ruth express frustration with what they see as a kind of attempted redefinition of local identity by those who are recent arrivals to the community. They find this attempt at redefining local identity especially troubling because they tend to perceive the newcomers as more invested in younger residents than with those who are older or who have lived in the community for longer. Sharon uses the terms “established residents” and “newbies” to distinguish between long-time and newer residents, and while “newbies” is not necessarily a derogatory term, it carries considerably less authority than the term “established residents.” Her discussions of community members also suggest that assumptions and stereotypes about age play a part in this distinction. While there are plenty of young “established residents” in Southeast D.C., there are very few older or even middle-aged “newbies,” so the conversation is often construed as one between “young” newbies and “older” established residents, and Sharon counts herself among this second group. In the quotation below, she explains her perspectives on age and community interaction, and on how she perceives them to be understood by newer residents:

...Subsequently this new River East Emerging Leaders [REEL] group cropped up, and I think the only thing about that group that bothered me, because I don't

have a problem with young people stepping up to the plate, because at some point we will all, the old guard will all be retired and dead. So, I don't have a problem with that, but I think the thing that bothered me the most was, I was in a meeting, they were talking, there was a gentleman talking about REEL, and a woman about my age asked about it, and he said, You can't join because you're too old. So, that's just, I found that very unpalatable. And, just sort of, that creates resentment, you know? Cause we have always made an effort to work with everybody.

It is apparent from this quotation that Sharon, and presumably others like her, feel stung by some of the activities of the newer, mostly younger cadre of residents increasingly coming to Southeast D.C., and in particular that they feel hurt by the lack of inclusion of residents of all ages in some of those activities. Furthermore, since most of the established residents who are active in community life tend to be somewhat older, and since the “newbies” who are active in community life are almost all younger, this age differentiation within groups such as REEL does also constitute a kind of de facto differentiation on the basis of their length of residence in Southeast D.C.

Ruth, who no longer actually resides in Southeast D.C. but grew up there and still participates actively in community activities, is also troubled by the growing prominence of community members who have shallow roots in the community. Her concern, however, is more about the new residents' perspective, or lack thereof, on the rich and complex set of experiences and conditions that have characterized life in Southeast D.C. over the last two centuries. She feels that in a community such as Southeast D.C., with its complex history of marginalization and also of great struggle and triumph against that marginalization, it is foolish and selfish to neglect the systems and narratives and personalities that animated the community in the past and that serve as the grounds—whether for better or worse—on and within which all action today takes place. She views many of the newer residents as lacking interest in or engagement with the history of the

community, and she sees this as a kind of willful blindness to the difficulties of life in Southeast D.C. for much of its history, and to the strength and resilience of the people who resided there and dealt with those difficulties. Says Ruth of the newer residents, many of whom live in the Anacostia Historic District, “You’re interested in what you’re doing now, you’re interested in the fact that you live in a historic district, but you’re not interested *in the history*.” She elaborates below on her impression that many of the newer residents see history as more of an exploitable or marketable resource than as a source of engagement, connection, and identity:

And so you have folks who are moving in now, ... like the folks in Historic Anacostia, the REEL, or whatever they call themselves. They know they’re in a historic district, but they don’t really know why it’s historic, but they come in wanting to change the name, and change other things, you know.

The concept of history, and indeed the ways in which it is bound up with ideas of memory, heritage, and preservation is a common thread throughout the interviews with research participants in both locations. In much the same way that marginalization inflects local identity, it also very strongly inflects local history. And for Ruth in particular, “history” encompasses a broad array of place-based attributes and is perhaps *the* central concept in the panoply of place-based narratives and constructions. In this sense, her criticism of the newer residents’ appreciation for the materiality of Southeast D.C.’s history is a strong one indeed.

Michael is one of those “newbies” who have recently moved into Southeast D.C. with an explicit desire to engage in community life in ways they see as capitalizing on their youth, energy, and dedication to their new community. In the following excerpt, he provides a kind of unwitting rejoinder to longer-term residents’ criticisms. As a founding member of REEL, his perspective is that engagement of young people is a

primary goal of the group, and thus functions not as a mechanism to exclude older residents but as a mechanism to energize younger residents:

We've had a heart-to-heart conversation about who we are as an organization, and we're comfortable with that. I think we're starting to become comfortable that we are a new, young, fresh, energetic-type group that is primarily focused on young people, and that's fine, you know, we're okay with that. And I think we're gonna continue to make that our target group. Now the goal is to continue to get new, young people, but also to reach out to old, young people, you know, younger folks that have been here, born and raised here, been here for a while.

Michael also suggests that generational and age-based differences are not as pronounced among residents of Southeast D.C. as some of the established residents indicate, and that the differences that do exist are minor challenges within the larger framework of achieving what he sees as near-universal desires for neighborhood improvement:

Cause the reality is, whether you moved here two weeks ago or you've been here for thirty years and graduated from Ballou High School,¹¹⁴ whatever, the one thing that we all have in common is that we want the neighborhood to improve. How we get there, we all differ on that.

Regardless of some genuinely shared hopes and visions for the future of Southeast D.C., the issue of power is difficult to sidestep when the identity of the community is in such flux. The sense of ownership, belonging, and authority associated with local identity, particularly in the context of marginalization and neglect, is a powerful thing. That sense of ownership, belonging, and authority generally needs to be “earned” in some way, whether that be via time in the community or evidence of participation in it. Even when the sense of ownership and authority is indeed “earned,” however, that is no guarantee that interactions among people who find themselves at widely differing points on the spectrum of longevity and participatory “seniority” can be

¹¹⁴ Ballou High School is a public high school located east of the Anacostia River, in Ward 8.

negotiated without strife, even if their end goals coincide. The fact that Michael is a member of a group that highlights age as a central feature of its mission suggests that Sharon, Ruth, and other longer-term residents are right to view age and longevity as factors that do carry weight and resonance within the community's power structures.

Race

One of the most central marginalizing factors in most places, certainly in the United States and other former colonies or slave-holding states, and in states with significant levels of immigration, is race. Indeed, in today's mobile society worldwide, it is difficult to find a place where the differences in power as marked by race and the residue of Western colonialism and orientalism have not left their mark. However, there are areas where race matters more obviously than others, and certainly there are areas where the people who live there believe that race matters more, or in other cases, less. Unsurprisingly, in the U.S. it is almost always the places with larger populations of non-white people that tend to recognize and discuss race more fully. Southeast D.C., as a place that has been predominantly African American in a majority white region for the last half-century, is in general a place where people speak more frequently about race and with a greater sense of its significance than in a place such as Letcher County, where the population has been predominantly white for the last few centuries. This is the case notwithstanding significant pockets of African American populations in certain Appalachian coalfields communities, in addition to pockets of non-Anglo white groups—such as Southern and Eastern Europeans—that were more recently admitted into the “white” category. Latinos also constitute a rapidly growing segment of the Appalachian population. Amidst the contentious contemporary politics of the so-called “post-racial

era,” however, and the increasing tendency to dismiss any policy that acknowledges race as an undeserved “racial entitlement,” there are growing numbers of people even in an overwhelmingly African American area such as Southeast D.C. who dismiss the overriding significance of race, or who are increasingly uncomfortable speaking about it, at least in the presence of a white outsider. Nevertheless, race is most definitely still viewed as an important factor in shaping everyday life in Southeast D.C., and in shaping the ongoing process of marginalization that affects life there.

For two of my Southeast D.C. research participants in particular, race as an omnipresent framework for interpreting everyday life (in Southeast D.C. and elsewhere) is very much at the core of their thinking. As an artist and writer who devotes most of her time to collecting, preserving, and sharing the memories and histories of African Americans in Southeast D.C., Ruth is very attuned to the role of race in shaping virtually every aspect of life in this area, and particularly in this area prior to desegregation. The following excerpt reveals some of her perspectives on race, place, and history:

That was the intent [of her recently published book] was to show that this was one neighborhood in one place that is representative of our neighborhoods all over the country, and that we did not live in a vacuum. All these places worked together and were related somehow or another, in the entire scheme of black life in America, and that we are being judged, our history is being judged, or related, for that matter, as a series of unrelated events! And people who just happened to be, who lived in Ohio just happened to do this and who lived over here and just happened to do, I mean, we were all connected, we all knew what everybody else was doing, and we all worked together, and that’s what I’m trying to show. That this wasn’t an aberration. This was the way we lived.

Ruth views her work as part of a larger effort to share and connect the histories of pre-Civil Rights-era African American communities across the country so that local African American histories can be seen as less isolated both from each other and from the more mainstream narratives of American history. In this sense, we can see that her

understanding of place is tightly interwoven with her understanding of race, and in particular with her understanding of how racial formation over time has shaped African American experiences in this country. Furthermore, place functions for her both as a specific location—her home community of Southeast D.C., mainly in its Segregation- and Civil Rights era-guises—and as a multi-locational “community” of African Americans across the country.

Ruth does not often speak in terms of the diversity that exists within African American communities and experiences—for instance, how the experiences of African American women have differed from those of men, how the experiences of working-class or impoverished African Americans have differed from those of affluent professionals, how queer African Americans would have had vastly different experiences from straight African Americans, etc. Her approach to race, place, and history is still insurgent, nevertheless, in the sense that it places race and racial formation at its center. Furthermore, it also privileges small-scale, local histories and perspectives, as opposed to the conventional large-scale, broad-strokes emphasis of most mainstream historical narratives. Her emphasis on highlighting the experiences of everyday African Americans in average communities rather than spotlighting only a small and exceptional segment of the black elite also represents an insurgent approach to history.

Filmmaker and artist Kwame is also keenly aware of the significance of race in shaping the history and present state of Southeast D.C. and other places that have been marginalized on the basis of race. In the following excerpt, he provides a thorough overview of his perspective on how African American and other minority communities

throughout the country have been manipulated and stymied by mainstream power structures, from their earliest days up to the present:

So, like with the whole situation in Barry Farm, the impact of the drugs and the violence that was designed and created and socially engineered has left them in the destitution that they are in, but they came from one of the pillars of our history, to show what can be done with opportunity, space and opportunity. And it reminds me of Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1921. You know how you got Little China, Little Italy in New York, and stuff like that? You had Little Africa in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where they had a community full of African descendants, all schools, hospitals, businesses, it was all people of African descent, you know. And then people would come in and try to infiltrate that, [and residents were] just like, “We’re doin’ fine, We’re good,” you know, and they wouldn’t let anybody penetrate their economic infrastructure. Police came in, weren’t successful in dismantling it, and KKK came, weren’t successful. The US military bombed that city in 1921, dropped bombs and burned the city, just for people survivin’ and livin’ a wholesome life. See what I’m sayin’? So this is the kinda shit we’re really dealin’ with, so it’s like, really, what the hell do I gotta do to live? So, through our history things have been socially engineered, and Barry Farm represents one of those communities that through policy and social design, these people’s welfare has been undermined. That’s where we are today.

Kwame makes use of his art and documentary projects, as well as his local community activism and social justice work, to bring attention to and work to lessen the dehumanizing effects of marginalization of all kinds. It is clear that race—as a key means of enabling certain groups to subjugate and exercise power over other groups—is a primary element of his understanding of marginalization. From his perspective, one cannot understand the dynamics of day-to-day life in Southeast D.C. and other racially marginalized communities—particularly in terms of the complex historical processes of racial formation that undergird its present state—without understanding the profound role of race-based marginalization.

Social worker Sharon does not speak as frequently or as fervently about race as a factor of marginalization, but she discusses it nonetheless, and her comments underscore just how fundamental the demographic dominance of African Americans in Southeast

D.C. has become over the last fifty years as an element of local identity. In the following excerpt, quoted earlier, she comments on racial identity in Southeast D.C. in the context of the growing presence of gentrification in the community:

Any Black person in this community would tell you the same thing. We will be driving, I will be driving down the street, and I still say, “Oh my God, there’s a white person running with their dog!” I mean, because you’re not used to seeing it; it was never like that before! And they’re in the stores, in the grocery stores. And here lately we’ve also seen more Hispanic families in the ward [Ward 8].

Sharon’s shock at the sheer aesthetic discrepancy of seeing white people in her community, and white people not simply visiting or passing through but doing the kinds of things that residents do—buying groceries, walking their dog, going for a run, etc.—is evidence of the significance of race in Southeast D.C. This is particularly true given that the larger Washington, D.C. metro area is relatively mixed racially. It would not be unusual to see a cornucopia of people of different racial identities in many other places in the region, particularly within the city itself, but Southeast D.C. is unique as an area that has for several decades now had a super-majority of African Americans. Indeed, as suggested by several of my Southeast D.C. research participants, the intersections between race-based marginalization, class-based marginalization, and place- and geography-based marginalization in this community have combined in recent decades to create a community that is on the disadvantaged end of the power spectrum according to almost any metric applied to it. And to the extent that power is wrapped up in each of these factors of marginalization, perhaps especially with race, it is not surprising that a sudden shift in racial demographics is going to shock and unsettle long-term residents.

Accountant and attorney Michael echoes Sharon’s sense that increasing numbers of white residents is a source of shock for longer-term African American residents of

Southeast. He suggests further that it is generally not a welcome development. According to Michael, “I can tell you for a fact that the established resident in Southeast does not want more white people in the community.” “They want homeowners in the community,” he continues, “but they don’t necessarily want them to be white.” Michael chuckles knowingly as he utters this last sentence, also suggesting the longstanding power dynamics that make upsetting the balance of African Americans and whites in this area a particularly contentious prospect.

As far as his own views on race and the increasing numbers of white residents, however, Michael is ambivalent and even conflicted. “I want a more diverse neighborhood,” he says, “but, you know, I encourage my African American friends to move to the neighborhood.” He continues, “Cause it really doesn’t matter what color you are,” adding that “It’s about, are you gonna be a good neighbor.” In his above statement, Michael shifts from saying, first, that he wants a more diverse neighborhood (which would imply fewer African Americans proportional to the numbers of residents of other racial backgrounds), to saying next that he values the presence of increasing numbers of African Americans in the neighborhood, to saying finally that “it really doesn’t matter what color you are.” Clearly, from Michael’s perspective, what color you are as a resident of Southeast D.C. both does and does not matter.

Some of his ambivalence regarding race may also relate to the fact that as a young, affluent “newbie” to the community, and one specifically drawn by the affordable cost of historic homes, Michael is a prime example of the emerging face of gentrification in Southeast D.C. Unlike gentrification as it is usually understood in Western contexts—as being instigated and led primarily by affluent white people—the emerging trend of

gentrification in Southeast D.C. is an almost exclusively African American phenomenon, at least for the moment. As such, perspectives on the process of gentrification taking place in Southeast D.C. are invariably inflected with complex concatenations of overlapping race- and class-based discourses and stereotypes. Race is no longer the primary axis differentiating gentrifiers from long-term residents, but it nonetheless still stands as a silent subtext of conversations on age, class, and other axes of differentiation within gentrifying communities. Race is thus very much an important component of Michael's understanding of identity in Southeast D.C., even if he approaches it ambivalently. And as with my other research participants, the fact that race matters is evidenced by the fact that it can generate such a wide and sometimes shifting range of perspectives.

Race matters greatly in Letcher County as well, but it is articulated differently and with much less regularity. Eastern Kentucky is a region that tends to be predominantly white, and with whiteness acting as the mainstream, normative racial ascription within Western society, it is easy for residents of Letcher County and other predominantly white communities to neglect race as a framework of their everyday experiences, since it is not something that most of them must actively confront on a regular basis. Race is also very rarely implicated in the power structures that shape and marginalize a place like Letcher County, and Appalachian identity—both in its insider and outsider constructions—has a historically fraught relationship with the concept of race. Indeed, for all of their historical and ongoing marginalization, Appalachian residents have also been somewhat positively romanticized and mythologized, particularly in terms of the relationship between their whiteness and their poverty. White,

Appalachian poverty is in general presented in mainstream popular discourses as more noble than urban, African American poverty. This is not to suggest, however, that this romanticizing and mythologizing has had beneficial consequences for Appalachians; on the contrary, it has mystified the actual combination of racial and class-based discourses that work in tandem with structural exploitation to marginalize Appalachian residents (along with urban African Americans). It has also allowed the heavy racial undertones of such discriminatory labels as “white trash” and “hillbillies” to remain at best unexamined and at worst, completely dismissed.¹¹⁵

For all of these reasons, my Letcher County research participants mention race infrequently. When they do reference it, it is generally only tangentially, such as Theresa’s mention of it in the context of encouraging and cultivating different kinds of diversity in her coffee shop, and Keith’s mention of it in terms of his efforts as county judge executive to combat racism. While race obviously matters more in the structuring of everyday life in Letcher County than these brief mentions suggest, it also matters that race is not understood by most residents to be a significant component of the particular matrix of marginalization and identity that characterizes life there, especially when approached from the vantage point of place. The primary “difference” that is seen by residents as marginalizing Letcher County, both historically and today, is not race, but rather a complex of interwoven measures of class, status, and socioeconomic level.

¹¹⁵ See the following works for thoughtful explorations of race in the Appalachian context: Barbara Ellen Smith, “De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10 (2004): NA; Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); and William M. Drennen Jr. and Kojo (William T.) Jones Jr., *Red White Black & Blue: A Dual Memoir of Race and Class in Appalachia*, ed. Dolores M. Johnson (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

Significantly, this complex is also seen as a primary “difference” characterizing life in Southeast D.C., and will be the subject of the next section.

Class/Status

My usage of the terms “class” and “status,” particularly as they relate to place and identity, derives conceptual inspiration from the following reflections on class by geographers Nancy Duncan and Stephen Legg:

A revamped cultural geographic perspective on class and related processes could prove useful in the search for richer understandings of day-to-day practices and material conditions of power, exploitation, and oppression as they work out in particular places and as they participate in the production of particular places and relationships between places.¹¹⁶

This complex of “class and related processes” takes on added complexity in both locations because it functions not simply as a means of differentiating insiders from outsiders, as race has tended to do in both places, but as a means of separating insiders from each other. Therefore, there is a certain acceptance (more grudging by some than others) in both places of a level of overall working-class status, and even poverty, as part of the generalized sense of collective local identity. Indeed, much of this relates to the ways in which both areas have been characterized as marginal places by mainstream, middle-class, white conventions. Furthermore, local elites in both places sometimes capitalize on the gritty “authenticity” and “exoticism” that are associated with outsider constructions of marginalized local identity in their communities. The sale of “hillbilly” or “redneck” memorabilia is an example of this commodification of marginalization and overall poverty that sometimes takes place in Letcher County; another example is elite local coal company officials purporting to be the standard-bearers of authentic

¹¹⁶ Nancy Duncan and Stephen Legg, “Social Class,” in *A Companion to Social Geography*, eds. James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, and Richard H. Schein (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), 260.

Appalachian identity, in spite of the profound differences between their general standard of living and that of ordinary residents. A prime example of this kind of commodification in Southeast D.C. is the trumpeting of the gritty, artsy, uncommercialized state of a low-income neighborhood such as this as a selling point for more affluent residents interested in moving to the area, both because of its low-cost housing and because of its supposed chic shabbiness. Indeed, this is one of the core issues at the heart of the current and ongoing debate over gentrification, at least from the vantage point of those who choose to move to “edgy,” low-income, urban neighborhoods.

It is also important to note that residents of both places position themselves differently vis a vis their understandings of this complex of class- and status-related factors of marginalization, and their personal experiences with it. Every one of my research participants distinguishes between their perceptions of overall (and sometimes shared) class- and status-based marginalization, and their portrayals of their own experiences, or lack thereof, of this kind of marginalization. This is a significant point, because it demonstrates how individual people can simultaneously hold multiple and even conflicting understandings and internalizations of various factors of identity and marginalization. This is particularly true when these factors are framed via a concept as complex and multifaceted as place. Indeed, some of my research participants speak about these more “collective” notions of overall identity and marginalization in ways that suggest more identification with them than others. For those research participants who are more openly ambivalent about their own position along the spectrum of insider- and outsider-ness, it can perhaps be said that they simultaneously do and do not fully identify with certain aspects of marginalization as a part of shared local identity.

One factor of class-based marginalization that my research participants in both places share in identifying with is the frequent presumption by outsiders that they, as residents of these marginal places, are ignorant and/or unintelligent. Social worker Sharon contends as follows that local government officials from other parts of Washington, D.C. and from the federal government frequently dismiss the intelligence of Southeast D.C. residents: “the thing that we just despise is when they think that we’re ignorant, and that we don’t understand what they’re doing.” Her quotation suggests that not only do she and other residents resent the assumption that they are ignorant, but they also resent the assumption that they are in fact too ignorant to recognize that these officials are stereotyping and dismissing them. Likewise, bar owner Theresa says the following about her experiences with a state government panel, which was convened because of a challenge to her restaurant’s right to serve alcohol¹¹⁷:

I really think there’s a lot of tendency in the state capital to look at eastern Kentucky sort of indifferently at best, and actually our lawyer, who was based out of Frankfort¹¹⁸, his main kind of selling point for us, to go in front of this panel, was that Ben [her husband and business partner] and I are well-spoken, educated people, and that that was not what they were expecting from a bar in eastern Kentucky. And that was gonna be where our real weight lay. And I was like, to say nothing of what it’s [the bar] doing for this town, to say nothing of all these other factors, that’s where the strength is? Is that we can talk right? I mean, that’s just absurd.

My research participants provide several different kinds of explanations of how they understand the general sources of socioeconomic marginalization and class- and status-based marginalization in their communities. Retired teacher Joyce explains her

¹¹⁷ Summit City’s right to serve alcohol was challenged in 2011 by the state Alcoholic Beverages Commission. As a result of a tremendous outpouring of support from the local community, the commission agreed to allow Summit City to try to raise its proportion of food sold relative to alcohol sold (this was the source of the challenge). In the meantime, however, a local petition drive resulted in a loosening of Whitesburg’s local alcohol regulations, which rendered the Alcoholic Beverages Commission requirements moot.

¹¹⁸ Frankfort is the capital of Kentucky.

views on the economic stagnation and lack of opportunity that characterizes Letcher County as follows:

I think the biggest reason [that young people tend to leave] is that we don't have much of an economy here. You either have to work in the mines, and see mining comes and goes; there's times that it's really good, and then we'll go five or ten years where it's awful and people have to leave to earn a living. If you're not a doctor, or a teacher, or a lawyer, you know, there's just not that much here. There's a few other jobs, you know, state jobs and county jobs and stuff, but just not that much. And a lot of them, you know, went off to the factories in Ohio and Michigan, and did that. And, you know, our problem now is that the ones that stay are the ones that are on welfare, or SSI, you know, who don't work, and they don't present any kind of an example to their children.

Joyce outlines here some of the effects of the virtual monoculture that the coal industry has created in Letcher County and other Appalachian coalfields communities. She notes that when the coal industry is not doing well and not hiring workers, many residents have little choice but to leave in order to find work, since there are so few other kinds of employment opportunities in the area. She also raises the issue of public support for impoverished residents, mentioning the high number of residents who receive welfare, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). It is clear from her comment on SSI recipients—"who don't work, and they don't present any kind of an example to their children"—that she does not identify with their particular position of socioeconomic marginalization, and in fact views it disparagingly, as indicating a lack of individual will or discipline. Several other research participants also discuss the politics of SSI.

In Southeast D.C., Sharon also presents a generally bleak picture of the economic landscape of the community, particularly for lower-income residents with low levels of education and other skills. Significantly, she also connects issues of economic opportunity with housing and public health, which she defines broadly as including such

problems as high rates of HIV infection and drug abuse in the community. She thus recognizes the interconnected nature of many of these factors of marginalization:

... on the downside, housing and jobs are just such, that seems to be a constant problem in this community. And health. Housing, jobs, and health seem to be constant issues that we're battling from year to year, even though we, there's a Ward 8 Business Council that I work with who looks at development, and there's another group called the Ward 8 Workforce Development that looks at jobs. Even though we're sitting at the table with them, and we're trying to very meticulously outline ways that our folk could be employed, somehow it never happens.

Sharon continues with a nuanced discussion of the difficulties of convincing companies and institutions located in Southeast D.C. to hire local workers, noting the particular difficulty with construction companies, which tend to bring in Latino workers from as far away as Delaware rather than hiring unemployed locals. She also cites some of the problems employers report experiencing with local workers, and notes the occasional success story, such as a Giant grocery store that opened recently and went to great lengths to train and hire local residents as employees. Significantly, while Sharon does not disparage the position of unemployed residents of Southeast—she in fact advocates for them—she herself, like Joyce, is also in a different socioeconomic strata from the people she's describing.

Attorney and accountant Michael is likewise in a different socioeconomic strata from the unemployed and underemployed residents in his community. In the following excerpt he points to the role that increasing redevelopment in Southeast D.C. plays, or has at least been seen as playing, in providing job opportunities:

There was this assumption that when they started construction [on the new headquarters of the Department of Homeland Security] there was gonna be all these jobs available, and I know they have had career fairs for Homeland Security, but my understanding is that eighty percent of the people who applied for jobs have failed the drug test. So, you know, once eighty percent of those folks are eliminated just because of drug testing, you know, you begin to wonder, so

we'll see. And then once Homeland Security comes, you know, a lot of those jobs that are gonna be created are gonna require a bachelor's degree, work experience, you know, that type of experience. Those types of jobs aren't to just hire a person off the street. Even to be the mail clerk you have to have some formal education. So that's, you know, I'm definitely not one of those who says there will be white-collar jobs and a lot of Ward 8 residents who will be qualified for those jobs.

Michael's quotation suggests that the construction of the Department of Homeland Security headquarters in Southeast D.C., not long ago hailed as an important source of jobs for local residents, has not in actuality provided many jobs at all for local residents. It is impossible to know if the figure he provided of eighty percent of local job applicants failing the drug test is accurate or not. The fact that he emphasized this supposed failure rate so strongly, however, suggests that he sees the low levels of local employment at the construction site as an indictment of the residents themselves, rather than of the construction company and the work it did—or failed to do—in providing training and preparation for the disadvantaged local residents who would be applying for those jobs.

The issues raised in the above quotations from Joyce, Sharon, and Michael are complex and manifold, and almost all relate to the ways in which poverty and marginalization are perceived and interpreted by those who are outside of the personal experience of the worst of that poverty and marginalization, even while being “inside” in a geographical sense. This is an important angle from which to look at marginalization and identity in these two places, because it highlights the reality that notions of what constitutes a shared local identity are far from uniform. It also suggests that residents who are less marginalized than some of their neighbors can sometimes be among the harshest critics of those disadvantaged neighbors.

Another important issue relating to class and general opportunity (or lack of opportunity) that is mentioned by several of my research participants relates to the durability of the most marginalized residents' positioning within local space. Among residents of Southeast D.C., transience is sometimes mentioned as a characteristic of the area's most disadvantaged residents' movements through various spaces within and surrounding the community. The physical marginality of many of these residents makes them essentially homeless—moving frequently from one low-rent apartment to another, or from one family member's couch to another. In the excerpt below, Sharon discusses the difficulty of working with these virtually homeless residents, mainly because keeping track of their location is so difficult:

... it's tough to get people to take ownership when, number one, they're so transient. There's a lot of people in this community who are very transient because they're going from pillar to post. And we can tell, because we could send you something six months ago and then today it comes back.

The poor quality of local schools is another issue relating to class, status, and the availability of opportunities that several of my research participants discuss. In the Letcher County context, Keith cites the poor quality of the county schools as one of his motivating factors for deciding to run for county judge executive:

The court system was in bad shape and still is, you know: if you're a have, then, you know, all the rulings are in your favor and if you're a have-not, then the rulings are always against you. And the school system was in bad shape and it's still in bad shape, but I decided, you know, that I had some kinda responsibility to my children that, you know, if I see something wrong to make where they live a better place.

In the Southeast D.C. context, Kwame also lambasts the quality of the

community's schools, and furthermore frames it in terms of the larger neglect and even active "demolition by neglect"¹¹⁹ that characterizes much of Southeast D.C.'s history over the last century, as he sees it, and leaves the community particularly well-primed for redevelopment and gentrification:

Ward 8 got the most youth in the whole city, right? They get the least resources to deal with that. They've got the most children but the worst schools. Now if you wanna change the face of a area, you don't invest in the area, and then, you know, crime and violence justifies bein' able to tear down a community, cause in doin' all of that, one of the things that's on that list to get things rezoned and targeted for redevelopment is high crime and all of these things, so you want people to get locked up and go to jail, so it can justify you redoin' the community, do you see what I'm sayin'?

In this formulation, which undoubtedly captures the essence of a great deal of long-term redevelopment and gentrification plans, even if rarely voiced in such frank terms, Kwame ties together such issues as poorly funded schools, crumbling infrastructure, high levels of unemployment and crime, and high rates of incarceration. As he contends, these are indeed all factors that contribute to a neighborhood or community being deemed ripe for reinvestment and redevelopment.

Affective Marginalization

In addition to the factors of marginalization noted thus far in this chapter, there is another subtle but profound process that occurs in marginalized and disadvantaged areas such as Southeast D.C. and Letcher County, and which sometimes finds expression through affective and psychosocial attitudes or behaviors. The ongoing and sometimes lifelong experience of poverty, racial discrimination, lack of access to education and other opportunities, and the many other marginalizing factors that can stymie individuals

¹¹⁹ This term is drawn from historic preservation, and applies in this context in both a literal and figurative sense.

and communities also carries emotional and affective consequences. Indeed, the frustration of constantly coming up on the short side of whatever measure of well-being it may be engenders a deep sense of powerlessness, impotence, anger, bitterness, resentment, resignation, and fatalism. This is not to suggest that marginalization will automatically renders a person hostile, depressed, or bitter. Some people do draw strength and energy from the experience of disadvantage. Nevertheless, the unrelenting experience of structures and processes that frustrate individual and group well-being often does inhibit psychosocial well-being.¹²⁰

Almost all of my research participants speak about some form of negative emotional outcome as the byproduct of structural marginalization in their community. Mentioned most frequently is the immobilizing effect that can happen when people experience unrelenting and grinding poverty, and often find themselves subject to policies and structures such as SSI and public housing that leave them feeling little control over their own lives. In the context of Southeast D.C., Kwame speaks at length about the relationship between poverty and marginalization and the sense of inertia and fatalism, concluding that all too often, “people are degraded to the point where they just flow with the wind.”

Cause remember, we talkin’ about destitute, degraded people. So some people like, “My life’ll be difficult anyway, whatever happens happens.” Some people truly, you know, wanna stand up for it. I don’t think enough people care. And some people have been degraded to the point where they just flow with the wind. But for those who do want to get on some type of stepping stone to get involved in the process, they probably don’t even know, they haven’t been informed.

Sharon identifies the same kind of “flow[ing] with the wind” mentality among

¹²⁰ For a trenchant exploration of how mental health, marginalization, and agency interact, see Catherine A. Stewart, “‘Crazy for This Democracy’: Postwar Psychoanalysis, African American Blues Narratives, and the Lafargue Clinic,” *American Quarterly* 65, 2 (2013): 371-395.

some of Southeast D.C.'s most destitute residents, associating it in particular with having lived many years in public housing and having grown accustomed to an outside authority controlling where and how they live. Tellingly, she describes public housing residents as sometimes feeling like slaves because of their lack of control over so much of their own whereabouts and well-being, and indeed even of their destiny, as she says below:

I think at the end of the day, people, at least in public housing, may sometimes feel like slaves, in that they are just being used, all the time, and they have no control over their destiny. Cause if the housing authority says you have to move out, you gotta move. And if they're gonna place you over in Timbuktu, and that's the only place you have to live, that's where you have to go. And you have no, you're powerless. You're powerless.

Significantly, Sharon's primary emphasis here is not so much the fact that these people live in public housing per se, but the fact that they live in a public housing system that treats them with little respect and affords them little individual agency. Indeed, the feature of public housing living that may make them "sometimes feel like slaves" is the fact that "they are just being used" by the public housing authority and "have no control over their destiny." More specifically, the sharp decrease in recent years in the number of public housing units both in Washington, D.C. and across the country has severely squeezed public housing residents. This squeeze has forced them to move frequently from one complex to another in some cases, or, as is increasingly occurring, to accept a housing voucher instead of a housing unit, and then try to find someone in the private housing market who will accept their voucher. As Sharon notes, finding landlords who will allow them to use their vouchers is not easy, and even when housing can be found, it is often in locations that are far from the urban neighborhoods and networks

within which most public housing residents are ensconced. This is what Sharon is referring to with her reference to residents being placed in “Timbuktu.”¹²¹

As Sharon suggests, the affective consequences of being afforded so little agency over the most basic decisions of one’s day-to-day life are that public housing residents—and others who are similarly marginalized—do often feel powerless, inert, and even slave-like. The despair of living in such circumscribed conditions can provoke many responses—from energized anger to docile depression to lashing out at those nearby who are similarly powerless—but on the whole, it makes organized and energized resistance difficult. More prevalent than positive and action-oriented expressions of anger is a heavy sense of malaise and depression about the overall state of the community, and the seemingly dim hopes of achieving much positive change. Furthermore, and even more insidiously, the already existing problems of drug abuse and crime are intensified and aggravated by these prevailing attitudes of hopelessness, particularly among young people.

Kwame agrees that problems with drug abuse, violence, and crime are all deeply interwoven with the general marginalization and neglect that has characterized life in Southeast D.C. for decades. He contends, further, that the marginalization process occurred not so much as an unintentional result of neglect, but as the deliberate and desired outcome of strategic attempts to keep a largely black and impoverished population docile and impotent. Regarding the debilitating impact of drug abuse in

¹²¹ See the following works for more on the strictures and difficulties imposed on public housing residents by recent changes in public housing policy, particularly those associated with the HOPE VI Program and the trend toward mixed-income communities: Lynne C. Manzo, Rachel G. Kleit, and Dawn Couch, “‘Moving Three Times Is Like Having Your House on Fire Once:’ The Experience of Place and Impending Displacement Among Public Housing Residents,” *Urban Studies* 45 (2008): 1855-1878; Katie M. Mazer and Katherine N. Rankin, “The Social Space of Gentrification: The Politics of Neighborhood Accessibility in Toronto’s Downtown West,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011): 822-839.

Southeast D.C. and in urban African American communities across the country, particularly as part of the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s, Kwame argues that “crack cocaine ... was a real, it’s very significant in understanding how a lot of black communities went downhill, especially public housing communities.” He expounds on his understanding of the interrelated nature of these ills as follows:

So Barry Farms represents a community that has been a victim of cultural warfare, historical warfare, economic warfare, and chemical warfare, cause all them liquor stores and the crack epidemic. ... The point is that Barry Farms represents one of those communities who has been constantly blamed, penalized for being a displaced people, who has intentionally been subjugated to the condition that they’re in, by due policy.

The interconnection between ingrained poverty, despair, dismay at the decimation of the local landscape, and drug abuse and violence is also recognized by some of my Letcher County research participants as a reality of life there as well. While Joyce does not speak about the complex interactions between all of these factors, she does acknowledge that there is a relationship between the explosion in prescription drug abuse in eastern Kentucky over the last two decades¹²² and the parallel decline in the mining industry and increasing shift to mountaintop removal. Indeed, she identifies the growing epidemic of drug abuse and the ever-shrinking local economy as the two worst features of life in Letcher County, and notes that young people are often eager to leave the area if they’re able to, and if not, they often end up on SSI and fighting drug addiction. Generalizing about the numbers of young people in her community on SSI and addicted to drugs, Joyce says that “the ones who stay are the ones that are on welfare,”

¹²² As evidence of the seriousness of eastern Kentucky’s prescription drug epidemic, a 2012 summit was held, under the joint auspices of the U.S. Department of Justice and the University of Kentucky, to address the epidemic. See the following for more information about this event—entitled the Kentucky Prescription Drug Abuse Summit—and the extent of the problem:
<http://www.justice.gov/usao/kye/programs/Pill%20Summit%20Revision%20summary%20Final.pdf>.
Accessed December 2, 2013.

and that “we see, if not our grandchildren then our brothers’ kids or our sisters’ kids or our cousins’ children that are just so totally under the influence of drugs.” She describes the ravaging impact of drug abuse, and particularly prescription drug abuse, on the lives of individuals, families, and the community as a whole as follows:

I have a nephew that started drinkin’ and then got into drugs in high school, and he’s almost thirty, and he’s strugglin’ now to get away from it, but it’s a struggle. And it seems like once they’ve tried like the oxycodone and the cocaine and the really bad drugs, it changes their personality, and even if they get away from it, they’re different people than they were before they started it, and it just, you know, it just destroys lives. Not just their lives, but their parents’ lives.

Theresa also speaks at length about the extent of the drug problem in eastern Kentucky, and what she sees as its intimate relationship with the current dynamics of the local economy and the coal industry in particular. In the following excerpt, she presents a beautiful meditation on thinking of the mountain landscape as being like a geographical and spiritual “third parent” to people who grow up surrounded by mountains. She concludes this meditation jarringly, however, contending that the combination of economic difficulties with the ever-increasing destruction of that third parent causes profound psychic dissonance for many people, whether or not they are aware of or acknowledge it:

I think what’s really, really hard for everybody who lives here, especially people, which is most people, who make a living off of the coal industry, one way or the other, or whose families have or who wish that they could and haven’t quite accepted the fact that at this point nobody really makes as much as they used to, you know, I mean, it’s a very, that whole thing in itself is crazy, but you know, the way that coal mining works right now, our economy is dependent on destroying the thing that we feel is a third parent, you know? Like, the thing that makes us who we are is necessarily being dismantled, physically down to the very bone, for the economy, for the jobs that it offers, and, I honestly don’t understand, I mean I do understand, but I have a really hard time with how *incredibly* effectively the propaganda machine of the coal industry has convinced people to fight for the right to destroy their homes, like, to be angry that someone would suggest they not. And, I just, I sort of have a, just, so much despair, all the time,

about that, and just how painful that is. And I think that's a really, it has to be, a pretty profound sense of dysphoria for people, whether they're dealing with that or not, but ultimately there's no way that you can exist in that disconnect without having a huge psychological toll, which, when you look at the drug abuse, of the epidemic here, you know, there's a lot of stuff attached to that.

This sense of disconnect and dysphoria that Theresa describes—and which sets the stage for so many of the despair-induced ills such as drug abuse—is in many ways an apt term for the affective and psychological consequences of living with the long-term marginalization that characterizes both Letcher County and Southeast D.C., as well as with the stress and uncertainty of the respective changes threatening to unsettle these communities' physical and cognitive landscapes even further. Indeed, it seems that marginalization plus disruption equals increased fractures in the physical, cognitive, and affective landscapes of already fractured places.

As Melissa suggests tellingly, combining the historical pain of marginalization with the contemporary pain of loss of landscape, “I think there's just this idea that we've been stereotyped and been the joke for so long that maybe if we take away those mountains we'll get rid of that.” Sometimes dysphoria can cause people to support those interests that are directly counter to their own, both because of the power of propaganda and because of the warping effect of despair and uncertainty, of being “convinced ... to fight for the right to destroy their homes, like, to be angry that someone would suggest they not,” as Theresa says.

Likewise in the Southeast D.C. context, even if gentrification raises the likelihood of displacement for a swath of impoverished residents, among the more affluent residents—and even among some of the less affluent who would be at risk for displacement—there is still enamoration with the idea of the amenities that gentrification

would bring to their long-neglected neighborhood. As Sharon says, bemoaning the fact that Southeast D.C. hasn't yet attracted the kind of business development currently taking place in the nearby and rapidly gentrifying H Street Northeast neighborhood, "I think we deserve the same conveniences that everybody else has." And as Kwame explains in the following excerpt, it is not at all surprising that long-marginalized people might long for the trappings of affluence that have always been beyond their reach, but that are generally not offered to them without a hidden price attached. In the case of my discussion here, that price is the threat or actuality of displacement, and in the case of Kwame's statement, it is the imprisoning power of debt:

So now [once you have "made it" in some way], you don't want the substance of life, truly understand the substance of life, cause you never had it, but you want the appearance. So you get yourself in debt to get that house and that car, and you can't fight for your rights cause now you in debt. You have to fight to survive and pay the bills. So the classist, bourgeoisness of America is one, partly in debt, and they have to be in debt and be loyal to the power structure in order to pay off they debt.

Conclusions

My goal in this chapter has been to situate the experience of marginalization as it is understood and experienced by my research participants. As marginalization and identity recursively produce and re-produce each other in the negotiations expressed by my research participants, a complex matrix of these factors emerges. Exploring that matrix as it relates to my participants' understandings and experiences illuminates the conceptual landscapes of place animating their day-to-day experiences in these two communities, particularly in relation to the shifts currently taking place in their physical landscapes. Significantly, my analyses here suggest that in spite of the many factors that differentiate the experiences of my Letcher County and Southeast D.C. participants, there

are nonetheless compelling parallels and resemblances in the broad patterns and constructs they use to think about and make sense of marginalization, place, and change.

Chapter 3: Narratives of History and the Environment: Preservationist Values as Place-Based Common Wealth

In this chapter and the next, I consider the values that constitute my research participants' understandings of what I am calling place-based common wealth. I explore what these values seem to be and how they were expressed during my participant interviews, how they vary across and between the two communities in question, and how they are shaped both by the longstanding experience of marginalization and the current experience of change. This exploration of common wealth reveals a narrative of multifaceted values, discourses, and affective factors that undergird my research participants' various conceptual landscapes of place.

The values I examine in this chapter are those that I am characterizing as broadly preservationist in nature. In using the term "preservationist," I draw from several general definitions of "preservation" and the idea of a "preservationist ethic," but in particular from the work of historic preservationist Ned Kaufman, anthropologist Setha Low, and independent cultural advisor Jon Hawkes.¹²³ Kaufman contends that the concepts of place and preservation, broadly understood, complement one another and intermingle in ways that further the general impulse toward preserving, sustaining, and stewarding common resources of all kinds:

¹²³ See the following for other examples of how preservation is situated as a concept, specifically within the field of Historic Preservation: Diane Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos: A Tribute to Enduring Ideals," in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Robert E. Stipe (New York: Routledge, 2003); Robert E. Stipe, "Where Do We Go From Here?" in *A Richer Heritage*; Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, eds., *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Daniel Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

In the last few years, a broad, humane language of place has taken hold in many quarters, a language subtly yet significantly distinct from the first language of the preservation movement. When people speak in this new language, they are able to take in historic landmarks, species habitat, favorite views or picnic spots, people's feelings about places—sometimes in a single sentence. This language lacks the precision of preservationists' professional discourse, but it expresses how human communities experience places, and how they feel about them.¹²⁴

This “broad, humane language of place” is precisely the kind of language my research participants use to express their understandings of what place means to them in their specific contexts of day-to-day life. As Kaufman suggests, such language captures conceptual as well as affective dimensions of how people understand place, and how and why they understand places and place-based values as worthy of preserving, or not. Significantly, this is also the kind of language I am attempting to use in exploring my research participants' narratives, even while framing my explorations with terms such as “common wealth” and “conceptual landscapes of place” that are about, but not necessarily from, the words of my participants.

Setha Low also provides important insight into the kind of “preservationist ethic” I am invoking here, particularly in her concept of “social sustainability” as a means of recognizing and harnessing “the meaning of the built environment for defining who we are—as individuals and as groups.”¹²⁵ In Low's formulation, the goal of such efforts at social sustainability should be to “focus on how we can sustain the social relations and meanings that make up our complex life-world,” of which the material landscape is a significant component.¹²⁶ She also foreshadows my interest in exploring how the ethic of

¹²⁴ Ned Kaufman, “Moving Forward: Futures for a Preservation Movement,” in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, eds. Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), 315.

¹²⁵ Setha Low, “Social Sustainability: People, History, and Values,” in *The Heritage Reader*, eds. Graham Fairclough, Rodney Harrison, John H. Jameson Jr., and John Schofield (New York: Routledge, 2008), 392.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

preservation resonates in communities and among groups who have historically and perhaps contemporarily experienced marginalization. “But what happens,” she asks, “when your places are not marked, or even more to the point, when your personal or cultural history is erased—removed by physical destruction and omitted from historical texts?”¹²⁷

Thirdly, and perhaps most compellingly, the work of Australian cultural advisor Jon Hawkes on cultural sustainability as the necessary fourth pillar of the concept of sustainable development—along with the literature that has grown from Hawkes’ work—provides important foundations for the kind of preservationist ethic I am invoking here. Significantly, it also stands as a kind of parallel to the concept of common wealth that I have extrapolated from Wendell Berry’s work and threaded throughout this dissertation. The conventional understanding of “sustainable development,” as it was originally promulgated in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development and further developed through the 1990s and 2000s, was as a process that involved three distinct “pillars:” social equity, environmental responsibility, and economic viability. This new vision of “sustainable development” was intended as a kind of corrective to the excessive economic dominance of traditional models of unlimited economic growth.¹²⁸ Hawkes’ contribution in his 2001 piece, “The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s Essential Role in Public Planning,” was his contention that “cultural vitality is as

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ See the following for the text of the Bruntland Commission’s 1987 report introducing the concept of sustainable development: Bruntland Commission, “Towards Sustainable Development,” in *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, eds. Stephen Wheeler and Timothy Beatley (New York: Routledge, 2004), 53-57.

essential to a healthy and sustainable society as social equity, environmental responsibility, and economic viability.”¹²⁹ He explains further as follows:

A sustainable society depends upon a sustainable culture. If a society’s culture disintegrates, so will everything else. ... Cultural action is required in order to lay the groundwork for a sustainable future. I will argue below that the initial strategies that need to be implemented to successfully achieve sustainability must be cultural ones.¹³⁰

This notion of a preservationist ethic as a kind of place-based and place-grounded sense of socio-cultural sustainability (combining Low’s and Hawkes’ terms) hews closely to my research participants’ frequent discussions of the need to recognize, preserve, maintain, and nourish those tangible and intangible elements of their community’s identity that they see as valuable, and potentially as threatened—whether by the longstanding threat of neglect or the effects of the more recent disruptive changes. My aim in this chapter is to delve into this preservationist ethic as it is articulated by my research participants, and to explain how it comprises an important part of the place-based common (and occasionally un-common) wealth that they see as characterizing their communities.

Significantly, preservation as a value is not always recognized as a central concern of residents of marginalized communities. Conventional wisdom is that the stress of both historical marginalization and contemporary destabilizations might make a preservationist ethic a “luxurious” concern of residents, not at the forefront of their thinking and presumably more basic priorities, but for most of my research participants, that does not seem to be the case. The threat and reality of change and destabilization in some ways make it more apparent that “common wealth” is the richest asset these

¹²⁹ Jon Hawkes, “The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture’s Essential Role in Public Planning” (Victoria, Australia: The Cultural Development Network of Victoria, 2001), 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 12.

communities possess, even and sometimes especially if it is intangible, and that it's considered worth discussing, preserving, nurturing, and cultivating. Common wealth can outlive both coal and the rise and fall of fickle real estate values, and those components of common wealth that are intangible cannot be *taken* from residents in the same way that more tangible resources can be.

There is, nonetheless, some truth to the perception that preservationist practices, at least as conventionally defined, do not usually receive as much attention within marginalized communities. In fact, almost all of my research participants note significant reasons why preservation is not generally a high priority among marginalized people. According to Sharon, Southeast D.C.'s most marginalized populations are not very concerned with maintaining and preserving green spaces, waterways, and other environmental resources. As she puts it, "when you live in communities where you're struggling with social ills such as violence and unemployment and chronic disease, you don't often pay attention to your environment." Kwame concurs, pointing also to the lack of institutional information and support for those who might want to take a stand on preservation or on the threats posed by redevelopment and gentrification.

Cause remember we talkin' about destitute, degraded people. ... people have been degraded to the point where they just flow with the wind, but for those who do want to get on some type of stepping stone to get involved in the process, they probably don't even know, they haven't been informed.

My research participants from Letcher County provide similar reasons for why many residents choose to ignore damage caused by mountaintop removal to both the natural and built environments of the area, and why in some cases they actively support the practice. Painful as it is to see this damage and erosion of their natural and cultural heritage, mountaintop removal and the coal industry do provide the largest source of jobs

to local residents, who worry about their very survival should this industry leave the area. Indeed, both Melissa and Theresa discuss this reluctance to challenge coal industry-induced damage in terms of basic survival. According to Melissa, “you don’t fight against what’s putting food on your table.” Asked about how she reconciles her brother-in-law’s job as a strip miner with her own anti-mountaintop removal stance, Theresa replies simply and pointedly, “Brother’s gotta eat.”

In spite of these stark realities of life in communities with limited resources, an ethic of preservation is an important value woven throughout the ethnographic narratives that form the backbone of this project, as we will see. This ethic is expressed in myriad intonations and with differing levels of intensity, but the importance of preserving and maintaining highly valued elements of life is a steadily recurring theme. Indeed, it is hardly surprising to learn that people who are marginalized or struggling to make ends meet—no less than those who are more privileged—would recognize and practice the preservationist impulse that is so endemic to the human experience. It would be shockingly dismissive, in fact, to presume that marginalization and poverty somehow preclude any sort of care or concern for common wealth. It should also not be surprising, though, that marginalized people might speak about preservation in different ways and with different language than the mainstream discourse of how and why preservation is important and precisely what it entails.

Streams of the Preservationist Ethic: Historical and Environmental

In identifying and examining those elements of my research participants’ visions of common wealth that stem from an ethic of preservation, I divide this chapter broadly into those elements of common wealth that represent a more “historical” preservationist

ethic, and those that represent a more “environmental” preservationist ethic. I make use of this categorization scheme simply because this is the most common distinguishing factor among the kinds of preservationist common wealth discussed by my research participants. Furthermore, this division reflects a strong tendency in Western societies to separate the human from the environmental, the cultural from the natural, the conceptual from the physical, etc.¹³¹ I utilize the separation to guide my discussion here not because I wish to reify this kind of division, but because it reflects, in part, the way my research participants speak about their understandings of preservationist common wealth, and also, in a utilitarian sense, because it provides a concrete means of structuring the discussion. It is important to recognize, though, that the “historical” and the “environmental” do entwine and overlap with one another as they are discussed by my research participants, suggesting the necessary permeability of this boundary marker.

Historical Preservationist Ethic

I begin by looking at what I am calling the “historical” preservationist ethic, as it is expressed by my research participants in their discussions of place-based common wealth. In using the word “historical” here, I’m referring to a broad range of concepts that relate to recording, preserving, analyzing, celebrating, or interacting in some way with cultural memory, in both its conceptual and material formulations. For most of my research participants, the ideas of place, story, memory, and history are intimately connected in terms of their understandings of how the past—and knowledge or memory of the past—bears upon present life. In communities and regions such as these where

¹³¹ See the following collection for an early but still very important exploration of Western society’s division of nature from culture, human from environment: William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995).

geographical marginalization is a central facet of how the identity of the place and the people who live there has been understood and interpreted, both internally and externally, there are often strong opinions among residents about knowledge of the past and how it should be utilized. There are those who see the historical and ongoing association with marginalization as a stigma that they would like to put behind them, and in that vein, dealing explicitly with painful or traumatic events from the past can become a task to be avoided. Some even see it as potentially delaying the long-anticipated move out of marginalization and into the realm of so-called mainstream respectability. Ruth reflects on this kind of reaction below, in her explanation of why many African Americans today who lived through the era of Segregation are reluctant to bring much attention to that era of their past, both individually and collectively.

And so now we've gotten out of that condition, we don't need to talk about it anymore, and so let's just, you know, continue to be the first whatever, you know, we don't really need to talk about having been a slave, we don't need to talk about having to drink from the colored water fountain. And so that's, because, you can't really justify to your children being accepting of the conditions under which we had to live. How can you tell your children you went through that? How can you justify to your children not standing up and fighting against it, in a way, I mean, and so, it's just painful. It's painful. And it's painful to have to talk about it.

Ruth's reflections on remembering traumas from the recent past emphasize the sense of collective and individual resentment and shame that can accompany such memories. In the excerpt below, Melissa emphasizes the relationship between events in the past and current feelings of hopelessness in Appalachian coalfields communities. In response to a question about how she regards the United Mine Workers of America and their storied past in the Appalachian region, Melissa says:

It's like this. I'm incredibly proud to say that I had a grandfather who fought for the UMWA, and when he passed away we got to put the UMWA banner across his coffin, so, you know, you're really proud of it, but also it's like, when you

give up your right to strike as a union, what good are you? And so now there's no union mines and it's kinda, it almost helped so much then but it hurt so much when it went away. It was like, well, if the union, which was so powerful and such this strong force then [in the past], can't help us now, then nothing can.

Positive, “Insurgent” Views of Historical Knowledge and Memory

In addition to these negative views of memory and historical knowledge, however, and often existing alongside them even within the same people, are more positive and hopeful views on the potential benefit of embracing historical knowledge and memories of the past. These views tend to involve an understanding of historical knowledge and memories as positive, agency-generating resources that can bolster local, regional, or group-based identity, and that can enhance the state of current and future everyday life in the place or among the group in question. It is worth noting, however, that there are many varieties of these understandings of the benefits of embracing local or group-based history and memory, and not all of them promote place-based common wealth. Indeed, some of these views promote *un*-common wealth, while others even serve to sow division, enmity, and bigotry. I will give examples of these kinds of views in both Letcher County and Southeast D.C. That said, however, the majority of what my research participants had to say about positive understandings of history and memory involved working to strengthen local common wealth in ways that would generally benefit the community in question as a whole.

History and memory, in this positive sense, act as critical tools of “insurgent history.” Planning scholar Leonie Sandercock originated the usage of the term “insurgent history” as I am employing it here in her 1998 history of alternative, multicultural, and “insurgent” practices of professional planning, as opposed to the officially sanctioned

mainstream version of planning history. Sandercock explains the theoretical groundings of her approach to (re)writing history as follows:

The novelist Milan Kundera has said that the struggle of people against power is a struggle of memory against forgetting. For historians, the struggle of particular memories against particular omissions or suppressions also involves power. Stories about the past have power and bestow power.¹³²

Historical knowledge, as understood and employed in this way, serves as a source of recovery and reclamation of marginalized histories by the marginalized people and places that experienced them and now bear their legacy. It also serves as a source of enhanced ownership, agency, and self-efficacy for residents of marginalized communities, and in this way is particularly significant as a means of preserving, restoring, and creating common wealth in the face of the current structural changes taking place in Southeast D.C. and Letcher County. Three types of this positive, “insurgent” understanding of historical knowledge and memory are articulated by my research participants. The first type emphasizes local and regional historical knowledge, and encourages the interpretation and preservation of local historical events and sites and of local place-based memories, stories, etc. The second type emphasizes historical knowledge by and about marginalized groups in general, and is particularly pertinent in terms of the various narratives of African American identity and memory that shape my Southeast D.C. research participants’ views on history, identity, and agency. The third type is more oriented toward personal memory and toward notions of local pride, and sometimes comes cloaked in the mist of nostalgia and romanticizing.

¹³² Leonie Sandercock, “Introduction: Framing Insurgent Historiographies for Planning,” in *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, ed. Sandercock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1.

Strengthening Local Historical Knowledge and Memory

Turning first to the arena of local historical knowledge and memory, I draw once again from the words of Ruth, who spoke at greater length and with greater passion than any of the other interviewees about the importance of historical knowledge and memory. Her words will be cited frequently in this section. She describes her first significant experience with local history, and particularly with local oral history work, and the profound impact it had on her, as follows: “When the Anacostia Museum was established, in conjunction with the museum was the creation of the Anacostia Historical Society, and they interviewed a lot of the old folks, and, just reading that was fascinating.”¹³³ Ruth reiterates her sense of intrigue and discovery at reading this material, repeating with both verbal and facial emphasis, “It was *fascinating!*” Not only did she find this newfound historical information—and the perspective it afforded her on her community—immensely interesting, but she also recognized the potential value of such localized narratives to connect current residents more meaningfully with the community’s history, providing them with a greater sense of their own past and the past of their community. She explains how recognizing the relationship between local and family narratives grounded in stories about “so-and-so’s grandmother” and much larger-scale historical narratives, and indeed with the polish of “official” history as presented by a museum, shaped her thinking about the power of historical knowledge:

¹³³ The Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum was founded in 1967 with the following mission: “to challenge perceptions, broaden perspectives, generate new knowledge, and deepen understanding about the ever-changing concepts and realities of ‘community’ while maintaining its strong ties to Anacostia and the D.C. Metropolitan region.” http://anacostia.si.edu/Museum/Mission_History.htm, accessed November 28, 2013. See also the following for more on the founding and early years of the museum: Zora Martin-Felton and Gail Sylvia Lowe, *A Different Drummer: John Kinard and the Anacostia Museum, 1967-1989* (Washington, D.C.: The Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1993).

Cause I, you know, it just never occurred to me, I mean I knew the community was old. So-and-so's grandmother lived in the house she was born in, so you knew it was old, but you were grounded in that. So, cause I'd never really cared much about history, before then, and I think the main reason was we weren't in it! And so this was kind of important to me, it was kind of important to me at that point, you know, well, we need to do something *with* this information. And so, the more you gather, the more you learn, the more you want to know.

Ruth goes on to discuss how the process of connecting the dots between places they are familiar with in their own community and larger mainstream historical narratives can begin to embed residents in a thicker and more substantial web of knowledge regarding the role of ordinary people in shaping and contributing to history. Pointing to the connections that can be made between a local landmark and national Civil War history, Ruth suggests the power of this more intimate and immediate version of history, particularly for members of marginalized communities:

... those who live up in Congress Heights can say at one point this was the cavalry depot that supplied the Army of the Potomac, right here on *this spot*, you know, those kinds of things that they can kind of relate to, to history as it relates to them.

Kwame also strongly emphasizes the importance of “history as it relates to them” in historically marginalized communities such as Southeast D.C. In the following quotation he describes how his interest in the local history of Southeast D.C., and of the Barry Farm neighborhood in particular, was piqued. He also laments the fact that the historical events, personages, and narratives associated with this vibrant and pathbreaking community are not more widely known among residents:

I'm a director with a local non-profit, and we began to do programs in the local resident council building in Barry Farms, so, in the resident council building they have literature about the early beginnings of the Barry Farms community, so I'm sittin in there reading and it's talkin about how the early residents built the farms ... and then I see something about General Howard ... with the Freedmen's Bureau, and then I get into after Emancipation and the first community in D.C. where blacks could purchase land and build communities, so I got interested when

I discovered the history of how the community was founded. And then I found some of the people who were instrumental in the community like Frederick Douglass, his sons, Solomon G. Brown, which actually was the first person of African descent to work in the Smithsonian Institution. He was a expert on plants, animals, and his background was just like a lot of the young people at Barry Farms now—single mother, his father was dead, he had like six brothers and sisters, they were poor, in debt, kinda homeless. He got a job at the post office when he was fourteen, he helped start the first electric telegraph lines in D.C. when he was fifteen, then he just *moved* [suggesting that he became an active, influential, and successful member of local society—something that was not easy to do as an African American in the early twentieth century], you know? He was a artist, a poet, he was part of the Philomethean Society ... So see what I'm sayin? He was a excellent figure who came from the Barry Farm community, and nobody knows who he is, you know what I'm sayin? Nobody in the community. They're not learnin about him in the schoolbooks, cause now they don't localize the education, they nationalize public education, a lot of the local history gets lost.

Kwame speaks of this historical information about the role of African Americans in the development of Barry Farm and surrounding neighborhoods as a rich and critical source of common wealth for the community today. He also worries, however, that this important history is being neglected and risks being lost to the ravages of time. Similar to Ruth, he hopes his own work will help reverse this trend of historical neglect, and in turn perhaps inspire renewed awareness of the multi-faceted kinds of historical and cultural common wealth that exist in Southeast D.C.

While not speaking as extensively about the value of local historical knowledge and memory as Ruth or Kwame do, Keith offers an intriguing perspective on the consequences of neglecting local history in the Letcher County context. In the following quotation, he discusses how the lack of personal memories and historical framing of recent events played out in shaping his own re-election campaign for county judge-executive and in coloring residents' memories (or lack thereof) of the state of the county government prior to his initial election thirteen years earlier. He uses his then-twenty-one-year-old nephew as an example of someone who would likely not have a very

strong recollection of what county governance was like during the first nine years of his life, but who in that time had come of voting age and would most likely be casting his vote on the basis of very recent memories of or experiences with the local government system.

Well, if you look at the last election I run in, then, my brother says, You've gotta remind people of what all we've done. I said, People have been here, they know what's been goin on. He said, Let me give you an example. His son, I think, was twenty-one or twenty-two years old. Thirteen years before that, if he was twenty-one that would what, make him nine? He couldn't remember that when, the first day I went into the courthouse, there was a notice that the power was gonna be disconnected at the courthouse cause they hadn't paid their bill! You know, he didn't know they were \$750,000 in debt. He didn't know that they had no equipment running, you know. In just that short period of time he went from a nine-year-old to a twenty-one-year-old that all his recent memory of government had been *good*. He had no incentive, no motivation to campaign or to vote or to stand up for some issue or some person that, you know, who cares who the county judge is? We've always had good government, you know, and so, for a person that at twenty-one years old was very knowledgeable, very active, very sincere, but could not remember the bad times, didn't have a clue! Of what it went through to get the government to where it was, And assumed that it had run fine no matter who was sittin in the chair. And, you know, even somebody that was thirty years old, how long is their memory? You know, if they went from thirty to forty-three, how active were they at thirty, and what did they think about at forty-three?

Keith's reflections here suggest that working against the tide of corruption in institutions and communities where that corruption has become entrenched is a continuous struggle, even when some improvements do occur. Furthermore, and of greater significance for the discussion here, his reflections highlight just how essential it is to the maintenance of common wealth for people to be aware of how positive and negative changes over time affect the condition of that common wealth. Stated otherwise, it is important not to take for granted historical events or processes that improved the functioning of a system or a society simply because they now seem second-nature to us. Allowing a return to the state of corruption and abuse that had reigned in Letcher County

prior to Keith's time in office is comparable to "throwing away your umbrella because you're not getting wet."¹³⁴ Yet Keith's argument is even more subtly complex than this, because he acknowledges that recognizing that which has served as "the umbrella" is not always obvious, and indeed as more time goes by, it can be all too easy to forget that there is still a rainstorm bearing down on the umbrella. As Keith's brother advised him, "You've gotta remind people of what all we've done," because they had grown accustomed over time to a pattern of competent governing, and it was difficult or impossible for them to remember what it was like when this was not the case. As an example of one way in which Keith's tenure as county judge-executive provided an "umbrella" of protection from abuses, he stubbornly refused to allow companies interested in drilling for natural gas access to Letcher County, even as a natural gas exploration boom was beginning to take shape in the mid-2000s, and as many other municipalities across the country found themselves unable to resist the quick riches promised by the gas industry. But soon after Keith's successor took office, gas drilling began for the first time in Letcher County, and residents today now have to deal with the growing damage inflicted on their communities by this industry, which, rather incredibly, is even less regulated than the coal industry.

Generating Locally Produced Historical Knowledge

I turn next to a second type of positive understanding of historical knowledge and memory that was articulated by my research participants. This type of positive

¹³⁴ In a striking current and national-level example of the principle Keith is arguing here, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg recently expressed her dismay at the majority decision of the court in *Shelby County v. Holder* to overturn key provisions of the Voting Rights Act, which had greatly improved voting access among African Americans and other minorities in the nearly fifty years since it was passed. Writing in a dissenting opinion, Ginsburg eloquently and succinctly captured the absurdity and danger of neglecting the role played by positive historical change in shaping our current state of being. Doing so, she wrote, "is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet." http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12-96_6k47.pdf. Accessed September 5, 2013.

understanding of historical knowledge and memory involves the generation and collection of historical information and historical memories pertaining to marginalized communities *by* those very community members themselves. This kind of historical understanding and practice seems to be particularly relevant in the context of Southeast D.C., where residents are marginalized significantly by their existence as (primarily) low-income African Americans, in addition to being marginalized as a result of their specific geographical locale. Significantly, while Appalachian residents of Letcher County are also marginalized through a complex combination of class and “status” factors, class has not in recent years carried as much weight in the realm of identity as race as a focal point for cross-cutting and coalitional relationships across regions. In other words, race, and particularly African American racial identity, has long served as a much stronger source of group identity for African Americans than has class.¹³⁵ Americans in recent decades do not tend to think or speak in terms such as “the working-class community” or “the lower-class community” as sources of cohesion except in very localized instances; with race, on the other hand, terms such as “the African American community” or “minority communities” are used regularly and serve as sources of cohesion for otherwise very diverse and geographically dispersed groups of people. For this reason, the tropes of “the African American community” and “African American history”/“Black history” become crucial sites of identity negotiation for residents of Southeast D.C. in a way that has no parallel in Letcher County. It is true that the flowering of interest in the 1960s in

¹³⁵ This alignment of African American racial identity with Southeast D.C. and white racial identity with Letcher County is not meant to suggest that either of these places are racially monolithic, in spite of the fact that as noted in chapter one of this dissertation, Southeast D.C. is predominantly African American and Letcher County is predominantly white. Particularly in the case of Letcher County and the Appalachian region as a whole, it is important to note that African Americans have long been active (and largely unrecognized) participants in regional culture. Furthermore, the number of Latinos in the Appalachian region are growing rapidly, even in remote areas such as Letcher County, as noted in the demographic data in chapter one.

Appalachian culture and history did encourage Appalachians to identify themselves more explicitly as a cultural sub-grouping—and one that is undoubtedly marginalized—and I do draw in this section from several Letcher County interviewees’ discussions of “Appalachian history” as a kind of regional and cultural sub-group. Nevertheless, concepts of Appalachian identity and Appalachian history still find their roots in geographical marginalization, and for this reason are distinct from the racial (and sometimes cross-cutting racial and class-based) groupings with which many residents of Southeast D.C. identify.

Of my research participants in Southeast D.C., Ruth speaks most frequently about African American racial status as an important source of group identity. While all four of the Southeast D.C. participants discuss race in relation to redevelopment and other changes taking place in their community, and all of them reference their existence within the larger sphere of “blackness,” Ruth expresses much more explicitly and emphatically her identification with blackness as a kind of omnipresent imagined community. She frequently speaks in the first-person plural regarding blackness, and generally discusses local history work within the larger concept of black history—whether that be in terms of how black history is understood on its own or in terms of how it is seen as existing (or not existing) within the narrative of “general” American history.

As an example of her usage of the first-person plural regarding blackness, Ruth clarifies how she is using the word “our.” In the following quotation, which occurred early on in the interview process, she said “In our communities—black communities,” before pausing and continuing with her description of the general socioeconomic make-up of pre-Civil Rights-era black communities. And in a later interview exchange, she

relates Segregation-era Southeast D.C. to black Segregation-era communities across the country: “this was one neighborhood in one place that is representative of our neighborhoods all over the country.” As is apparent from both of these quotations, Ruth’s usage of the first-person plural in regard to both blackness and to black communities is strongly connected to her interest in history, and in particular to the history of pre-Civil Rights-era African American communities. Her interest in blackness as a cohesive force relates directly to her desire to strengthen the black historical record and also helps illuminate the insurgent element of her understanding of history. She sees knowing and appreciating the histories of marginalized groups and communities, particularly those histories that are produced *by* members of the group or community themselves and that narrate the history from the perspective of those who experienced it, as a critical element of common wealth for marginalized groups and communities. She explains her goal in writing her book, and in contributing to the larger project of black historical work in general:

That was the intent, to show that this was one neighborhood in one place that is representative of our neighborhoods all over the country, and that we did not live in a vacuum. All these places worked together and were related somehow or another, in the entire scheme of black life in America. And that we are being judged, our history is being judged, or related, for that matter, as a series of unrelated events! And people who just happened to live in Ohio just happened to do this and who lived over here and just happened to do, I mean, we were all connected! We all knew what everybody else was doing, and we all worked together, and that’s what I’m trying to show.

In presenting through her book one specific example of black community life in pre-Civil Rights-era America, Ruth aims to help grow the historical record regarding everyday African American experiences. Furthermore, she wants to enlarge and complicate existing narratives of how black communities functioned in pre-Civil Rights-era

America—both in relation to each other and to mainstream “elite white” history. In this desire to complicate conventional narratives of black history, Ruth is recognizing and utilizing the insurgent, critical, and even subversive potential of historical interpretation.

In addition to unsettling conventional scholarly historical narratives, Ruth also aims to unsettle and reframe common understandings and assumptions among African Americans themselves regarding the historical experiences of African Americans in this country. She sees reframing these common understandings and assumptions as an important means of nurturing and regenerating common wealth, particularly among younger African Americans, as she suggests below:

So, I think we have lost that as a people, and as I say in the book, we’ve lost that commonality, community. We’ve lost that. As a people we’ve lost that. And we need to get it back, just because. We need to get it back. For the children. We need to understand what it took, what it took for them to be able to go and live in the suburbs. They need to understand what *happened*, you know. And it’s not happening. And so the kids are kind of, they don’t have the deep respect for their people that they should, because they haven’t been taught the history. They’re just out there.

Interestingly, however, Ruth does not blame younger generations (at least not entirely) for this lack of “deep respect for their people,” as she describes it. Rather, she sees it as stemming primarily from a failure on the part of her generation (just before the Baby Boomers) and her parents’ generation—a failure to effectively share with younger generations the place-based and memory-based common wealth that she views as having undergirded African American life throughout the American experience. And this failure, in turn, she sees as spurred by the massive changes in the social arrangement of African American communities—both internally and vis a vis non-African American communities, in the decades following *Brown v. Board of Education* and the dawn of the Civil Rights movement.

Once white folks started to leave and other blacks started to move in, once the multi-family dwellings were constructed and folks started to move in, then you have a dilution of the small-town feel [in reference specifically to Southeast D.C.], and where information about where you came from might have been passed down, now it wasn't, because those people were gone. They'd moved, the information's not there, folks have died, old folks have died, they've left before there was a chance to carry forward the family traditions or whatever, so there wasn't a real, and too, how can I put this, we, (long pause), in retrospect, there were historic occasions, and some of those things that happened were indeed historic, but from our perspective—okay, we've torn down that barrier, let's move on. And so now let's enjoy the fruit of the effort that got us here, and so there's not that much interest in what happened then, because now, I've been looking through the window all this time, (tapping for emphasis), I wanna go in now, I can go in now, I don't care what happened back there, I wanna go *in now*. So, that's kind of what happened. And so, the information didn't have a chance to be transferred before we had a whole new experience.

Indeed, the massive spatial upheavals of African American communities that accompanied the desegregation process and the mid-20th-century urban renewal movement caused severe dislocations and disruptions within African American communities—disruptions whose scars are still visible today, and which are being repeated through the contemporary processes of urban redevelopment and gentrification. This link between past and present dislocations and disruptions of local heritage and landscape is one reason Ruth views repairing broken transmissions of memory and heritage as such a vital and urgent project today.

In addition to the above general framings of her interest in history, Ruth also speaks more specifically to the cultural politics of marginalization, power, and authority in relation to history. Indeed, both she and Kwame discuss at length why they feel it is so essential for marginalized groups to know and feel ownership of their cultural history, and perhaps even more importantly, to be able to contribute to that historical record in their own right. In the following quotation, Ruth describes her frustration with those she views as existing culturally “outside” the community of Southeast D.C., whether by

virtue of race, class, or some other factor, producing interpretations of local black histories. She sees these interpretations not just as “inauthentic,” but also as more likely to be inaccurate and to erase important elements of local history and memory.

It’s important for us to write this stuff down, talk about it, and get it down. It really is necessary, because if we don’t, somebody else will be interpreting our history, and they’ll get it all wrong. Let me tell you, they get it *all* wrong. So, that’s why I’m doing what I’m doing, because, when I go to conferences and hear people talk. Point of information, you know, because they don’t get it right. They don’t get it right. [referencing a comment she made at a recent conference presentation on the history of Southeast D.C. in which she corrected the presenter’s incorrect naming of particular people and places in the community].

Kwame concurs that the ability to tell one’s own story—and to have it meaningfully heard and added to the historical record—is of paramount importance for marginalized communities. He also recognizes that many, if not most, marginalized histories have either been mangled—as Ruth suggests above—or omitted from the historical record entirely. He suggests that “history is usually that which is told by the people who’ve won the wars.” It is therefore an uphill battle, as he sees it, to work not only to uncover the lost common wealth of marginalized historical knowledge, but also to ensure that the stories of marginalized people today are not edited or erased like those of their ancestors.

What motivated me to do this work was that I understand that history is historic, and if you don’t tell your story, someone else is tellin’ it for you, and then you look at the Nacostia and the Nacotch tank indigenous peoples who were in that land, we know nothing of them. Nothing! But the fact that we celebrate the man who’s destroyed these people with all types of warfare ... So *I know* that if I don’t preserve the history and tell the story it’s not gonna be told.

Ruth makes a similar argument regarding her sense of the danger of older marginalized people neglecting to share the stories of their own experiences, and of younger marginalized people neglecting to listen to or record the historical experiences of

these elders. The risk is that this valuable cultural memory could be lost entirely, or that it could be (mis)interpreted by those who did not experience it and/or understand it from only a limited (non-marginalized) perspective.

... the main thing is this: If we don't tell it, if my generation doesn't tell it, it's *gone*. It's *gone forever*. Because the children don't know it. ... If we don't write it down, then somebody else will write our history. Cause we're the last generation to have lived under segregated circumstances, and if we don't document it, it's gone.

In a different context but still relating to the importance of authority over one's own story, Theresa discusses her anger at the coal industry's intensifying practice of co-opting Appalachian history and tropes of Appalachian identity. In the quotation below, she is discussing in particular the inversion of Appalachian labor history by the coal industry. Turning completely on its head the historical reality of coal mining unions fighting against the abusive practices of coal barons, recent industry propaganda glides over Appalachia's brave and bloody history of struggles to unionize and to protect the well-being of people and communities. It erases this radical history altogether and instead contends that blind support for the coal industry is the backbone of Appalachian heritage and identity. In this deeply flawed formulation, coal miners themselves are equated with coal industry elites, and the implication is that one cannot struggle against the coal industry without also struggling against one's friends, family, community, and even oneself. Theresa says the following about this "Friends of Coal" campaign and its inversion of historical reality:¹³⁶

And I think that's the place that I just constantly struggle with people's kind of embracing of the idea of to support coal miners you necessarily support the coal industry, and that's so *completely* divorced from the history of this place, where the coal miners were always working to better this place in struggle against the

¹³⁶ See Figure 9 on p. 27 for an image of a "Friends of Coal" sticker affixed to a car in Letcher County.

people who were making the money off their bodies and our land, and that history has just sort of been, has vanished through this Friends of Coal propaganda campaign that really equates miners and corporate owners in the same idea of coal. And so that's just been, trying to figure out ways to undo and think through that, not specifically the work of Summit City by any means, but the work of others, definitely, to think about. It's one of the most, I mean, somebody, I hope, is studying it, because it really, I mean it's masterful, unbelievable. [the inversion of historical reality in the service of industry propaganda]

Like Kwame and Ruth above, Theresa recognizes the difficulty of repairing the damage done by grossly inaccurate and misleading historical discourses such as these. This repair work is particularly difficult when the subjects of these discursive violations have been and remain marginalized, and sometimes even absorb these inaccurate and damaging discourses themselves. Nevertheless, she and Kwame and Ruth all see it is a necessary project, and one that can begin to be positively addressed by strengthening the historical preservationist ethic in marginalized communities such as these. The reparative discursive work of residents such as Ruth, Kwame, and Theresa—which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter—thus contributes not just to a renewed sense of place and identity but also to a more robust sense of agency.

Celebrating Personal Memory, Local Pride, and Nostalgia

I turn next to the third type of positive understanding of historical knowledge and memory articulated by my research participants. This type of positive understanding of historical knowledge and memory involves accessing a historical preservationist ethic via idyllic, often nostalgic, place-based memories. My research participants in both places vary considerably in their articulation of nostalgic or idyllic memories of life in their respective communities, and for that matter, in terms of their sense of place and attachment to other places they may have lived at different points in their life. In general, nostalgia was a more commonly expressed theme among the Letcher County

interviewees, but they vary in how much they emphasize it. With regard to the Southeast D.C. interviewees, nostalgia did not seem to be a very significant source of motivation or sentiment underlying their understandings of historically-based common wealth.

Nevertheless, one exception to this rule is Ruth, who not only discusses and embraces nostalgic place-based memories, but is in fact rivaled only by Joyce in Letcher County in the fervency with which she speaks about her sense of historical nostalgia. Significantly, both Ruth and Joyce are middle-class, college-educated women in their early sixties, so these similarities in their gender, age, and class and educational backgrounds likely have something to do with their strikingly parallel views in this particular arena.

Both Joyce and Ruth emphasize the nurturing and supportive qualities of the respective communities that helped shape them during their childhoods. Both also stress the fact that these bucolic and loving environments flourished in spite of the structural hardships imposed by poverty and segregation, respectively. Indeed, it is with pride that they describe the capacity of their parents and others in previous generations to persevere and to create happiness and success in spite of structural challenges. Joyce describes her childhood in rural Letcher County as follows:

I just, I was reared kind of I guess in an idyllic world, as far as I was concerned. Everything was wonderful, you know, our mom and dad loved us, we had problems, you know, we weren't rich, and there wasn't a whole lot of extra, but we were happy. Mom and Dad spent time with us, you know, on the weekends Dad would, we'd get out in his old jeep and we'd go to Pine Mountain or go to the custard stand, have an ice cream, or just ride around, he'd take us swimmin in the river, and ah, so you know we grew up feelin really loved and secure.

While emphasizing slightly different qualities of the community environment that she sees as having provided a strong foundation for her childhood experience, Ruth's

description below of 1950s Southeast D.C. is similar to Joyce's description above in its positive evaluation of community life at that time.

We just grew up in a place that took care of its children, we grew up in a place where children respected adults, they respected their place in the world. They were sheltered in the sense that it was a village, ahm, and everybody knew everybody, everybody knew where you were, everybody knew where you should be, and your neighbor could discipline you and send you home, and then your parents would discipline you.

Joyce and Ruth also share in emphasizing not just the positive value of remembering and learning about the past, but the value of actively and perhaps uncritically *emulating* that past. As is common with historical or memory-based interpretations that are framed within a sense of nostalgia, the past tends to be seen as more authentic, more functional, more wholesome, more solid, etc.¹³⁷ Joyce says the following about her sense that previous generations were harder, more disciplined, and of stronger "character" than today's young people:

Nineteen-seventy was when we started our reunions down there [at the community school], and you know the older people came for many, many years, and you could just see such a difference in the character of those people, you know, they walked like ten miles to come to school, they had real strong, of course you know religion was taught in school back then, and you went by character rather than whatever we do today. And those people were just, they would tell some of the funniest stories of what they did back when they stayed in the dormitories and stuff. They were just a different brand of people, and all of them, even though they came from extremely poor circumstances, all became teachers or doctors or lawyers or, you know, in some kind of field where they became well-off financially.

Ruth does not speak explicitly of character in the same way that Joyce does, but she most definitely shares in idealizing earlier generations of Southeast residents, and in implying that they did more with less than current generations:

¹³⁷ For a useful discussion of nostalgia, history, and preservation see David Lowenthal, "Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

But this was a place where you had, my grandmother's parents died early, she died in 1901 and he died in 1903, he was a lawyer, they came here from Texas, they graduated from Prairie View Teacher's College. I mean you had folks who came here who had skills, who were educated. Aunt Bess taught music from her house on Morris Road where my mother now lives, so, you know, you had people who wanted to be citizens of the United States, and wanted to make a contribution, and wanted to assert that citizenship by being able to vote, by being able to have all of the rights and privileges pertaining thereto, and worked toward that end, however they did it, whether you knew that's what we were doing or not. But we were working towards freedom. So. And to better things for our children, for those to come, to make it easier for them to live and thrive, if I can use that, in the United States of America. So, you had all of that going for you in one place. You had teachers and preachers and doctors and lawyers and merchants and cleaners and pharmacists and all these people living in the same area, in the same village, working toward the common good.

As upper-middle-aged people, Joyce and Ruth have both experienced and observed a great deal of change over time in their communities. For Ruth these changes included urban renewal and desegregation and the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, plus the subsequent diminution of the civil rights movement and the growth of urban redevelopment and gentrification. For Joyce these changes included the usual boom-and-bust economic cycles that have long punctuated coal-dependent regions, as well as the flowering of a newfound sense of Appalachian cultural identity, the intensification of environmental and cultural damage as a result of increasingly destructive coal mining practices, and the growth in both "pro-coal" and "anti-coal" activism. Experiencing these profound changes in both places has deeply shaped their understandings of local history, memory, and identity. It has also created a disconnect between their earlier and contemporary experiences, and it is thus not surprising that they might find comfort in the memories they associate with their childhoods.

Such emphasis on nostalgia and fond memories of the past can easily become problematic if it clouds more mundane realities of both change and continuity over time.

It also has a tendency to encourage exclusionary and marginalizing practices, particularly when it is expressed in terms of the supposed decline in community “character” or “purity” over time. Indeed, nostalgia and romanticizing of the past do often go hand-in-hand with virulent expressions of racism, classism, and other forms of discriminatory beliefs and practices. Nostalgia and fond memories of the past can also serve, however, as motivation for generating richer and more diverse understandings of the local past and what it might have to teach us in the present, and for connecting young people and current residents of all ages and backgrounds to a sense of place-based connection and belonging. This is precisely the kind of productive harnessing of place and memory that historian Dolores Hayden explores in *The Power of Place*, illustrating the generative cultural work performed by public art and public history projects in marginalized neighborhoods of Los Angeles.¹³⁸ It seems likely that there is some of both the former and the latter in both women’s perspectives. Significantly, this is an example of the more immediate and individualized and the more communal understandings of common wealth existing in tension alongside each other. This is not to suggest that Joyce or Ruth act in explicitly contradictory ways, but rather that most understandings of place-based common wealth themselves contain contradictory elements. Not surprisingly, this suggests that place-based common wealth is not an unqualified good, but it also reminds us that it is likewise not an unqualified “bad.” It is of inherent value, contradictory though it is, and its sheer importance to people such as Joyce and Ruth and many others suggests that it cannot be ignored as part of efforts to make sense of conceptual landscapes of place and the common wealth that animates those landscapes.

¹³⁸ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995).

Significantly, it is not only the upper-middle-aged interviewees who offer a nostalgic view of local history; likewise, not all of the middle-aged and upper-middle-aged interviewees speak with such strong nostalgic overtones. Keith, for example, does not romanticize the past or frame it as an ideal for contemporary situations, even as he does share stories of his own fond memories of his life as a child and young person in Letcher County. Sharon, likewise, speaks of feeling very grounded in her Southeast D.C. neighborhood and in the social networks within which she exists there, but she also does not idealize her past experiences, whether they be based in personal memories or knowledge of local history.

Among the younger interviewees, both Melissa and Theresa do speak in somewhat idealizing tones about their memories and their nostalgia for their communities as they existed when they were children, in the not-too-distant past. Much of this discussion relates to the profound significance of their physical surroundings in shaping their childhood experiences, and to the subsequent trauma of seeing portions of this physical heritage destroyed or irreparably damaged in recent years. Melissa explains her relationship to the physical heritage of Letcher County—and to the specific heritage of her own childhood in Letcher County—as follows:

I think growing up here, it's kind of like, we don't realize that we have this really strong connection and that we do identify so much to the land, but it's not until later on, I think I was twenty-one before I really realized how much it played a part in my life. ... like when I make friends outside the region it's like, I kinda have like this entire different experience of childhood it seems like, I mean, outdoors was a huge, huge part of my life, we were never inside when the weather was nice, and, when the weather was cold we were still outside playing, so, and then when I got older and was a teenager, there was the idea that I had to get out of here, ... and so I left for a while, and then when I came back, it was different, like it was, I didn't even realize I had missed it until I came back and was here, and once I was back and saw the mountains, it was the first time I realized really what was happening and that it wasn't what anyone else was experiencing.

Theresa's meditation below on her relationship with her community and region's physical heritage is less focused on recent damage to that heritage, but it demonstrates a similar kind of unabashed love for one's place—not unlike that expressed by Joyce and Ruth:

And Pine Mountain, that's the other thing, I mean, just as far as sense of place, Pine Mountain holds you in this place so strongly. And the farm that I grew up on [in nearby Wise County, Virginia], we talk about moving there a fair amount, cause it's also, there's nowhere more beautiful in the world, as far as I'm concerned, than that spot.

Another variation on expressing a historical preservationist ethic via idyllic, nostalgic, place-based memories involves the strong emphasis on aesthetic qualities. In some cases, these aesthetic qualities are prioritized above and beyond more basic structural concerns, and occasionally even in opposition to those concerns. Michael, in particular, tends to speak of his understandings of local history and preservation in aesthetically-oriented terms, though several other research participants do so as well. In an early conversation with Michael, cited in chapter two, he emphasizes the intertwined role that notions of history and aesthetics played in attracting him to Southeast D.C., and to the historically designated neighborhood of Anacostia in particular:

I started looking around and I wanted something that was near a commercial corridor, ah, with a lot of potential, and preferably something where I could get like a historic home. Cause I really love those neighborhoods with the old Victorian houses, but you know, I'm priced out of all of that right now, so, ahm, I wanted something comparable. So one day, you know, I just happened to be driving around Anacostia, and I was like, this is the perfect neighborhood for me. And I decided to move.

Living in a neighborhood with a certain visual kind of historicity to it was obviously desirable for Michael, and indeed is in general widely desirable today among people who are looking to buy older homes, especially in urban areas. The Victorian

aesthetic, in particular, has for much of the last century existed as a kind of idealized aesthetic of historicity, particular in the realm of architecture and urban design. In expressing a taste for the architectural styles associated with the turn of the twentieth century, Michael and others like him are participating in a kind of commodification of imagined nostalgia for this historical period, and more specifically for the qualities of affluence and taste that they associate with the residential architecture of this era. The yearning to associate oneself with this historical aesthetic is of course an expression of individual tastes to some extent, and I do not doubt that Michael genuinely appreciates Victorian architectural aesthetics, but such yearnings do not exist in a cultural vacuum. They are tied in to understandings of identity, belonging, and of the cultural validation that comes with participating in a mainstream ideal such as this. They are also tied in to the increasing popularity of historicity, of the domination of mainstream historical understanding by aesthetically—and ultimately commercially—driven values.

Most homeowners are aware that maintaining the value of their investment in property is desirable if at all possible, and improving the aesthetic quality of the built environment surrounding the home is a way of contributing to this process of protecting their financial investment. Michael suggests in the following quotation that aesthetic quality, economic well-being, and overall neighborhood well-being—perhaps stated otherwise as common wealth—are intertwined with one another. His statement here also suggests that the act of homeownership itself is a significant element of local common wealth, and that the beneficial value of homeownership may sometimes outweigh concerns for social justice. These concerns include the maintenance of the Barry Farm public housing complex, to which he refers below. Strikingly, he also appears to suggest

that the desire to maintain high levels of homeownership and aesthetic quality may outweigh even the need to maintain the historic built environment of the neighborhood, if that historic environment does not meet the requisite aesthetic standards.

I'm all about maintaining the historic character of the community; I live in one. But I'm also about not seeing abandoned homes, seeing homeowners, because that's truly how a neighborhood improves is homeownership. So, you know, I'm very well aware that when Barry Farms is torn down and rebuilt, we'll have a lot of new homeowners, and I think that's good, you know, for the larger community. I think it's awesome, actually, and I know a lot of people, including myself, can't wait for it to happen.

While Ruth is more focused than Michael on the maintenance of local historical knowledge and information—in both its tangible and intangible forms—she expresses a similar sort of disdain for rental housing relative to single-family residences. As with Michael, and likewise with Joyce in Letcher County, this desire to restore the community to an earlier and presumably more ideal state suggests that certain social structures and social groupings contribute more negatively to the maintenance of this “ideal” state. Certain aesthetics and certain histories are seen as producing more common wealth than others, in spite of all of them having existed as a historical reality in the place in question.

You had zoning changes in the '50s, where only multi-family dwellings could be built, and so all of those, if you see an apartment building with white brick, that's a '60s building, slid sideways on the street where it can't be accommodated but it's slid sideways. That's one of those '50s and '60s apartment buildings. All of those—Butler Gardens, up behind the Douglass home, all of those garden apartments, on Stanton and, I mean, it's just like they're doing now putting up these townhouse developments and all of these McMansions. Well the same thing happened in Anacostia. The same thing happened. Wherever there was this much land they slid something on it. And you couldn't build a single-family home; it was all multi-family dwellings.

Significantly, in the above discussion I have included those understandings of historical knowledge and memory that are grounded in nostalgia and idyllic memories as a branch of what I am calling “positive,” and even “insurgent” views of historical

knowledge and memory. I have done this with some reservation, and indeed it is worth noting that these understandings straddle the line between what might be called “positive” or “productive” views of history and those that are more negative and reactionary. As I explained above, this straddling quality serves the purpose of illuminating the inherently contradictory nature of most understandings of place-based common wealth, but that should not blind us to the reality that some of the nostalgia-based statements above do quite clearly reflect *un*-common wealth, or a vision of well-being that is not broadly shared or inclusive. The fact that the same, generally well-intentioned people can simultaneously promote common wealth and un-common wealth does not mean that these people are insincere in their visions of common wealth; it does mean, however, that we need to be vigilant in probing underlying and sometimes even subconscious expressions of who should and should not partake of that common wealth.

Environmental Preservationist Ethic

I turn now to the second main focus of this chapter, what I am calling an “environmental” preservationist ethic, as it is articulated by my research participants in their discussions of place-based common wealth. It is obvious that both terms that I am using to organize my research participants’ understandings of a preservationist ethic—“historical” and “environmental”—are extremely broad in their reach, and can be utilized to characterize a vast array of practices and perspectives. As noted earlier in this chapter, my reasoning for utilizing these two terms is not to emphasize the necessity of differentiating the two, but simply to provide an organizational schema—one which adheres to the Western linguistic and philosophical divides within which I and all of my research participants exist—and more significantly/complicatedly, to actually highlight

the permeability and overlapping nature of the two terms, particularly when understood within the context of a preservationist ethic.

The “environmental” term is perhaps even more contentious than the “historical” term, both within a generalized context but particularly within the specific context of these two marginalized places that are currently facing significant structural changes and potential threats to their local “environments.” In Letcher County mountaintop removal and its damaging effects directly threaten the topographical landscape and environment, along with certain elements of the built environment such as homes and cemeteries located near mining sites. Furthermore, the local social and political “environment” is also becoming increasingly volatile as a result of disagreements over coal mining, economic well-being, and environmental well-being. In Southeast D.C., the beginnings of high-end redevelopment projects and the eventual gentrification that is likely to take place directly threaten the built environment that supports primarily low-income and impoverished residents—namely public housing complexes and nearby homes and businesses. Social environments of support and kinship networks, which are important in any community but are often a matter of survival in impoverished communities, are also directly threatened by displacement and gentrification. The rising rents and tax rates found in gentrifying neighborhoods are likely to force many low-income residents—and the businesses that cater to them—out of their neighborhoods and into new and unfamiliar areas. Furthermore, redevelopment projects also threaten the topographical environment of the swaths of Southeast D.C. that have remained as green spaces, and while gentrification may lead to the restoration of the badly polluted Anacostia River, it

is an ironic twist that the people who have lived for so long alongside that pollution may be unable to partake of an eventual cleaned and restored river.

For all of these reasons, it is obvious that the various “environments” of Letcher County and Southeast D.C. face substantial stressors and threats. As historically marginalized communities, however, many people in these places have grown accustomed to the idea that a clean and well-protected environment is a luxury relative to other basic everyday needs. Many have also grown accustomed to the environmental neglect and abuse that have long plagued these areas. Further, environmentalism as a movement has generally been propagated by largely affluent, largely white segments of the population. As such, it has often been framed in ways that can seem alien and exclusionary to low-income people and people of color, and in tones that often smack of elitism or of disregard for the challenges marginalized people face. Furthermore, the industrial corporate arena has recognized and taken advantage of this chasm between affluent environmentalism and the everyday realities of marginalized communities, fanning the flames of anti-environmentalist sentiment among low-income working people and simultaneously ensuring that these low-income workers can continue to form the backbone of the labor source for their environmentally damaging endeavors.

The Language of Environmentalism

As a result of these historical and contemporary relationships between “environmentalism” and low-income communities and communities of color, the language itself used to describe environmental well-being becomes a key player in shaping the environmental preservationist ethic in both of these communities. Indeed, wrapped up in the expression of an environmental preservationist ethic by my research

participants is a response to the conventional ways in which “environmentalism” and “the environment” have been constructed and portrayed in mainstream public discourse.

While some of them do find resonance in the more conventional understanding, several others adapt conventional environmentalist language to reflect the nuances of how environmental well-being is understood and supported in these particular communities.

Sharon is particularly adamant about the disabling effect of environmentalist discourse that is, at best, decontextualized and lacking in meaning for marginalized people such as many of the residents of Southeast D.C., and at worst patronizing or belittling. She has the following to say about participation in environmentally oriented movements in Southeast D.C.:

... what’s very telling is when we have environmental meetings and invite the community to come, there’s usually about ten or fifteen of us. It’s those of us that really understand it and, because it took me a while. Environmentalists speak a different language, and I think that’s one of the challenges, is that they have to speak plain folks’ talk. And that doesn’t happen all the time. And people are like, well what the hell does “green” mean? What does that mean? And I don’t think that the environmental community or policymakers have articulated that very well.

Sharon finds much of the language used by conventional environmentalists—whether activists or scientists or policymakers—to appear maddeningly abstruse and decontextualized for marginalized residents who are not well-versed in mainstream affluent discourses. She argues, however, that there are other ways of speaking about environmental well-being that will resonate more clearly and more strongly with marginalized people’s everyday needs and interests. She sees those concepts that connect environmental well-being with the centrality of “home,” and all the expectations of safety and comfort and well-being that accompany “home” as a concept, as particularly useful in communicating effectively with low-income residents of Southeast D.C. about

environmental well-being. Significantly, the struggle to secure and maintain shelter of any kind—and ideally shelter that is safe and socially supportive—is at the heart of the injustice that occurs when residents are displaced or forced to move elsewhere because of rising rents and property taxes or the elimination of public housing units. In the following extended quotation, Sharon discusses the concepts of the indoor environment and cleanliness as particularly meaningful for marginalized residents, especially those who are in the most desperate circumstances. She also stresses the crucial reality that however it is framed, environmental well-being cannot be approached outside the context of the larger problems and challenges that shape everyday life for many residents of Southeast D.C.:

I'm gonna tell you the story that I always tell. When, my first home visit, cause I'm a social worker by profession, when I got out of college and I got my first job, my first home visit was down at Sheridan Terrace. They have since torn it down, and I was in this unit, and this mother had just had her ninth child, the baby was home from the hospital maybe five days, so when I came in, the mother's sitting at the table with, they call it a 40, a big bottle of beer, a *big* bottle, they call it a 40. And the baby's sitting on the couch. So, when I came in, I chatted with her, and she was like, Oh, sit over there, sit over there. So she asked me to sit on the couch where the baby was. And the baby started to cry. So, I said, Are you gonna, do you want me to get the baby? Oh no, no, just leave it. And I can't touch the baby without her permission, so the baby lay there crying. So as I'm sitting there, there are roaches crawling on me on the couch, and they're crawling on the baby, and I hate bugs, so what I had to do was very casually just knock them off as they were crawling on me, and then I reached over to the baby and knocked them off on the baby. So imagine what that does to that baby's health to be exposed to roaches like that? ... for me thinking of the environment is thinking about cleanliness, inside the home and outside of the home, and people were just angry, they were in despair. And they were happiest when they were drinking a 40 or at a party getting high, ... because the other thing that we were concerned about is, back in those days there were kids that were pumping gas for you at the gas station, and that was before they had those nozzles to contain the fumes, and these are little bitty kids, so I finally realized when I was working at Sheridan Terrace, that the kids would go pump gas because their mother didn't come home for a couple of days, because she's strung out on drugs somewhere, and there was no food in the house, so they had to go make money to eat. So I think that when I

think of “green” for this particular audience, I would think of cleanliness, because they understand what that means.

In this portrait of life in 1980s-era Sheridan Terrace, a former Southeast D.C. public housing complex, Sharon very compellingly weaves together issues of poverty, despair, drug abuse, lack of employment, childhood hunger, and environmental hazards, all under the umbrella of environmental quality and well-being. “Cleanliness” in this context is much broader and more all-encompassing than keeping oneself and one’s home tidy and clean; it relates to the overall *uncleanliness* and *unhealthfulness* of the entire structural system within which severely marginalized people often exist. Endemic roach and other pest infestations, routine exposure to gasoline fumes and other toxic substances, potential lack of access to birth control and contraception, as suggested by the presence of nine children in one home, lack of educational and employment opportunities but easy access to alcohol and drugs—these are all examples of *common poverty* in terms of environmental well-being, and in this context it is jarringly obvious why abstract calls to save or protect “the environment” might fall on deaf or scornful ears.

Melissa makes a similar argument in the Letcher County context, suggesting that language invoking a rigid separation between the well-being of people and the well-being of “the environment”—in the more limited sense of physical landforms, wildlife, green space, etc.—can alienate the people whose own suffering is intimately tied to the suffering of the physical landscape where they reside. In the following extended excerpt, she discusses her participation in a program called “Witness for Peace.” This program involved youth delegates from around the U.S. traveling together to Columbia to visit communities in the coal mining region there, to observe the environmental damage, to meet with local miners and their families, and also to meet with local industry and

government representatives. Melissa discusses below both a preliminary visit made to Letcher County by several of the Witness for Peace delegates from elsewhere in the country, and their subsequent trip together to Colombia.

There was a young guy from Boston who just got an internship with John Kerry, and he was wanting to learn about the issues [regarding mountaintop removal], and a lot of the Witness for Peace delegation came to Kentucky two days before we left for Colombia to tour here, and he was taken aback by here, like, he didn't know what to think. And he made a comment the first night I met him, that a lot of what we do here is what they do in Boston, like, he said that in Boston that this homeless man died on the street and that people just kept walking by, and that here we let things die of the environment and we just keep walking by, that we're indifferent, and it's the same. And I was really upset by the comment, like I really admire him, he does great work, but I was upset by the comment, because we're conditioned here, you know, after so long you can't keep fighting, and you lose hope. I mean it's been over 100 years that we've been through this, you know, you're raised to think this is normal. I don't think it's indifferent, I think it's loss of hope. And so, when I first heard these comments when they were here in my community and then I traveled to Colombia with them, I was like, I felt really out of place, and like, I don't know that I belong in this group, you know, I'm not here to look at this from an environmental standpoint, I don't fight for the, necessarily the environment here, like I'm fighting for the people here. And then when I went there [to Colombia], I was really excited that we got to talk so much to the community and not just people who wanted to just show us the environmental destruction, but like, this is what's happening to the community, this is a human rights issue. And so when I started doing that and like getting to talk to them then, I was definitely more connected there than I was with people from the delegation here.

Melissa distinguishes between a kind of "environmental" rights and human rights in this excerpt, and she does so because of her frustration with much of the discourse of environmental destruction that is applied to her community by those who are often not fully versed in the historical marginalization and complicated cultural politics of life there. This strictly environmentalist discourse tends to disregard the accompanying human and cultural damage taking place alongside and as a result of mountaintop removal, and sometimes even vilifies marginalized local residents for failing to rise up against the coal industry, as Melissa's quotation suggests.

Interestingly, two other interviewees strongly embrace the conventional term of “environmentalist;” they seem to imbue it perhaps with their own added contextual modifications but nonetheless embrace it strongly. Both Kwame and Keith not only embrace environmentalism and identify as environmentalists themselves, but they do so in a way that suggests a definitive moment of becoming or transforming. In response to a question about the relationship(s) of local residents with the Anacostia River, Kwame mentions his own work with a local group known as the Earth Conservation Corps, describing that work as transformative in encouraging him to become an environmentalist. Before going on to discuss the many serious ecological problems in Southeast D.C., particularly in relation to the Anacostia River, Kwame explains that “I became an environmentalist at twenty-one, and I helped remove like thirteen tons of waste [from the Anacostia] with the Earth Conservation Corps.” There is pride in this pronouncement from Kwame, and it is clear that he views environmentalist work as a noble and necessary thing. In spite of his own wholehearted affiliation with it, however, he goes on to explain the generally weak role conventional environmentalism plays in Southeast D.C., and the reasons for this as he sees it:

We got individuals who understand [environmental problems], but those individuals are not able to, those few are not able to positively impact the minds of people, and they don’t have the resources to educate them. So the majority of East of the River communities have the worst impact from environmental pollution. Go to River Terrace, by the Pepco Power Plant: the highest cases of asthma, respiratory infections and diseases, least resources to deal with it.¹³⁹ Period. Especially dealin with the Anacostia, and when you go to Anacostia, you have two things: you have lead pipes everywhere, you have a lot of water pollution, and the least resources to deal with it. So people are not as connected as they should be and need to be, and that goes back to gentrification: why are they re-doin the new pipes?

¹³⁹ River Terrace is a neighborhood located east of the Anacostia River in Northeast D.C.

There is a kind of insider-outsider dynamic operating in Kwame's above comments about environmentalism. He is able to see the situation both from the more mainstream and affluent perspective of recognizing the necessity of improving environmental pollution and damage, but also from the more marginalized local perspective of lacking the resources to deal with pollution and also of having lost some of the prior local connections to the river and its environs precisely because of its extremely polluted quality.

Keith is also very emphatic in his embrace of environmentalism and support for environmentalist goals. In the following quotation, he describes with bluntness his devotion to environmentalist practices, and his belief that causing or allowing damage to the environment runs counter to an unspoken code of common sense morality:

When Al Gore was runnin' for president, and they was a whole bunch of young people at the house that were friends of my kids, and they was all sittin' around talking and they'd just gotten to be voting age, and they was all talkin' about who they were gonna vote for for president, and one of 'em said, you know you can't vote for Al Gore, he's one of them environmentalists, he said. You know, our electric bill, our gas bill, and everything'll go high, we'll have to start drivin' little bitty cars, and argued against bein' an environmentalist. And then one of the other kids said, there's two kinds of people in the world: environmentalists and fools. And it's true, you know? I mean, anybody that's not an environmentalist, I guess you could really, by some stretch of the imagination be somebody that just doesn't know any better, but I think that's very rare. The truth about it is most people knows what's right and wrong. And ah, but anybody else that would not be an environmentalist for the sake of their job or their cheap gas pump prices or low energy prices or electric bills is a fool! And you're just passing on all that damage to the environment to somebody else to clean up at some point for the sake of cheap energy bills.

Like Kwame, Keith does also recognize that the matter of survival and maintaining one's livelihood often facilitates turning a blind eye to ecological damage among marginalized local residents. He describes some of the constraints local residents face on speaking out against the damages caused by mountaintop removal as follows, explaining from the

perspective of such residents that “you know, my friend works there and I don’t wanna say anything, or I work there, or they’re on my family’s property and they’re gettin’ a income from it and that’s the only income they’ve got, or, you know, whatever reasons.”

In spite of his understanding of these constraints among the marginalized residents of Letcher County, most of whom have family members and friends who work for the coal industry, he does not see these constraints as sufficient rationale for condemning environmentalism. Indeed, he is even less sympathetic to the constraints faced by local residents (including himself, ironically, since he is by trade a coal miner) than Kwame, and certainly less so than the other three Letcher County interviewees. Fond of metaphors and imagery, Keith sums up his views on the environmental damage that so many people tolerate in the face of desperation, providing a blunt but compelling argument as to why this toleration is ultimately more harmful than beneficial to marginalized residents, even if it means suffering some additional consequences in the short term:

And it’s ah, you know, at some point people are gonna have to be responsible and, you know, people that allow damage, you know, if somebody come took a hammer and started beatin’ on your car, you wouldn’t just back off and say, well, my brother does body work so I need to let this guy beat my car up so he can have a job repairing automobile damage. They wouldn’t do that. But, they will allow mountaintop removal and a lot of other abuses.

The use, and often the co-optation, of environmentalist discourse by corporate and governmental entities represents another facet of how mainstream environmentalism is presented to marginalized communities. Theresa and Kwame are examples of two residents of these marginalized communities who are well aware of the role played by governments and industries in shaping environmentalist discourse and in utilizing it to further their own specific interests, which are often at odds with the actual environmental

and human well-being of the communities in question. As is obvious in the quotations below, both Theresa and Kwame reject the bureaucratic “spin” on issues of local environmental well-being, but they recognize the power of such discourse, nonetheless, to shape general attitudes and perspectives among residents of these communities. In the following quotation, Theresa laments the coal industry’s rather brilliant propaganda model, which she sees as operating in the following way: communicating to residents in a circular and entrapping fashion that to want to protect the mountains, which are generally recognized as a significant component of place-based identity in the area, is to act as environmentalists, and to act as environmentalists makes them traitors to their community and thus to the mountains. Theresa’s evisceration of this propaganda model is piercing but also deeply saddening, as it exposes the power of carefully crafted discourse—particularly discourse emanating from those in positions of power—to turn people against each other and sometimes even against themselves:

... it’s also been cheerfully declared a national sacrifice zone, because we “need” the coal, so there’s a lot of investment in not recognizing what a significant place this is. So, but I think what’s really, really hard for everybody who lives here, especially people—which is most people—who make a living off of the coal industry, one way or the other, or whose families have or who wish that they could and haven’t quite accepted the fact that at this point nobody really makes as much as they used to, you know, I mean, it’s a very, that whole thing in itself is crazy, but the way that coal mining works right now, our economy is dependent on destroying the thing that we feel is a third parent, you know [she has just described the mountains as being seen as a kind of third parent by many residents]? Like, the thing that makes us who we are is necessarily being dismantled, physically down to the very bone, for the economy, for the jobs that it offers, and, I honestly don’t understand, I mean I do understand, but I have a really hard time with how *incredibly* effectively the propaganda machine of the coal industry has convinced people to fight for the right to destroy their homes, like, to be angry that someone would suggest they not. And I just, I sort of have, just so much despair, all the time, and just how painful that is. And I think that’s a really, it has to be a pretty profound sense of dysphoria for people, whether they’re dealing with that or not, but ultimately there’s no way that you can exist in that disconnect without having a huge psychological toll, which, when you look at

the drug abuse, of the epidemic here, you know, there's a lot of stuff attached to that.

Kwame also discusses the ways in which both the language and substance of policy are used to justify unjust practices such as displacement, but simultaneously invoke the discourse of public participation and outreach, thus speaking the language of justice and respect for local communities to describe what are in actuality unjust and disrespectful interactions. Kwame pointedly describes this process with respect to what he sees as disingenuous efforts on the part of local government and business officials to “involve” residents in the decision-making process leading up to what almost always involves displacement. “We’re gonna do it legally,” says Kwame, speaking from the perspective of the policymaker, “we’re gonna put in policy so when we do it [initiate displacement of residents] it’ll be legal already.” He continues with crisp irony, “and we’re gonna help you participate, give you ways to participate in us kickin’ your ass out.” Indeed, he and Theresa both highlight powerful examples of discourses of preservation and of justice and respect—discourses that support common wealth, in other words—being co-opted and used to promote the very ends of abuse, degradation, and injustice that common wealth seeks to protect against.

Streams of the Environmental Preservationist Ethic

Having explored the role played by language and discourse in shaping the understandings of and experiences with “the environment” and “environmentalism” among residents of marginalized communities, I turn now to a more in-depth exploration of the various types of environmental preservationist ethics expressed by my research participants in Letcher County and Southeast D.C. With each of the types of environmental preservationist ethic explored, I will consider how these values reflect

marginalization, identity, and visions of ideal common wealth, and how they contribute to the shaping of conceptual landscapes of place.

An Aesthetically Grounded Environmental Preservationist Ethic

I look first at understandings of an environmental preservationist ethic that are grounded in aesthetic values. Aesthetics are a significant general component of most forms of environmentalism, and also of most understandings of place and identity; it is not surprising, therefore, that aesthetics would also come into play in my research participants' discussions of their environmental and place-based values. Several of my participants describe their home communities as places of aesthetic beauty, such as Sharon's statement that Southeast D.C. is "a beautiful place to live" and Ruth's comments about Ward 8 having "unparalleled views" of Washington and its environs and having once been "the greenest ward in the city." Likewise in Letcher County, Theresa contends, as noted above, that there is "nowhere more beautiful in the world, as far as I'm concerned," than the farm near Letcher County where she was raised. And Joyce says, very similarly, that "to me you could not go anywhere and find a more beautiful place."

In addition to these general statements about the beauty of their home communities, however, some of my participants go a step further and frame essentially all notions of environmental well-being in terms of aesthetic beauty. Joyce in Letcher County and Michael in Southeast D.C. provide the clearest examples of this aestheticizing of environmental understandings and values. Joyce, several of whose family members are employed by the coal industry, explains below how she reconciles the environmental damage caused by mountaintop removal with her support of it. Her explanation reflects the influence of discourse that pits environmental well-being against

economic well-being and then flattens environmental well-being purely to its aesthetic dimension, thus making it easier to dismiss in favor of economic well-being. But as her somewhat conflicted tone suggests, this minimizing of environmental well-being is not necessarily an easy thing to swallow, even for strong supporters of mountaintop removal and the coal industry. Furthermore, even the flattened and purely aesthetic dimension of environmental well-being can be difficult to dismiss, as Joyce's somber reflections on the lost beauty of the mountains where she grew up suggest:

I was thinking the other day about, you know, when I was a little girl, there was no signs of coal minin' anywhere, you know, the mountains were beautiful, there was no mountaintop removal or any of that, and, you know, the things we've had to adjust to over the years, so much of Carcassonne [the small community where Joyce grew up] is being mined now, and, you know, growin' up we never thought it would be touched, and ah, you know, you hate to see these things happen. But then, too, you think, well, you know, it's helpin' people make a living, you know, and there's so many things that they have found to do, you know, with the areas that have been stripped, like in Knott County [county neighboring Letcher to the northwest], all that, they have the horses and the all-ATV areas that they can all ride, and the elk, you know, is over there and all of that, so they've really, and of course the sportsplex is built on top of a mountaintop removal area, and, you know, if you have the money and the enterprising to do those sorts of things, we could have a golf course on top of one of our mountains, and of course you know up in Whitesburg they've got that Ernest Cook [Memorial Park], you know where they've got the baseball fields up there? Right on top of the mountain. So they've really used a lot of the areas that the coal has been stripped off of. But, you know, there's also no question that the mines have ruined a lot of people's water, and, ah, it's just a give and take kind of thing.

Joyce begins this meditation on the effects of mining by lamenting the destruction of the beautiful mountains amongst which she was raised, and concludes it by noting that there's "no question that the mines have ruined a lot of people's water." Ultimately, however, she frames the issue of mining's effects on the area as "a give and take kind of thing," thus positioning environmental well-being—both in its purely aesthetic sense and in the more health-based sense of pollution—as an element of common wealth that may

sometimes have to be offered up in exchange for economic well-being. With the exception of this reference to mine water, however, she rarely mentions pollution or other kinds of environmental damage that could threaten the health of residents; more common is her reduction of environmental well-being to aesthetics, along the lines of coal industry discourse. Indeed, Joyce has stitched this coal industry discourse onto her own more homegrown narrative of striving to see the big picture and value the greater good over the lesser good, when forced to choose. These are emotional qualities that she associates with maturity and wisdom, and when seen through that framework, supporting mountaintop removal becomes a matter of valuing basic economic survival over insubstantial aesthetic values.

It's hard, you know, it's hard to make those adjustments, but when you're young, and I know when I was twenty-five or thirty years old I was totally against mountaintop removal, I thought it was horrible what it was doing to the area. But back then they were not as good at reclaiming as they are now. But now that I'm older and, you know, my family are all involved in it, and I see how our state would just, I mean, I don't know what would happen to us without coal. ... But as an adult, and you know, as a mother of someone who works in a mine, and as a sister, and like I said caring about my state, I think it's a necessity. ... So, you know, there's good and bad things about it. But you know, I think part of being an adult is you look at the more practical aspects. Beautywise, not nearly as pretty as the mountains.

It is not hard to see how a framing that suggests that beauty is the only thing lost—traumatic though that alone may be—and that what is gained is literally survival as a region, would be appealing to those whose immediate livelihoods are dependent on the coal industry. Sheer survival is indeed more “practical” than beauty, even if the loss of beauty can be soul-crushing in its own way.

In the Southeast D.C. context, Michael engages in a similar kind of prioritizing of the aesthetic in terms of his overall preservationist ethic—both environmental and

historical—but he does so toward a different end than Joyce. Joyce prioritizes aesthetics as the most notable component of environmental preservation, but she does so in an effort to *minimize* the influence of environmental preservation relative to structural economic concerns. Michael, however, prioritizes aesthetics within his understanding of preservation as a means of de-politicizing the contentious discourse surrounding issues of redevelopment and displacement. By privileging the aesthetic dimensions of Southeast D.C.'s environment, he attempts to smooth out the sharp differences of opinion among residents, collapsing the deeply complex and divisive issues of justice and ownership that surround gentrification into a simple and unifying theme of aesthetic beauty and liveability. It should also be noted, however, that his framing mirrors Joyce's in the sense that the aestheticizing of political differences allows for the protection of economic investments in real estate such as his own, in a way not unlike how Joyce's (and the coal industry's) aestheticizing of environmental well-being allows for the protection of local jobs and the profitability of the coal industry. Michael explains below his minimizing of differences of opinion within the community about what its future should look like:

... most people would think that there is a gap between what people want to see. I think there is, but I think there's not, I don't know, I think when you really sit down and talk to people one-on-one, I think you'll probably come to the realization that you want the same thing.

He then expands on his sense that basic desires and goals for the future state of life in Southeast D.C. are more similar than divergent, emphasizing in particular here the presumed differences between established residents and newer residents:

... the one thing that we all have in common is that we want the neighborhood to improve. How we get there, we all differ on that, you know, but we do agree that we want to decrease the crime levels, we do agree that we don't want abandoned homes in the community, we do agree that we don't want trash on the streets, we do agree that we don't want kids hanging out on the corner. So I tend to just say,

hey, let's focus on the things that we do agree with, and ah, and not let things that are trivial divide us, you know.

All of these visions of an improved community that Michael describes are indeed likely shared by most, if not all, residents of Southeast D.C. Significantly, however, this set of goals—touching on crime, abandoned houses, trash and litter, and youth delinquency—only address the surface level of much deeper social and structural problems. The mother in a public housing unit who is struggling to provide enough food for her children, for example, is likely to be concerned at some level about trash on the streets and (perhaps moreso) about the threat of crime, but she is undoubtedly much more concerned about the possibility of her children going hungry or of the family being displaced.

A Spiritually Grounded Environmental Preservationist Ethic

Another type of environmental preservationist ethic expressed by my research participants, particularly those in Letcher County, is understandings of the environment that are grounded in spiritually oriented terms. None of my research participants speak of their home environments in a fully religious or spirit-based manner, and they are quick to point out that they do not view their connection to these environments in a completely “loopy” or “new age” way, as Theresa phrases it. They recognize, nonetheless, that there is an element of spirituality inherent in how they envision their connection to the physical environment of their home community and its environs. As I mentioned above, this tendency to merge environmental and place values in an almost spiritual way is more common among my Letcher County research participants, though in Southeast D.C. Kwame does discuss feeling a kind of abstract, spiritual connection to his African ancestors as well as to his Native American ancestors, and in that sense to the physical

ground of eastern North America. Nonetheless, in general this notion of feeling deeply and even spiritually rooted in a particular place—in both its cultural heritage and its physicality—seems to be a more commonly articulated theme in rural communities. In the rural context of Letcher County, Theresa offers the following poignant explanation of her feelings of connectedness to the physical environs of Letcher County, describing her sense of the mountain itself as having a kind of life force of its own:

People articulate it in different ways, but there is just a really strong sense of connectedness to the physical place. And I think you can get off on a track that sounds pretty loopy and new age pretty quickly talking about that [chuckling], but just at a real gut level, I mean I think there is, I know I can say I've got like a spiritual connection to the mountains, and to particular mountains. I mean I think that Pine Mountain, which is not the mountain I grew up with, but it's just an incredibly profound force. Geologically it's a profound mountain, I mean there's a lot of ways you can discuss it, but it's really, it's just very present. And so I grew up kind of between two other mountains that were similarly kind of forceful, that I really identified with, and so it's kind of easy to bring that sense of identification to Pine Mountain cause it's so strong, and it's a wild place, it's a truly, I mean, literally, it's a wilderness, of intense mountain ecology up on that mountain, in isolation, and it's magical.

Theresa's feelings regarding her own sense of connection to the mountains, and the sense of connection of others in the area, are indeed intense and poignant, and they are heightened by the state of threat within which many of those mountains now exist.

Having earlier described the local mountains as a kind of “third parent” for people raised amongst them, Theresa goes on to lament that “the way that coal mining works right now, our economy is dependent on destroying the thing that we feel is a third parent, you know?” She continues, “the thing that makes us who we are is necessarily being dismantled, physically down to the very bone, for the economy, for the jobs that it offers.” And as cited earlier, she suggests that experiencing this dismantling—“physically

down to the very bone”—is psychologically traumatizing to many people, whether they are consciously aware of it or not:

... it has to be a pretty profound sense of dysphoria for people, whether they're dealing with that or not, but ultimately there's no way that you can exist in that disconnect without having a huge psychological toll, which, when you look at the drug abuse, of the epidemic here, you know, there's a lot of stuff attached to that.

Melissa also provides a similar kind of meditation on the psychological pain associated with witnessing the destruction of one's physical environment. She describes the difficulty of realizing that something that has shaped so much of everyday life and identity in the region—the mountains that surround and shelter and provide a livelihood for those who live amongst them—is literally being gutted and destroyed in the name of livelihood and profit.

Sometimes it's, I feel like there's just this idea that, or there's *not* the idea, there's *not* the thought—we are so connected to the land that sometimes we don't even realize it. And we don't realize that if we keep doin' this it's gonna be gone, and one day you're gonna look around and you're not gonna see home, it's not gonna look the same, you're not gonna garden because the garden is on toxic soil with damaged water, and there's just this idea that, I think because we've lived so much for just the day and not the future that we don't realize what all we're giving up that makes us who we are.

An Environmental Preservationist Ethic of Everyday Use

A third type of environmental preservationist ethic expressed by my research participants is grounded in notions of everyday use and access. There is a growing body of scholarship that explores understandings of “the environment” that are centered on day-to-day interactions with one's environs—whether that be via livelihood, leisure, or even foraging or hunting for food sources. This is in contrast to conventional environmental scholarship that adheres to prevailing nineteenth- and twentieth-century-era understandings of “the environment” and “nature” as pristine spaces that should be

set apart from other spaces and “protected” from human influence and interaction as much as possible. This conventional understanding of the environment as pristine space to be policed and kept fundamentally apart from everyday human activity grew out of the specific experiences and perspectives of affluent, white, and mostly male Westerners, and also drew heavily from the rational Western philosophical tradition of dichotomies—between body and soul, nature and culture, man and nature, etc.¹⁴⁰

People from less affluent backgrounds have long been more likely to speak of their relationship with their environment in terms of their everyday use of and interaction with it, often as a means of practicing their livelihood or of acquiring sustenance. Furthermore, access to these spaces—whether they be areas for hunting, fishing, gathering firewood, children playing, etc.—can easily be threatened if the areas become subject to protections or regulations that cut off everyday access for local people, or if residential areas are physically cut off from green areas via development projects, as has regularly occurred in Southeast D.C. Kwame provides an example of the kind of historical patterns of interaction practiced by residents of Southeast D.C. with their local environment, explaining that “historically, people in the Barry Farm community used to fish at the river.” He continues by discussing the disruption of this practice, however, as the result of local railroad development, noting that “then they cut off access with the railroad tracks,” but concluding nonetheless that “but a lot of people east of the river, and in lower-income communities, do have a connection with the river.” In other words, according to Kwame, the material and psychological resources afforded by having a

¹⁴⁰ For overviews on these conventional nineteenth- and twentieth-century-era understandings of nature and the environment, see the following works: William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995); and Carolyn Merchant, “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative,” in *Uncommon Ground*.

waterway near one's home are not something that only the affluent are capable of appreciating.

It is worth noting, furthermore, that even the rubric of leisure takes on different connotations when it is applied to a low-income or working-class context versus an affluent context.¹⁴¹ Mainstream, affluent versions of leisure may tend more toward quieter, contemplative types of activities such as hiking, biking, canoeing, etc., while more working-class leisure may tend more toward hunting, fishing, backroading, etc. Kwame mentions fishing above, and in the quotation below, Joyce discusses the kinds of new recreation activities that have been created as a result, ironically, of the reclamation of former mountaintop removal sites:

And like I said they do a *much* better job of reclaiming it now. They level off, we've got a lot of ball fields and recreation areas that we never used to have because of all the flattening of some of the mountains. And, have you been to Knott County to the sportsplex over there? Well, I mean that area is amazing. They've got ATV trails and horseback riding and all that stuff that they've, they've made very lucrative and, you know, taken advantage of. So, you know, there's good and bad things about it.

Following from Joyce's description of the kinds of leisure activities made available through the Knott County Sportsplex, located just northwest of Letcher County on a flattened mountaintop removal site, Melissa also mentions several of these same activities, explaining that her family "four-wheel[s] on the strip mine site back here behind the house." Riding ATVs and four-wheelers, in particular, is a popular recreational activity in Letcher County, and indeed in many low-income rural areas across the country.

¹⁴¹ See Hal Rothman, *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

Ruth also highlights the importance of physical access to environmental amenities and leisure activities within marginalized communities such as Southeast D.C. Speaking from the experience of her own family, she describes the kinds of loss of resources that have occurred over the last two centuries in Southeast D.C. with regard to residents' ability to maintain their interactions with "nature" and green space as a source of both sustenance and leisure. In the following quotation, she mentions access to the Anacostia River, the pear trees in her great uncle's yard, and a beloved community cemetery as all falling victim to the tide of urban renewal and development in Southeast D.C., thus depriving residents of some of their cultural and environmental heritage. See Figure 13 on page 37 and Figure 16 on page 82 for images of one of the areas Ruth discusses below.

President Eisenhower decides to upgrade the interstate highway system, and he ran all those highways through our communities, and most of the communities that those highways came through were black communities. Specifically in Southeast, you had, in the late forties ... they built the Suitland Parkway. The Suitland Parkway goes from Andrews Air Force Base to the south entrance of the Capitol of the United States. And Suitland Parkway runs, it becomes South Capitol Street, and South Capitol Street will take you straight to the south entrance of the US Capitol. Well, when they did that they split the community. Suitland Parkway, it took away Jake Morris Cemetery, it just split the community in half. And then when they put 295 down [Interstate 295], that was in the late fifties, it cut us off from the river... Barry Farm Projects started out as housing for returning black servicemen and their families. That land was also taken by right of, seized by the government, for whatever compensation in whatever way. As was land seized for the Metro [rail and bus transit system], that was the final assault, and my grandfather's brother lived down on Howard Road, he had pear trees in his yard, they had homes down there, you know. Just, picking it apart little by little.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have established the broad significance of what I am calling a preservationist ethic in shaping how my research participants perceive and value the

tangible and intangible “assets” of their respective communities—in other words, the “common wealth” of their community, as they understand it. In the context of the shifts and disruptions that are taking place in both Letcher County and Southeast D.C. and the feelings of uncertainty among many residents about what the future holds, it is not surprising that my research participants would place particular emphasis on their understandings of what is valuable about their community and what is worth protecting from the all-consuming capitalist desire of resource extraction and real estate development. As we saw in this chapter, however, not all of my research participants view the neoliberal ethic of capitalist extraction—as manifested respectively by mountaintop removal coal mining and the processes of redevelopment and gentrification—as the primary threat facing their community. Some, such as Joyce, see the economic depression of their community as its greatest vulnerability, and others such as Michael, see the state of disrepair and neglect of much of the area’s built environment as its greatest threat. All of my research participants, nevertheless, perceive their community to be facing profound challenges and uncertainties, whether they see those challenges as stemming primarily from ongoing marginalization or from the current structural changes, or some combination thereof. This sense of threat, uncertainty, and longstanding oppression, in turn, tends to cultivate an enhanced recognition of the tangible and intangible resources that make this place not just a geographical locale but a richly textured network of people, places, memories, and lived experiences and aspirations—an embodied *conceptual landscape of place*.

In addition to demonstrating my research participants’ overall valuing of their local “common wealth” and the need to recognize, maintain, and cultivate that common

wealth, I have also explored differing expressions of the preservationist ethic, in terms of more historically-oriented and more environmentally-oriented forms of preservation. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, I have continued to note the strong underlying resemblances in how the participants from both Letcher County and Southeast D.C. express their core understandings of place-based values. While differing somewhat in their use of language and obviously in the context of the situations they are discussing, their reflections on such things as the sense of deep pride they have as residents of these places and their desire to cultivate a stronger sense of collective ownership and optimism are often strikingly similar. Indeed, Ruth from Southeast D.C. and Joyce from Letcher County sometimes almost seem to be sharing in the same conversation about local memory, pride, and the importance of maintaining what they see as the stronger community-mindedness and sense of character among past generations. Likewise, Theresa from Letcher County and Kwame from Southeast D.C. also share in a kind of conversation about their frustration with corporate and governmental manipulation of local narratives of place and identity. Also very significantly, some of the most profound differences in perspective about common wealth and preservation occur not between Letcher County participants as a whole and Southeast D.C. participants as a whole, but between particular participants in each place. For example, Michael's perspectives on the kind of preservationist ethic he values have much more in common with Joyce's than they do with his fellow Southeast D.C. participants. Ultimately, it appears that each of my research participants is responding in unique but related ways to the experiences of ongoing marginalization punctuated by the current stressors taking place in each locale.

Chapter 4: Integrative and Participatory Values as Place-Based Common Wealth

The issues that shape everyday life in Letcher County, Kentucky and Southeast Washington, D.C. are complex and multi-layered, particularly when viewed from the perspective of how residents conceptualize their “landscape of place.” And when this perspective is viewed not just in terms of the complicated historical backdrop that has contributed to these communities’ current marginalization, but also in terms of the current and yet-to-develop processes that promise to complicate and possibly marginalize life in these communities even further, the questions being explored in this dissertation project take on even greater complexity. And yet, in spite of the difficulty and in spite of their own frustration at charting a clear path of understanding through the thicket of marginalization and destabilization, most of my research participants offer “big-picture” assessments of what is happening in their communities and the vision they see for the future. These are not always well-formed or surefooted, and some are more fully developed and more thoughtful than others, but they all stand as attempts to make general sense of what is going on and what has gone on in their communities. Significantly, these assessments are constructed from a vantage point that aims for a holistic and integrative orientation. In this chapter I will examine and interpret these larger, integrative assessments.

In addition to articulating understandings of common wealth that are broadly preservationist in orientation, as discussed in the previous chapter, my research participants frequently define common wealth in terms of broad-based relationships, interactions, and active goals and visions for the future. In spite of the myriad differences

in their understandings of what constitutes common wealth and how to achieve it, as with the preservationist ethic they ground their explanations of common wealth in a broadly integrative and participatory ethic. I begin this chapter by exploring how they express what I am calling the integrative component of this ethic of holism, and I conclude by focusing on how they formulate what I am calling the participatory component.

Integrative Values

In turning now to the integrative component of the holism ethic, I explore how my research participants understand and articulate this notion of integration, connection, and inter-relationship as it relates to local, and also larger-scale, notions of common wealth. I begin with their expressions of historically and environmentally integrative perspectives and then move into expressions of integrative perspectives around citizenship and civic engagement.

Historically Oriented Integrative Values

The strongest expression of this historical emphasis comes from my research participants in Southeast D.C., particularly Kwame and Ruth, though Theresa and Melissa in Letcher County also briefly allude to historically integrative patterns. While history was a less emphasized theme in general among my Letcher County research participants, this may be partly due to the kinds of questions I asked in my interviews. My focus on mountaintop removal in Letcher County did not obviously lend itself to in-depth historical meditations, partly because of the newness of mountaintop removal. However, the interweaving of history, place, and identity in Appalachia is very strongly stressed in many explorations of Appalachian culture, both popular and scholarly, and several interviewees who I am not highlighting in this dissertation did indeed speak at

length about their views on the significance of history and memory in shaping contemporary life in eastern Kentucky. In terms of the material I am drawing from in crafting this dissertation, nevertheless, historical themes are more strongly emphasized by my Southeast D.C. research participants, and consequently it is them who I will highlight.

In many of Kwame's conversations with me, and also in his professional and community-based work, historical patterns and continuities of oppression and domination are central focal points of his thinking. A voracious reader who is constantly seeking to interact with writings and with people whose perspectives are subversive and marginalized, Kwame devotes considerable energy to unraveling complex genealogies of oppression and to working to upend the stubborn legacies of those genealogies. In the midst of a long meditation on race, slavery, and indigenous persecution, for example, he off-handedly notes that "the same thing, you remember, the colonization of Africa and the Americas is one event, not two separate events." His recognition of these complex systemic connections spanning continents and centuries is expressed with trenchant clarity, belying the invisibility and silence surrounding these connections within mainstream historical narratives, and even within many progressive and insurgent narratives that do not consider large-scale inter-relationships among overlapping historical projects.

And while not as immediately historical in orientation, Kwame's reflections on the source(s) of power within systems of domination also demonstrate his penchant for broadly integrative thinking. He explains his understandings of the roots of sexism, racism, and other systems of domination in the following quotation, noting not only the similarities in how oppressive systems are structured, but also the travesty of people

being played against each other—particularly marginalized people—and denied the opportunity for coalitions that might collectively challenge multiple systems of domination:

Sexism plays a man against a woman, so whoever's playin' 'em against each other can be in power. What racism does is play skin color or ethnicity against the ethnicity so whatever ethnicity's in charge, the same or different, can be in power, it's for a small group of people called the elite. It ain't for the masses. So, if I can get you to think, it don't matter who, we can reverse the roles, if I can get you to think that you came from a slave, and you didn't, if I can get you to think that you always been privileged and you wasn't, you know, I'm still pullin' your strings. And it's about pullin' your strings.

Ruth also speaks integratively in terms of history, particularly in her discussions on wanting to see more historical focus within narratives of everyday life—including everything from the public education arena to urban planning and community development to popular culture. More specifically, she especially wants to see more emphasis and integration of African American experiences in mainstream historical narratives. She speaks frequently of wanting “to see more of black history in the mainstream,” as she elaborates here:

We knew somebody, everybody who did something, every white person who did something, we knew somebody black who also did it! That's why we knew that Matthew Henson got to the North Pole before Perry did! [Chuckling.] We all knew that growing up, we knew that! So, if I wanted to see a change I think the change I would want to see is the mention of black people in the history of the United States, because, we don't, in general, I listen to the Diane Rehm Show, and she has a monthly book club, but I have yet to hear her, and I'm not being critical, cause I like Diane Rehm, but I don't know that she has reviewed, she did one month, Boo Radley, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but I don't know that she has done a black author. And so those kinds of omissions, they are, kind of unintentional, but still. We had a lot of black people who wrote books that are worthy of, you know, from way back, and sometimes I want to send her a little note and say, well, you know, maybe one of these weeks, you can do Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

Ruth's comment above is very much along the lines of arguments that advocate for greater inclusion and recognition of marginalized groups within mainstream narratives, rather than seeking to fundamentally reorient those narratives so as to de-center them from what remains a distinctly elite vantage point.¹⁴² She also advocates, however, for more insurgent means of addressing the inequalities and marginalizations that have been written into so many of our mainstream cultural narratives and touchstones of everyday experience. In the excerpt below, she argues for the necessity of seeing black histories and black experiences in the United States not simply as a series of isolated events that can be periodically peppered into the larger mainstream narrative for a bit of added flavor. Rather, she contends that black histories and experiences need to be understood with as much complexity and subtlety and texture as elite white histories and experiences have been; furthermore, they need to be understood within a framework that acknowledges the systemic and integrative qualities of black histories and experiences, both as a collective set of systems in their own right and as fundamental components of the larger American cultural milieu. Indeed, she sees her own work as a writer and historian as part of a larger project of presenting narratives of black history as a full and integrated process, not a series of discrete events:

So you don't show, you don't show how it all works, how it all works together, how it all worked together, or how it all *fits* together, or how one relates to the other; you don't have that. And again, that was the intent [in writing her book] was to show that this was one neighborhood in one place that is representative of our neighborhoods all over the country, and that we did not live in a vacuum. All these places worked together and were related somehow or another, in the entire scheme of black life in America, and that we are being judged, our history is being judged, or related, for that matter, as a series of unrelated events! And

¹⁴² See the following work for an exploration of democratic expansion as a process of enlarging the narrative to include those who were previously marginalized, as opposed to shifting the entire narrative in order to include marginalization as a fundamental component: Gary Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

people who just happened to be, who lived in Ohio just happened to do this and who lived over here and just happened to do, I mean, we were all connected, we all knew what everybody else was doing, and we all worked together, and that's what I'm trying to show. That this wasn't an aberration. This was the way we lived. This was the way it was!

While they do not speak as extensively as Ruth or Kwame about integrative understandings of history, Theresa and Melissa in Letcher County do make poignant statements about the power of the historical systems, patterns, and oppressions that have shaped life in eastern Kentucky for over a century. In discussing the value for her of thinking about issues of place and identity in the Appalachian context, Theresa reflects on the role played by “the sort of insider outsider dynamic and how does that function, who owns it and who can define it,” noting that historical patterns deeply influence this dynamic:

I think the whole, this region's history and the coalfields history being so complicated and so kind of, being so routinely fucked by outsiders, [laughing], for lack of a more nuanced way to say that, that of course this place has an incredibly fraught relationship with the idea of from here or not from here, and how is that defined, and how that plays out in daily life.

In a very similar vein, Melissa remarks that “there's a reason why people are so leery of outsiders and it's because we've been burned so many times in the past, by people who have said they were here to help.” Clearly, this historical pattern of intervention from powerful forces outside the region has been, at best, misguided, and at worst, blatantly exploitative. It has left a deep impression in the contemporary ethos of place-based understanding and identity within the region.

Environmentally Oriented Integrative Values

As with the historically oriented integrative ethic, my research participants differed on the basis of location in terms of how much they had to say about

environmentally oriented integrative values. The participants from Letcher County generally spoke more frequently about environmental integrativeness than those from Southeast D.C. And also as with historical integrativeness, this imbalance likely has something to do with my framing of many of my interview questions; in Southeast D.C. I framed many of those questions in terms of redevelopment and gentrification, and in Letcher County I framed many of the questions in terms of mountaintop removal. As I pointed out above, discussing one's experiences with mountaintop removal does not lend itself to in-depth historical meditations as much as it does to environmental ones, and likewise discussing one's experiences with or fears of displacement and gentrification does not lend itself to in-depth environmental meditations as much as it does to historical ones. Nevertheless, several of my Southeast D.C. research participants did speak about the relationship between patterns of environmental injustice and displacement, as overlapping processes that both involve kinds of disfranchisement and exploitation. I will focus most extensively in this section on the environmentally oriented integrative ethic as it is expressed in Letcher County, but I will also briefly discuss the Southeast D.C. context.

Melissa in Letcher County speaks frequently about the importance of acknowledging and not reducing the complexity of the ethics of environmental justice and environmental injustice in marginalized communities. This is particularly so when the community has been led to believe that certain types of environmental injustice are actually beneficial to them. This also comes into play when those visiting the region to organize in support of environmental justice neglect the painful memories of outside exploitation and unwittingly demean and alienate those residents with whom they could

potentially join forces. Melissa explains in the following quotation, cited previously, the holism and people-centeredness with which she approaches environmentally-based struggles and activist practices. She conceptualizes “the environment” as encompassing more than just the non-human natural features, and in fact actively centers her notion of environmental well-being around people and their everyday experiences in their environment:

There was a young guy from Boston who just got an internship with John Kerry, and he was wanting to learn about the issues [regarding mountaintop removal], and a lot of the Witness for Peace delegation came to Kentucky two days before we left for Colombia to tour here, and he was taken aback by here, like, he didn't know what to think. And he made a comment the first night I met him, that a lot of what we do here is what they do in Boston, like, he said that in Boston that this homeless man died on the street and that people just kept walking by, and that here we let things die of the environment and we just keep walking by, that we're indifferent, and it's the same. And I was really upset by the comment, like I really admire him, he does great work, but I was upset by the comment, because we're conditioned here, you know, after so long you can't keep fighting, and you lose hope. I mean it's been over 100 years that we've been through this, you know, you're raised to think this is normal. I don't think it's indifferent, I think it's loss of hope. And so, when I first heard these comments when they were here in my community and then I traveled to Colombia with them, I was like, I felt really out of place, and like, I don't know that I belong in this group, you know, I'm not here to look at this from an environmental standpoint, I don't fight for the, necessarily the environment here, like I'm fighting for the people here. And then when I went there [to Colombia], I was really excited that we got to talk so much to the community and not just people who wanted to just show us the environmental destruction, but like, this is what's happening to the community, this is a human rights issue. And so when I started doing that and like getting to talk to them then, I was definitely more connected there than I was with people from the delegation here.

Melissa's statement suggests the critical nature of the historical formulation and contemporary enactment of insider-outsider relations in the Appalachian region. It also suggests that she understands environmentalism as a fundamentally integrative effort—one that integrates all human and non-human elements of a place and does not shy away

from centering environmental discussions around an explicitly human-centered perspective.¹⁴³

Melissa also speaks passionately about the importance of “remain[ing] true” to her core values and her sense of identity and place, as she understands it, again defining environmental and place-based well-being very broadly and integratively in cultural as well as more measurable physical terms. She reflects below on the relationship between residents sometimes turning a blind eye to environmental abuses and what she sees as an endemic yearning to free themselves of negative stereotypes about their supposed “failures” as a region. She argues that the ideal goal should be to “remain true” to one’s identity, one’s physical environment, and indeed to all of the kinds of common wealth that allow a community to function and flourish, but she acknowledges that the pain of marginalization and of having absorbed negative narratives of place can make doing so difficult:

I think there’s just this idea that we’ve been stereotyped and been the joke for so long that maybe if we take away those mountains we’ll get rid of that. If we take away this thing that isolated us and turned us into being something different, which people even here sometimes view as this really negative thing, then, you know, we’ll be like the rest of America and Diane Sawyer won’t come in here and call us the hidden America¹⁴⁴ and people won’t talk about how we’re isolated and how we’ve never been out of the mountains, and maybe we won’t talk different, and just this idea that if you take it away then we’ll be accepted. ... I want to fight the idea, even here, that I have to change to be a successful human being in America, you know, I think I can be successful and still remain true to who I am

¹⁴³ Melissa’s holistic approach to environmentalism bears much in common with the environmental justice perspective, which emphasizes the full range of human, cultural, and ecological effects of environmental degradation. For useful overviews on environmental justice as both a movement and an academic field, see the following: Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds., *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, & Pedagogy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002); Sylvia Hood Washington, Heather Goodall, and Paul C. Rosier, eds., *Echoes from the Poisoned Well: Global Memories of Environmental Injustice* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); Joni Adamson and Kimberly N. Ruffin, eds., *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship: Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹⁴⁴ This is a reference to Diane Sawyer’s 2009 special on the ABC Program 20/20, entitled *A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains*.

and remain true to the land. But, I'm not really sure, it's just, it's been so beaten into us, it's beaten into us every day, it's beaten into the kids at high school, it's beaten into everyone—coal miners, teachers, nurses—everyone just thinks that we have to get away from this stereotype idea, and part of this stereotype is the mountain.

Strikingly, and quite sadly, Melissa is actually suggesting here that there is at least some acceptance among eastern Kentuckians and rural Appalachians in general of the notion that destroying one's own physical environment is simply the price to be paid to atone for and hopefully abolish negative regional stereotypes. Melissa herself finds this notion painful and impossible to accept, as do many others. In this context, however, it is worth returning to Theresa's observation that many people do accept this kind of dissonant and self-destructive logic, though not without struggle. Theresa also contends that "ultimately there's no way that you can exist in that disconnect without having a huge psychological toll, which, when you look at the drug abuse, of the epidemic here, there's a lot of stuff attached to that."

There are also similarities between Melissa's observation of people resigning themselves to this self-destructive kind of logic in order to rid themselves of the shame of stereotyping and marginalization, and Ruth's suggestion, explored in the previous chapter, that some of the reluctance to discuss the everyday indignities of African American life during Segregation has to do with a desire to rid themselves of the shame of having lived under conditions of flagrant marginalization and oppression:

And so now we've gotten out of that condition, we don't need to talk about it anymore, and so let's just continue to be the first whatever, you know, we don't really need to talk about having been a slave, we don't need to talk about having to drink from the colored water fountain. And so that's, because you can't really justify to your children, being accepting of the conditions under which we had to live. How can you tell your children you went through that? How can you justify to your children not standing up and fighting against it, in a way, I mean, and so, it's just painful. It's painful. And it's painful to have to talk about it.

Both Melissa's and Ruth's statements highlight the profound affective impact of being forced or misled into accepting conditions of disrespect, marginalization, or outright oppression and exploitation. Melissa's and Ruth's statements also highlight the necessity of considering emotional affect as a component of any kind of integrative thinking. Obviously, one cannot speak about African American history during the era of Segregation without acknowledging the effect of the emotional pain and trauma caused by the injustices of these experiences, some of which continue into the present day and reverberate strongly within debates about redevelopment and displacement. Likewise, one cannot speak about environmental well-being in contemporary Appalachia without acknowledging how the emotional pain and trauma of relentless marginalization and negative stereotyping weave themselves through the environmental understandings of residents and through debates over issues such as mountaintop removal.

The complex politics that surround contentious issues such as these in marginalized communities also demand integrative thinking regarding elite decision-makers' recognition, or lack thereof, of the importance of maintaining resources and access to common wealth for residents of these communities. Such decision-makers often act in ways that impair the common wealth of marginalized local residents, though these actions are usually framed as benefiting, or at least not harming, residents. Examples of this kind of governmental and corporate doublespeak include Theresa's discussion of coal industry propaganda encouraging residents "to fight for the right to destroy their homes" and Kwame's characterization of many so-called public forums as "give[ing] you ways to participate in us kickin' your ass out." Kwame also deftly diagnoses the connection that sometimes develops between environmental improvements in areas that

have generally had very degraded environments, such as Southeast D.C., and underlying goals of gentrifying those areas:

... when you go to Anacostia, you have two things: you have lead pipes everywhere, you have a lot of water pollution, and the least resources to deal with it, so people are not as connected as they should be and need to be [in terms of regular interactions with the Anacostia River], and that goes back to gentrification: why are they re-doing the new pipes? They're not for them. [current low-income residents]. Why are they re-doing the streets? Not for them.

Keith in Letcher County speaks at length about the significance of applying an integrative and broadly-framed ethic of understanding to situations of all kinds, including those that do not at first appear to be complex. While he does not emphasize the role played by ongoing marginalization to the degree that Melissa and Kwame and Theresa do, he nonetheless applies a sophisticated and rigorous critique to analyses of problematic social behavior, such as that that has caused and allowed mountaintop removal. He explains his views on the importance of recognizing the physical complexity and mutual interdependence of the environmental systems that support human and other life forms, and furthermore of heeding the need to protect and maintain that complexity:

... if you go to the headwaters of a stream, you really don't see anything, you know, there's not any fish there because there's not enough water, and there's not ponds for animals, and it's, you know, it's just kind of a place. And to cover up that place with spoil from a strip mine, you know, it wasn't much of a place to start with and so it probably wasn't that big a deal, but then when you go to lookin' at it, what's really happenin' at the micro level, you know, what's happenin' to the organisms that are actually the first part of this food chain or the first part of this biological chain, you know, what happens there is really what determines what happens downstream. And, but still it's something that you can't see, you don't understand, ... these microorganisms and these bacteria and these things that are the foundation for the ecosystem for everything downstream, you know, you're coverin' it up and killin' it all, and then once it gets down below there where water's flowin', then that same system doesn't exist anymore. So if you really figure out that you're killin' something by the tiniest of the roots, then you need to be careful what you're doing.

In addition to recognizing complexity and advocating for its protection, Keith also contends that those who presume to be able to use their wealth and privilege to isolate and insulate themselves from negative “externalities” of all kinds—from environmental degradation to endemic poverty to disfranchisement and discrimination—are only deluding themselves. Appalachian mountaintop removal activists often note that “everywhere is downstream from somewhere” to hammer home this point, particularly when communicating with those outside the region who are not as directly or as immediately affected by the pollution and destruction of mountaintop removal. Indeed, even when one is well aware of and appreciative of this principle of “downstream” effects, it can still be difficult to recognize those effects when they are difficult to detect. Keith gives the following example of how this ignorance can be bliss, at least until “downstream” becomes one’s “own” stream:

There was a person who had a sewer problem in Mayking [a community in Letcher County], and her neighbor did sewers, and he fixed her sewer problem for \$3000, and ah, but then her water didn’t taste right and she couldn’t figure it out. So the health department put dye in her septic tank, and in about ten minutes her water out of her faucet turned bright green. I mean, the sewer system was literally dumpin’ into her water. And they were *drinkin’* it! And so, but it happened underground, somethin’ she couldn’t see, and she knew that her sewer didn’t bubble up out of the yard anymore. Because she was pumpin’ it in her house! And so I think that if we had these dyes that would illustrate to people what was really happenin’, and when you damage the environment over here, you drink it over here, and when this drinkin’ water turned a different color, then they had to go over there and fix whatever was turnin’ it green, but, as long as their water’s clear, then they’s not a problem.

The implication of Keith’s statement above is that if one’s water ran green or orange out of the faucet, as occasionally happens in Letcher County as a result of pollution from mountaintop removal and other industrial sources, it might be easier for people at a safer distance to recognize and to complain when their water, too, changes its

color as a result of pollution occurring in other areas. The point of this water dye analogy is that there *is* connection and integration even between those places that appear to be far-removed from one another.

Significantly, however, addressing environmental damage does require doing more than simply noting its existence and the breadth of its spread, as Keith repeatedly emphasizes during our interview exchanges. Constant awareness and engagement with such abuses and injustices is exhausting and dispiriting, and particularly as individuals it can be difficult to summon the energy and the will to pay regular attention to such issues, much less to combat them. As he notes in discussing the often overwhelming work of attending to and fighting injustices, “at some point you want to just go home and tend to your little cocoon and your little family.” Indeed, he gives the following example involving his own grandfather as an example of how this tendency to turn away is not limited to people who easily tolerate injustices or who are unbothered by the pain of others:

When Mt. St. Helen’s blew up, then they was a big pictorial article in, it was *Life* or *Look Magazine* or something, *Newsweek*, I don’t know what it was, but I had one of those and I took it to Kingdom Come [a community in Letcher County] and showed it to my grandpa. I said, buddy, lookat here, and they had pictures of ash everywhere, and then one of the pictures was a small child that had died covered with ash, and my grandpa, he’s lookin’ through that and he saw that picture of that baby, and he closed it. He said, I don’t wanna see anymore of that, I don’t wanna know anything else about it, you know. And now, I can see that point, to a point. But, that may be the same thing that I say and the same stance that I take when a mudslide from mountaintop removal hits my neighbor’s house, you know. That’s not me, I don’t wanna be involved with it, I don’t even wanna see it, you know. And people have a way of hearin’ and seein’ what they want to hear and what they wanna see, and they’ve got a way of blockin’ and not addressin’ things that they don’t wanna address. And you can mentally make somethin’ very bad a non-issue. You know, you can say, that didn’t affect me, nothin’ I can do about it. But I don’t know at what point, you know, if you look at civilizations, at the big picture, risin’ and fallin’, and what happens and, you

know, it's just complacency and tolerance for corruption and non-attention to real issues, and all of a sudden it just crumbles around 'em.

While Keith's emphasis in this quotation is on the potential power of individuals to play at least some role in standing up to injustices, he also acknowledges that corporate and governmental actors have vastly greater power than the average individual living in a place like eastern Kentucky. And as a result of that proportionally greater power, he argues that they also hold proportionally greater responsibility than average, generally working-class or low-income individuals. He acknowledges that it makes sense from the crude standpoint of profits and bottom lines for coal industry leaders to argue that their industry is beneficial to all and causes no harm, but in keeping with his common-sense attitude toward integrity, he expresses disbelief that they can make these patently false arguments with a clear conscience. In a biting analogy that neatly exposes the absurdity of coal industry arguments that the industry is beneficial on the whole simply because it provides a small number of jobs with middle-level incomes,¹⁴⁵ he demonstrates how this same argument reads when applied to the illegal drug industry:

... and I cannot believe that they really believe some of the things that they say, because, you know, it doesn't take an educated person to understand what environmentalism is, you know, and so they have to know this, but they also know that any mention of environmentalism or, ah, doin' things the right way cuts into the profit margin at the bottom of the page, so it's got to be bad, and they preach against it. But they surely know better, but you know, they actually convince themselves and insulate themselves from the truth about a lot of it, and say that, oh we're good because we provide jobs, you know. Drug dealers provide jobs, real good jobs, you know, good-payin' jobs. From sellin' drugs you can make a lot of money, so therefore we shouldn't enforce the laws on drug dealers. You know, same logic applies to coal or anything else.

¹⁴⁵ And ironically, the switch from underground to surface mining operations almost always results in significant losses among the numerous lower-level positions that have long formed the backbone of the mining work force in Appalachia. So in spite of vastly enriching the corporate purses of the coal industry, mountaintop removal and other forms of strip mining actually *increase* unemployment rates in a region already struggling with some of the highest unemployment levels in the nation.

Keith finds this willful acceptance and propagation of falsehoods and injustices on the part of industry and government elites to be unacceptable. And though he does not condone the acceptance of this same perspective among marginalized workers and community members, he does acknowledge the intricate webs of engagement and dependence that lead many people to accept the falsehoods propagated by the coal industry simply because their own economic livelihood, or that of loved ones, depends on the maintenance of jobs within the coal industry. Indeed, there is undoubtedly an integrative nature to the *un*-common wealth that is created when marginalized residents are manipulated through fear and dependence into accepting conditions that actually harm their well-being in many ways. Because of the precarious nature of these residents' economic situation, industry and government elites recognize that they can use that precarious situation to their own advantage by working to inflame feelings of fear and powerlessness. As a result, residents often feel that they must choose between various kinds of common wealth and well-being—i.e. keeping their job v. having clean water v. their home being knocked off its foundation by mountaintop removal blasting—that should never be mutually exclusive. But as long as these types of common wealth are presented as mutually exclusive, economic survival will always come out on top, for the simple reason that, as Melissa notes, “you don’t fight against what’s putting food on your table.” Keith also acknowledges the integrative nature of the web of connections and dependencies that many residents must consider in deciding whether to speak out against mountaintop removal or other environmentally damaging practices. He explains from the perspective of such residents that “you know, my friend works there and I don’t wanna

say anything, or I work there, or they're on my family's property and they're gettin' a income from it and that's the only income they've got, or, you know, whatever reasons."

Joyce provides a compelling example of a resident who faces exactly these kinds of supposedly either-or decisions on whether to support mountaintop removal. At a very basic level, Joyce is appalled by the destruction caused by mountaintop removal, both in terms of its aesthetic consequences (discussed in the previous chapter) and its more health- and liveability-based consequences (such as polluted water, houses shaken from their foundations or damaged by mudslides, etc.). But she resigns herself to accepting mountaintop removal as the necessary cost of ensuring employment for her son and other family and community members, noting that the economic environment of Letcher County is so desolate that many people would indeed be forced to move if even some of the mountaintop removal operations in the county shut down.

... it's hard, you know, it's hard to make those adjustments, but when you're young, and I know when I was twenty-five or thirty years old I was totally against mountaintop removal, I thought it was horrible what it was doing to the area. But back then they were not as good at reclaiming as they are now. But now that I'm older and, you know, my family are all involved in it, and I see how our state would just, I mean, I don't know what would happen to us without coal. ... But as an adult, and you know, as a mother of someone who works in a mine, and as a sister, and like I said caring about my state, I think it's a necessity.

Joyce's quotation here suggests the close relationship between integrative thinking on the basis of environmental well-being and integrative thinking on the basis of citizenship and civic responsibility. For Joyce, being a mature and responsible citizen and acting in the best interest of her family, community, state, and nation involves resigning herself to some of the damaging consequences of an economic interest that she sees as the lifeline allowing community to exist at all of these scales. In short, promoting what she sees as the greater good—or perhaps the most essential element of common wealth—

requires neglecting certain other elements of common wealth. This is ultimately a false equivalence, in that the purposeful imposition of an economic monoculture on the Appalachian region over time has set up exactly these conditions so that they seem inevitable rather than manufactured. This does not, however, change the fact that in the short term, individuals would most definitely be harmed by the withdrawal of the coal industry. Indeed it is very likely true that, as Joyce notes, “if something happened that the mine would close [where her son works], he’d have to go somewhere else [to another community or region] to seek a job.” Melissa also recognizes this conundrum, and in fact agonizes over what might happen to some of her family members if her activist work in opposing mountaintop removal were to be successful. In the following excerpt, she describes a recent conversation with her brother, a coal truck driver, about why he needed to get new hauling tags for his truck:

I was joking with him on the phone, and I said, Are you driving around in an untagged truck? And he said, No, I have my coal tags. He said, This is a tag, and he named some name. It’s so if I ever can’t haul coal anymore, I can haul other things. I can haul lumber, or a gas trailer, and he started naming other things. And it just kinda hit me. And it’s been this process that I’ve been thinking about a lot, that if I was ever successful in what I do, truck drivers are the ones that are most likely to be hurt. There is a work force that works on strip mines, but the numbers aren’t as great as the deep mines, but your numbers are really great for the transport part of it, because there is so much more coal coming off the tops of mountains. And so, it’s him and his friends and co-workers that I would be hurting the most. So, you know, that was like the first time I realized just what an impact I had, and the fact that he was that scared about it.

In this instance, Melissa describes the pain of appreciating that promoting kinds of common wealth with the potential to improve overall well-being in a community can also pose the risk that some residents may suffer damage to certain aspects of their individual well-being, at least in the short term. This relates to the discussion in chapter one on the role of standpoint and power in shaping how change is experienced: indeed,

determining whether a certain process or change serves common wealth or common poverty depends to some extent on the vantage point and respective power of the person or group in question. From the standpoint of Melissa's brother or Joyce's son, promoting the expansion and protection of environmental common wealth most definitely presents risks to their immediate economic well-being, and possibly to their ability to remain in their community. Fighting for a change that seems at best neutral to one's own self-interest, and at worst directly opposed to it, can be a hard pill to swallow. But as Keith suggests below, he hopes that participating in positive action and seeing even small results from it will remind more people of the ways that *un*-common wealth and common poverty harm all of us, even when it isn't obvious in terms of our own immediate well-being:

I think that before anybody is willin' to stand up and speak out or complain or protest or even think about an issue, they have to be negatively affected by it. Now, if somethin's happenin' that I benefit from, or if somethin's happenin' that is good for me, then most of the time I don't complain about it. But, if somethin', if you've never said anything in your life about coal mining or mountaintop removal, or you've never been affected negatively by coal mining, you'll never say a word about it. But just as sure as it floods your house, you know I was in the head of Choppin' Branch [a small waterway in Letcher County], and a man's coffee table was floatin' in his livin' room. That man had lived there for forty years, he'd never spoke, never said a word about it, but when his coffee table floated, then he was ready to say somethin' about it. When the neighbors' kids' toys were washed out, when his heat pump was literally washed away and pulled loose from his house, because of floodwaters that had never been there since the homes were built in the '20s, then he said somethin' about it.

This may not be the most hopeful view of human nature when it comes to addressing wrongs and injustices, but it does suggest Keith's very nuanced observations of social behavior, and his contextualization of those behaviors within an integrative framework. It also suggests that just as promoting various elements of common wealth does not always further overall collective common wealth—to the extent that such a thing

even exists—likewise neither does broadly integrative thinking always promote overall collective well-being. Integrative thinking can be employed just as easily to further more individualized forms of well-being and to weaken more communal forms. By themselves, notions of “common,” “community,” “integrativeness,” and “interconnection” are ethically neutral, and can be used in the service of unjust as well as just ends. None of my research participants come to easy or necessarily concrete conclusions regarding these things, and importantly neither do I in my analysis of their words and the conditions in their communities. Significantly, however, all of them are engaging in their own ways with these thorny questions, and acknowledging—to greater and lesser degrees—that thorniness.

Civically Oriented Integrative Values

I conclude the section of this chapter on integratively oriented thinking with an exploration of how my research participants articulate notions of citizenship and civic responsibility in integrative terms. Several of my research participants speak at length about their frustration with fellow residents and with the tendency of many people in general to adopt narrow perspectives that take into account only their own or immediate neighborhood’s needs as opposed to thinking more inclusively and thus opening up the possibilities of coalition work. While my participants acknowledge that such narrow perspectives exist for a variety of reasons, some of which are beyond the immediate control of individuals, they lament the limiting effect of these attitudes nonetheless.

In the Southeast D.C. context, Ruth expresses her frustration with what she sees among residents as the lack of common cause and lack of willingness to see from the neighbor’s perspective. She notes below that this tendency is unfortunately aggravated by

the geographical and political boundaries that crisscross the area, most notably those denoting the city's eight wards and thirty-seven Advisory Neighborhood

Commissions.¹⁴⁶

... it's a mishmash. It's separated by parkland, it's separated by St. Elizabeth's, it's separated, you know, ... and Fairlawn [a Southeast neighborhood on the boundary between Wards 7 and 8] doesn't really want to be in, I think they might even be in Ward 7 now, and so they don't want to have anything to do with Ward 8, but they're right across the street! You have to have something to do with it because it's right there! ... There's no way that they will come together to say, let's look at it from up here instead of down here. And to me that's a problem. There's no overview, no taking of the general pulse. It's, I'm down here, I'm dealing with my little area of the world, corner of the world, and you're on your own. And I'll fight for my little corner, I'll fight for it, but, you know, I don't know whether you have the same issue, and if you do, you fight for yours and I'll fight for mine. There's no coming together. It's crazy! And it's really frustrating.

While his emphasis is more on generating increasing levels of civic and political participation among younger residents of Southeast D.C., Michael also notes the reputation of some local leaders as sparring needlessly with one another and taking advantage of their positions to amass personal power. He sees this as a primary reason as to why "new blood" is needed among community leaders.

... that's definitely something we're [River East Emerging Leaders as an organization] trying to promote. Yeah, definitely. new people in general. But not *new* as far as, like you've been here one year-type new, more, let's get you involved in the process type new. Some of them [current leaders] have been in for a while, and more or less used the position as just a way to get their name out there rather than really doing community work. ... Ahm, so, and I think that's good, you know, even if young people don't win, just to get them involved in the process is what's important.

The kind of situation alluded to by both Ruth and Michael, in which residents turn against each other in the structurally imposed competition for meager resources—and indeed sometimes become entrenched in and abusive of the power they are able to

¹⁴⁶ The District of Columbia City Council describes Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, known colloquially as ANCs, as "the body of government with the closest official ties to the people in a neighborhood." <http://dccouncil.us/pages/learn-about-wards-and-ancs>, accessed November 27, 2013.

amass—is common in historically marginalized communities such as Southeast D.C. and Letcher County. It also creates a vicious cycle in which those from outside the community can point to the dysfunction or corruption occurring within local power structures as evidence of the inherent backwardness and waywardness of the community as a whole.

In spite of these historical structural constraints, nonetheless, several of my research participants, including Ruth, Michael, and Keith below, strongly emphasize the significance of maintaining a united front as a community and being willing to see from a perspective that is broader than one's own immediate gaze. In a fascinating meditation that intermixes hints of civil libertarianism with a fullbodied communalism, Keith explains his unyielding position on the necessity for civically integrative thought and action as follows:

So if I want to take the top of that mountain off and put the dirt over in that holler, and I own it, then I should be able to do what I want to on my own property. But when it comes a rain like it did last night, and all that dirt comes out and covers this house up, then all of a sudden that person there has got a issue with what I do on my own property right up there! There are very few things that any individual in the world can do that don't affect somebody else. I mean, if you get cheese on ya hamburger or you don't get cheese on ya hamburger, who cares? But, if I put my sewer in the creek, it matters to somebody else! If I pollute the air, it matters to somebody else! There's very few things, you know, the way you pronounce your name being one of them. But there's very few things that I can do on my own property in my own house that don't affect somebody else. You know, if I go home and beat my wife, then, it affects my children if nobody else sees it. You know, just about everything that you can think of, if you look at somebody else's perspective, most of the time somebody else is affected by it.

Even when they recognize and appreciate the integrative nature of the social structures that shape their everyday worlds, however, the reality remains for most marginalized people that gathering the resources and the courage necessary to work in opposition to very powerful structures and forces is daunting and implausible, if not

outright impossible. Speaking out and putting one's integrative thinking into action is not free of consequences. Even when it does not result in harm, furthermore, it very often fails to make a noticeable impact on power dynamics and overall common wealth, and as a result can intensify feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and impotence. In the following statement, Ruth gives an example of how lack of outreach and access to information hinders both civic participation and the kind of integrative thinking that makes such participation particularly powerful. Indeed, one cannot truly think or act integratively without access to the knowledge that serves as the building blocks of this kind of thinking:

People don't know the history of the area. That's number one. And so if you don't know the value of it, then you don't know how to protect it, or that it should be protected. ... And if you don't know what's coming [in the sense of development projects], you obviously are not equipped to deal with it.

Sharon also laments the debilitating effects of lack of government and corporate transparency in the context of Southeast D.C., with regard to both the district government of Washington, D.C. and the federal government. In addition to lack of transparency, she also bemoans policymakers' tone of dismissiveness toward residents of Southeast D.C. and lack of appreciation for their agency. These kinds of actions and behaviors, and in some cases lack thereof, communicate to Southeast D.C. residents that they are not valued, and that perhaps they have no ability to shape the outcome of events affecting their community. This again represents the insidious cycle mentioned above in which marginalized residents are encouraged to blame themselves for the uneven structural and power balances afflicting their communities. Sharon speaks below on her frustrations with the attitudes of Washington-area policymakers and officials:

... and sometimes I don't know if they take us seriously. ... Homeland Security and the US Coast Guard are coming [to Southeast D.C.]. They're actually having a meeting tonight, at St. E's, no, at Matthew's Memorial [she is referring here to St. Elizabeth's Hospital and Matthew's Memorial Church, respectively], because they don't have enough parking space on the west campus¹⁴⁷, so they want to move to the east campus for parking space. Well, some of the people in the community are up in arms about that, because the east side belongs to the District. ... And it's just the little things, because we had the last meeting on the grounds of St. E's where you could go through Gate 4 on Martin Luther King [Avenue], there was a gate that's easily accessible. You can't go through that gate anymore, the entrance is now on Alabama Avenue. Well, that's because it'll be connected to Homeland Security. But see, the thing that we just despise is when they think that we're ignorant and we don't understand what they're doing, when you should just be transparent, and just let us know, but I guess government doesn't always play by the rules.

And in her meditation below, cited earlier, on the lack of agency and sense of fear and dependence that can be generated by years of experience as a public housing resident, particularly in recent years as ever-increasing numbers of families are pushed permanently out of public housing, Sharon employs a jarring but apt metaphor for the kind of mentality these experiences can engender:

I think at the end of the day, people, at least in public housing, may sometimes feel like slaves, in that they are just being used, all the time, and they have no control over their destiny. Cause if the housing authority says you have to move out, you gotta move. And if they're gonna place you over in Timbuktu, and that's the only place you have to live, that's where you have to go. And you have no, you're powerless. You're powerless.

The experience of lacking control over where one lives can engender feelings not only of powerlessness but also of fear, as Sharon goes on to describe. In the neoliberal atmosphere of recent decades, governments have actively worked to shed their duty of providing public housing, and the elimination of public housing units masquerades as

¹⁴⁷ The west campus of St. Elizabeth's is the portion that was acquired by the federal government and is now being redeveloped as the headquarters of the federal Department of Homeland Security. The east campus is still owned by the District of Columbia and includes a new hospital building in addition to the planned mixed-use community of St. Elizabeth's East. See Figure 5 on page 19 for a view of the construction that is beginning on St. Elizabeth's East.

“renovation” and “upgrading” of these complexes. As a result, fully “public” public housing complexes are transformed into quasi-public, quasi-private entities with severely reduced numbers of housing units available to former residents, and much higher prioritizing of their new “market-rate” units. As Sharon notes, such developments are presented so as to appear equitable, with promises of a right to return for previous residents; that right to return is quite often untenable, however, with the “qualifications” required eliminating most former residents.¹⁴⁸

There’s this whole issue, there’s this operative word that they keep throwing out: you come back if you’re *qualified*. So, qualified means, because I’ve watched it happen in other developments, qualified means you have a job, you have a bank account—checking and savings—you have good credit, and there’s no one in your house that has, ahm, you can have a misdemeanor but no felonies, and if you have any one of those, you’re disqualified. At least three-fourths are knocked out right there. So, it bothers me when the government just talks in circles instead of just saying, telling them the truth.

As noted earlier, Melissa’s contention that “you don’t speak out against what’s putting food on your table” and Theresa’s assertion that “brother’s gotta eat” serve as legitimate rationales for most of my research participants as to why many residents, and especially the most marginalized residents, would avoid taking part in activism. While in general not as marginalized as the average resident in their communities, my research participants clearly recognize the power of such constraints for many residents. They also recognize the often dampening effects of these constraints on residents’ sense of their own agency and efficacy as individuals and collectively, similar to what Sharon describes above regarding long-term experiences with public housing. Theresa in particular shares Sharon’s concern with the self-perpetuating tendency of powerlessness, in addition to its

¹⁴⁸ For a useful and in-depth overview of the movement toward shrinking the overall number of public housing units available, see Rachel G. Bratt, Michael E. Stone, and Chester Hartman, eds., *A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

parallel tendency to evoke self-blame or a sense of inadequacy. She coins a phrase below to refer to this tendency, calling it “the tyranny of lowered expectations:”

I always call it the tyranny of lowered expectations around here, like, people, including myself, if I had described Summit City to them [when she was first getting it opened], I would have, in fact I did say on multiple occasions, there’s no *fucking* way that’ll work, there’s not a chance in *hell* that that is gonna survive in this place. I guess we’ll do it, oh well, like we’ll see what happens, let’s go forward. But you know, it just, we’re so conditioned to think that we can’t have in this place, that we’re not good enough, I mean I really think there is an *intensely* deeply ingrained sense of not good enough, here, that most of us carry within us, no matter how much cultural pride we may or may not have, like, I mean I was raised like hard-core *Appalachia*, you know.

Even Keith, for all of his steadfast belief in the possibility of individual agency, acknowledges that some individuals can participate and exercise their agency much more easily than others, and that we are not all equal in our ability to act. Perhaps even more importantly, we are not all equal in our ability to act without facing devastating consequences. His example below is predicated on small-scale situations and small-scale differences, but it nonetheless suggests the power differentials imposed by structural forces:

... and it’s not only that, it’s the empowerment and the resources that a person’s got available, and, you know, if I was ninety years old and in a wheelchair and lived next door to a drug dealer, I might feel inclined to keep my mouth shut. And if I was thirty years old and kids in school, then I might feel like I needed to say or do something.

Participatory Values

In turning now to what I am calling the participatory component of the holism ethic described at the opening of this chapter, I explore how my research participants conceptualize their own role, sense of agency, and participatory potential in regards to putting into active practice their beliefs regarding conceptual landscapes of place and the preservation of common wealth. How do they see themselves, if at all, as contributing to

the preservation of common wealth, to the nurturing of positive and integrative conceptual landscapes of place, and perhaps to the generation of new and stimulating kinds of common wealth, of expansive new conceptual landscapes of place? And in particular, how do they see themselves as contributing to the overall well-being of their communities, even as those communities face the structural upheavals of mountaintop removal and redevelopment?

Introducing “Place-Talk”

In structuring this discussion of the participatory values and practices of my research participants, I begin by introducing a concept that I am calling “place-talk.” I explain below how I am defining and employing this term in the context of discussing participatory values and practices.

Most of my research participants note the effects on residents of living with long-term and ongoing marginalization, in particular the effects on sense of identity and agency. As explored in chapter two, this is why the matrix of marginalization and identity is so critical in shaping the conceptual landscapes of place of residents of these communities. A commonly used concept in the field of psychotherapy—that of self-talk—has, I suggest, important applications for exploring the effects of this matrix of marginalization and identity on understandings and practices of agency among residents of marginalized communities.¹⁴⁹ Psychotherapists often speak of the benefits of practicing “positive self-talk” and likewise the ill effects of practicing “negative self-

¹⁴⁹ See the following for an innovative exploration of the mutually reinforcing relationship between people and place, in terms of psychological well-being: Steven Cummins, Sarah Curtis, Ana V. Diez-Roux, and Sally McIntyre, “Understanding and Representing ‘Place’ in Health Research: A Relational Approach” *Social Science & Medicine* 65 (2007): 1825-1838. And for an innovative exploration of the affective dimensions of place, see Cameron Duff, “On the Role of Affect and Practice in the Production of Place,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 881-895.

talk.” In other words, to approach one’s moment-to-moment situation in moving through daily life with a baseline attitude of optimism, rather than pessimism, is to increase the likelihood of realizing one’s goals, in best-case scenarios, and of avoiding a sense of defeat when those goals cannot be realized, in worst-case scenarios.

In making use here of the concept of self-talk, I adapt it so that it is more of a collectivized concept rather than referring purely to individual actions and reactions to individual situations. I also qualify it by giving it an explicitly geographical and place-centered focus, changing the term from “self-talk” to “place-talk.” I also acknowledge, as do many who use the term self-talk in its psychological context, that the internal affective state of individual people or even groups of people does not by itself have the power to undermine systemic oppression, marginalization, or exploitation. Indeed, in extreme situations, the most a positive practice of “self-talk” or “place-talk” can do is to blunt the pain of whatever trauma is being suffered.

Furthermore, when adapted to be “place-talk” rather than “self-talk,” the concept can be expanded so as to encompass more broadly-defined social groupings, in this case geographical ones. As a geographical concept, the idea of place-talk has important connections to Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods’ concept of marginalized geographies, as discussed in chapter two.¹⁵⁰ Certain places and geographical locations, by virtue of their structural and discursive marginalization, become geographically marginalized as a result of the interlacing effects of negative stereotyping and a certain presumption that the place and its residents are to blame for their own marginalization and exploitation. Over time that geographically-inflected marginalization can generate a

¹⁵⁰ McKittrick and Woods, ““No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,”” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*.

kind of collectively diminished sense of agency. This collective practice of “negative place-talk” is variously absorbed and internalized by residents, often on the basis of their level of marginalization, but at some level it colors the sense of identity and agency of all residents.

While none of my research participants use the terms “self-talk” or “place-talk,” they do speak at considerable length about the concepts animating these terms. They also discuss their views of the general role played by what I am calling “negative place-talk” and “positive place-talk” in their communities. With regard to negative place-talk, they reflect on how marginalization relates to negative place-talk, how the relative level of one’s marginalization and access to resources tends to correlate with the degree of internalization of this talk, and how a lack of local common wealth that can bolster positive place-talk contributes to the perpetuation of negative place-talk. They also consider the role of negative place-talk that is generated primarily outside the community in question versus negative place-talk that is generated primarily by people within the community.

Likewise, and in a more hopeful vein, they also explore the role of positive place-talk. They consider the importance of nurturing the positive place-talk that already exists and working to generate new forms of positive place-talk, noting that both positive and negative place-talk tend to be self-perpetuating. It is in this more hopeful vein of nurturing and generating positive place-talk that my research participants delve most fully into what I am calling the participatory ethic, emphasizing the power of putting into practice their conceptual landscapes of place and their ideas of common wealth.

Negative Place-Talk, Un-Common Wealth, and Common Poverty

In earlier sections of this chapter and in previous chapters, I have explored the sentiments of several of my research participants that there is a mutually reinforcing cycle in marginalized communities involving marginalization, internalization of negative stereotypes, despair, a lessening of agency, and ultimately inactivity and hopelessness. As noted above, Sharon compares the experience of Southeast D.C. public housing residents—who for years have been buffeted here and there by the housing authority—to that of slaves, in the sense that they have very little control over their own basic living conditions. She explains further that ongoing experiences such as these can easily engender a sense of fatalism and resigned acceptance of marginalization, particularly when attempts at speaking out only result in the imposition of additional constraints or injustices. “And then some people have this attitude [of],” she contends, “well, this isn’t for me anyway, so why should I try to cooperate? So they’re gonna send me where they wanna send me anyway.” Theresa in Letcher County also highlights this mutually reinforcing cycle in her discussion of what she calls “the tyranny of lowered expectations,” in her lament at the “deeply engrained sense of not good enough that most of us carry with us here” and in her sense that some of the roots of the region’s drug epidemic lie in the despair and dysphoria generated by long-time marginalization and the exploitation associated with mountaintop removal. And Kwame asserts, in the context of why many impoverished Southeast D.C. residents choose not to fight displacement and other forms of exploitation, that “remember, we talkin’ about destitute, degraded people, so some people be like, my life’ll be difficult anyway, whatever happens happens.” And lastly, there is Melissa’s bleak diagnosis of how the ongoing despair that comes from

internalizing negative stereotypes can actually prime people to accept coal industry propaganda:

... and I think there's just this idea that we've been stereotyped and been the joke for so long that maybe if we take away those mountains we'll get rid of that. If we take away this thing that isolated us and turned us into being something different, which people even here sometimes view as this really negative thing, then, you know, we'll be like the rest of America and Diane Sawyer won't come in here and call us the hidden America and people won't talk about how we're isolated and how we've never been out of the mountains, and maybe we won't talk different, and just this idea that if you take it away then we'll be accepted.

A number of my research participants also discuss the power of un-common wealth and the *absence* of common wealth to condition residents into normalizing those conditions of common poverty. This in turn perpetuates and even intensifies the civic poverty of their communities. And this exacerbation of un-common wealth and common poverty at the expense of the more productively generative common wealth also perpetuates negative place-talk. In the excerpt below, Ruth emphasizes what she sees as the deleterious effects among Southeast D.C. residents of having witnessed the deterioration of their community common wealth, as materialized in the landscape and also as expressed discursively. As an antidote to this, and as a means of generating a more participatory ethic of place, she suggests the importance of seeing common wealth made visible and palpable in one's community:

... so the tone of the community changed, and you have an influx of transient population, you have a lessening of goods and services, and so it had nowhere to go but down. And then you create seven housing projects: Barry Farms, Douglass Dwellings, Stanton Dwellings, Woodland Terrace, the one up in Congress Heights, and what was the other one, Highland Dwellings. There were seven of them. And, you can't crowd people of the same circumstances together. You cannot do it. And so for fifty years it's been goin' down. I mean people that have been living over there all their lives and they have seen nothing but a state of decline! How can you, I mean you can't [foster a flourishing community given these kinds of dysfunctional experiences, as she sees them]

Keith makes a similar point about the conditioning effects of what is seen and experienced in a community, or not seen or experienced. He also adds an interesting twist to this argument; he suggests that the length of time the community has been experiencing marginalization, as well as the rate at which that marginalization has taken hold, both play a role in shaping the likelihood that residents will reject or accept those injustices. He explains as follows:

But you know, if government gets a little bit bad, then people'll tolerate it. And if it progressively gets worse, but at a real slow rate, then all of a sudden it can be *incredibly* bad, and nobody says anything about it, you know, because their tolerance builds up proportionally to the decline of government, or anything, you know. If coal minin' practices, you know, flood the road and people can't get home for an hour, then they'll tolerate that, and then, couple years later it floods three times a week, you know, then it's really not that bad. And it really has to get inside their homes, and then they say, enough is enough. And ah, so I think that the cycles of activism, and the times that people literally speak up and decide, you know, I'm not gonna put up with this anymore, you know, it changes from time to time. And you know, if it gets real bad real fast, then their reaction is real fast, but if it's a real slow progressive thing then, you know, well, you put up with this so put up with that.

Though he does not phrase it in these terms, Keith's basic argument is that the long-term presence and normalization of marginalizing conditions lessens both the material resources and the sense of power and efficacy of residents to speak or act against those debilitating conditions. If a community has been relatively free of marginalization or exploitation, or even of just a particular kind of marginalization, the sudden appearance of disabling conditions can often spur residents into action. Furthermore, communities that have been relatively free of marginalization and exploitation are also very likely to possess more resources and tools—both structural and discursive—for combatting the newly and uniquely threatening conditions. Indeed, examples of the kind of strong local response evoked by the sudden onset of disruptive conditions can

regularly be seen in the reactions of affluent neighborhoods and communities to isolated instances of violation or destruction of common wealth.

Kwame also offers an example of the conditioning power of common poverty, in particular, to shape the overall physical and cultural environment of one's community. The expectation that one's environment will always be dirty and polluted simply because it has always been that way, for example, does not inspire a hopeful, proactive, or positive place-talk-based approach to civic participation. When one's environment is physically degraded, as Kwame notes, this degradation not only fails to inspire residents to participate in its cleaning, but also often fails to prevent them from adding to that degradation:

There are not even enough trash cans, ... where are the trash cans comin' to Barry Farm? There's one by the bus stop. There are not even enough trash cans to dump your trash! We need a residential neighborhood with backyards, trash cans, you know what I'm sayin', but when your environment is filthy already, throwin' a bag down is just like addin' a little to the mess.

While the following quote from Michael is framed in a tone that is less sympathetic to marginalized residents, it nonetheless also acknowledges the power of conditioning and of internalized negative place-talk. Michael has the following to say about his frustration with how some residents of Southeast D.C. interact with their physical environment, particularly in contrast to how they would interact with the physical environment of a more affluent neighborhood:

... just, throwin' trash on the street, in your own neighborhood, I mean, that's how you feel about your community, like it's dirty, and just make it dirtier, you know. That's nothing that, would you walk into Georgetown and throw a chicken bone on the street? No. But it's okay to do it in Anacostia? You know.

He is angry on one level that this kind of behavior occurs at all, but at another level his words hint at anger and exasperation surrounding the more complex issue of *why* this

behavior happens. He does not spell out this anger and exasperation explicitly, and does not delve as Kwame does into the complicated structural conditions and power dynamics that indirectly encourage residents to contribute to their local environment's degradation. Nevertheless, there is despair and sadness in his words as he laments the fundamental lack of care of some residents for *their own* home environment. There is also sad irony in the corollary he notes, that many of these same residents seem to demonstrate more care for environments that are not their own community, most likely out of fear of the consequences of not doing so in these generally more affluent places.

Theresa also discusses the internalization of negative place-talk among residents of her community and the Appalachian region in general, referring to it below as “desperation cheerleading.” As she explains it, internalizing negative stereotypes and coming to expect local resources to be deficient or non-existent can condition people to uncritically celebrate local developments that less marginalized communities would generally approach with wariness. In other words, the appearance of small crumbs of opportunity at their doorstep can be seen by residents as something to be grateful for, even when those crumbs may in fact come laced with poison. The “crumbs” Theresa describes below are crumbs of economic opportunity, but they come at the cost of housing an institution—that of the prison industry—that often generates racial and intercultural strife in rural Appalachian communities. Furthermore, the prison industry has not even proven itself to be a good source of economic stimulus for struggling local economies.¹⁵¹ Theresa has much to say about this particular industry, having produced a film about the recent arrival of the federal prison industry in nearby southwest Virginia.

¹⁵¹ See Anne Bonds, “Profit from Punishment? The Politics of Prisons, Poverty, and Neoliberal Restructuring in the Rural American Northwest” *Antipode* 38, 1 (2006): 174-177.

Aside from the specifics of this example, nonetheless, she also frequently references her notion of “desperation cheerleading,” and its close cousin “the tyranny of lowered expectations,” as reflecting broad general patterns of thinking and acting in regard to local common wealth and common poverty:

Well, I think, you know, prison as an industry of last resort, and the degree of, it's almost like it's the willingness to not question it is an indication of the degree of last resort we're actually at, you know, that the sort of like blind enthusiasm that sort of, I don't even think it's enthusiasm, but it's just sort of desperation cheerleading, it's like, Yes, this is great, we will not look at it, we will not question it, we will just go with it, because, to me that's where it's at, is people who don't feel that there's any other option but to embrace it.

Positive Place-Talk

In spite of the stubborn tenacity of some of these longstanding patterns of negative place-talk and conditioning in Letcher County and Southeast D.C., there is also significant evidence of the power of positive place-talk to begin to reverse and counteract the more destructive effects of the negative patterns discussed above. In the following quotation, Sharon describes her impression that “going green gives this community a sense of hope,” explaining that anything that can help strengthen the sense of ownership among residents can also begin to grow their sense of agency and their belief in the possibility of positive change. In this case, “going green”—working as part of a local youth environmental collective to clean up local waterways—is the stimulus for that sense of hope:

And I'll just never forget that ... our first recruited Corps member, he just got it! The environment and its significance—he just got it! So, there was a reporter there [at a stream-cleaning event] and he said, Why are you doing this? And he [the youth Corps member] said, Well, I wouldn't want anybody to come and put tires in my living room, so why should we do it to the ecosystem here? But he just (snaps her fingers), it clicked for him. So, it's things like that that helps to change people's mindsets, and I think going green gives this community a sense of hope.

While Sharon does not address this particular point, I suspect that the Corps member's use of the living room concept as a metaphor for the polluted stream is extremely significant. If one is conceptualizing the physical environment as, quite literally, a part of one's own home, then the sense of ownership and of having a personal stake in the well-being of that environment has been established. The groundwork has been laid for a stronger sense of agency and participatory efficacy, which can in turn generate increased civic participation. The most marginalized—who have neither the resources of time nor of energy to participate in these kinds of efforts—will obviously not have the luxury of participating in even small efforts such as these, but they may still benefit from an increased hopefulness among the community as a whole.

In the quotation below, Kwame discusses this issue of how to reach the most destitute and marginalized in a community such as Southeast, D.C., and what he sees as his most important goals in working to lessen the difficulties of everyday life for these residents:

I would tackle literacy issues, because if you can't read, what else are you gonna do but destroy your community? You know? And I would deal with the gentrification issue in a way that empowers *people* so they get in the process of re-claimin' and claimin' their right to be who they are and where they are. ... I would enable people, I would empower people to navigate for themselves, ... And most of all, I would make sure people know the story. And I would focus on the dehumanizing and the attacks against the culture, you know, ... And I would remind these people that you are not what people say you are, and I would remind those people that these people are not what you say they are, and put it on record, like I'm doin' with this documentary. ... I would use my influence, and my position, to empower others, and not for selfish needs.

Kwame emphasizes in this statement the power of historical and cultural knowledge as a kind of reclamation, along the lines of my discussion of history in the previous chapter. As he contends, seeing one's own history and culture from a more self-generated and

positive perspective can be deeply affirming and empowering: “I would remind these people that you are not what people say you are.” When he says that he “would make sure people know the story,” he means that he would work (and indeed is working) to make sure that people in his community have access to organic local histories in addition to the more conventional mainstream histories.

I turn now to an exploration of some of the concrete ways in which my research participants are working to generate positive place-talk in their communities, to actively strengthen and create local common wealth, and to nurture landscapes of place that are inclusive and empowering. I will discuss these activities, as understood and practiced by my research participants, in terms of two categories: creating new sources of and means of access to common spaces; and engaging actively with the making, re-making, and defining of one’s place and the practices that shape that place.

Creating Space and Access to Space

In Southeast D.C., both Ruth and Sharon lament residents’ diminishing access to the grounds of St. Elizabeth’s Hospital as a result of recent redevelopment projects. They suggest that what is needed and what they would like their own work to help generate is *increased* access to open spaces such as these, not *decreased* access in a community that already lacks the spatial amenities common to more affluent communities. Sharon describes as follows her efforts to help ensure that community access to the public green spaces of the St. Elizabeth’s complex was maintained, in addition to clear access from other parts of the city across the river to Southeast D.C. This second concern is particularly important in light of the likelihood that having a large federal agency in their

neighborhood will significantly increase traffic congestion into and out of Southeast D.C.:

I'll tell you, I remember, we had many, many, many, many meetings, and there were two things that many of us, and me in particular, I was a stickler about. Number one, we've gotta be able to have access to that site. Because, it's in our backyard! And it's already got the big wall that isolates them, so we want to continue to have access. Well of course they [federal government representatives] say they're still working on that. So that's the number one issue. The other thing is, when they were talking about, ah, Homeland Security and what they do and all that stuff, I remember sitting, cause the meeting was here in the conference room, I remember sitting there thinking about 9/11, and how when I got to this side of the river it was like nothing had happened, because there was, cause it was just, it was like a regular day over here. And I just thought, Oh my God, if Homeland Security is on this side, imagine what the traffic barriers will be. I mean, it's gonna be really challenging, because they said, Well, we'll assure you, and I said, All I know is that I better be able to get across that bridge, or across the water to get home. And sometimes I don't know if they take us seriously, but I really meant that.

Ruth shares Sharon's concern about access to the St. Elizabeth's site and to the neighborhood as a whole as a result of redevelopment. She also sees the shift toward a diminished expectation of access as having begun a decade ago or more, when the plans for renovating St. Elizabeth's were in their very early stages:

I think because St. Elizabeth's has always been walled off, and because for the past several years, maybe almost ten years now, you can't even get onto the west campus [the portion that is now owned by the federal government], people just, you know, it's behind a wall, you can't see it, so it's just kind of not there, and they don't really realize, if they even know!

Both Sharon and Ruth are somewhat pessimistic about the prospects for continued access to the St. Elizabeth's site, much less improved access, in spite of their own efforts in advocating for such access—meeting with officials, repeatedly making the case for access in public venues, etc. Indeed, even Michael, who in general views recent redevelopment efforts in Southeast D.C. more optimistically, finds grounds for pessimism as relates to the St. Elizabeth's redevelopment, particularly in terms of what

he sees as a power discrepancy between the federal and district governments. He also agrees with Sharon and Ruth that the most significant price to pay for this lesser wielding of power on the part of the D.C. government will be access to the site for residents:

... you know, anytime you have 15,000 new employees coming to your community to work, it's gonna have some impact, and I'm sure it's gonna have a positive impact, as far as bringing in new people to the community, and, you know, new businesses popping up because they have to support a new population. But I think the opportunity could have been so much bigger if the city could put their fingerprint on it, on the property, ahm, and develop it ... where we have the authority to say what goes and what doesn't go. So, you know, it's like, I have mixed feelings about it right now, so we'll see. And then, you know, when you look at St. Elizabeth's, ... you wonder like when Homeland Security comes, is it gonna be open to the public or is it gonna just be closed off for the federal government. ... I think the most important parts are gonna be the federal government, you know, the parts where the sight, the views of the city and, I think that'll be federal government, so, we'll see.

It is apparent from his first few sentences above that Michael views the economic development associated with the redevelopment of the St. Elizabeth's site as a positive thing, and potentially as a means of increasing residents' access to the kinds of amenities that a revitalized local business scene might produce. He also supports the general mantra of gentrification and redevelopment—that a revitalized business and housing market will rise the tides in a community and eventually lift all boats, even for more disadvantaged residents. As he states in a separate exchange, “I think people are looking forward to just convenient access to the everyday items that most people get in other neighborhoods. People want that.” This echoes similar statements made by both Sharon and Ruth about residents' interest in a more flourishing business sector in their community. In spite of his general enthusiasm for gentrification and redevelopment, however, Michael does recognize that the increased forms of access to amenities will not be equally available to all, and may indeed portend displacement for disadvantaged residents. The excerpt below

comes immediately on the heels of his statement above about people wanting “convenient access to everyday items:”

On the same time, on the flip side, people are a little nervous, because, you know, they’ve seen what’s happened to Shaw and U Street¹⁵², how, you know, one day it was all black, and the next thing, next day, you know, it’s all white. And people are scared of that, you know. They say, Am I gonna get pushed out, you know, for whatever reason, ah, when all this new development comes. So it’s like, you know, it’s hard for, it is scary for some people.

Michael obviously recognizes and is somewhat sensitive to the reality that redevelopment, rapid economic growth, and gentrification are not unqualified positives for all residents of Southeast, D.C. On the whole, however, his interest in building common wealth in his community lies not in expanding opportunities for residents such as these, but in promoting homeownership and the values associated with it. Significantly, it is in terms of homeownership that he speaks most frequently and most passionately about the need for increasing access to physical spaces in his community. He also tends to merge the notion of physical access to community spaces with financial access to community spaces. And perhaps most importantly of all, his notion of “access” is almost always framed in terms of acquiring ownership, both physical and financial, of those spaces, not in the sense of being able to partake of the right of use and free access. He explains his feelings on increasing the rates of homeownership in his community—“access” to residential property—as follows:

It’s about, are you gonna be a good neighbor. And I just hope that some of my friends will move to the neighborhood and take advantage of this low property cost now, and not wait until like this boom comes and all of a sudden the house costs \$600,000 to move into and you can’t afford it. So I, I sincerely hope that we take advantage of it now.

¹⁵² Shaw and U Street are both areas of Northwest D.C. that were formerly home to large numbers of low-income African Americans, but have undergone dramatic redevelopment and gentrification in recent years, part of which entailed the displacement of many former residents.

In the Letcher County context, there is not nearly as much emphasis on residential housing—whether in terms of increasing the number of homeowners, ensuring housing for all residents, or preventing displacement. Indeed, housing is for the most part plentiful and quite inexpensive in Letcher County, in spite of the stubborn tenacity of poverty there. It goes without saying that rural poverty tends to look quite different from urban poverty, and certainly it does in terms of housing and mobility. The most impoverished and marginalized residents of Southeast D.C. struggle to maintain housing in an urban locale that is within one of the most expensive cities in the U.S., in spite of remaining the least expensive sector of that city. In Letcher County the problem of displacement has not been a major issue, and indeed like many rural communities across the country, it actively works to combat the longstanding issue of outmigration and population decline. One of the risks of the continued intensification of mountaintop removal in this area, however, is that the physical destruction of mountaintop removal will eventually lead to forced displacement.¹⁵³ For the time being, however, this has not been an issue in Letcher County.

As a result of the structural differences in how poverty is expressed in the residential and financial landscapes of Letcher County and Southeast D.C., it is not surprising that efforts to improve access to common places often manifest themselves quite distinctly as well. There are efforts underway in Letcher County, just like in Southeast D.C., to revitalize the community's business and arts environment and make it a more attractive place for investors. In Letcher County, however, partly because space is

¹⁵³ In neighboring West Virginia, entire communities have become ghost towns as a result of their nearness to mountaintop removal sites. Likewise, vast stretches of countryside have been bought up in recent years by coal companies, forcing many marginalized families to choose between remaining in a zone of destruction and selling their family property.

so much more plentiful and the population is so much smaller, these efforts to bring increased amenities and opportunities to the community—i.e. to “gentrify” it, so to speak—do not lead as directly to exclusionary effects for the most marginalized residents. Indeed, Letcher County, and in particular the county seat of Whitesburg, seem to provide some evidence that “gentrification” as it is often touted in places such as Southeast D.C.—as a means of enhancing the quality of life of all residents—actually provides more widespread and all-encompassing benefits when implemented in rural areas such as Letcher County. The process of “rural gentrification” is much more complex, however, than simply transposing the processes that take place in an urban area onto small-town landscapes, and the burgeoning literature on rural gentrification explores some of its downsides as well.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, in the context of Letcher County, the kinds of cultural development processes that are taking place have not had the corollary (and often primary) effect that almost always occurs in urban areas—that of substantial outside financial investments in real estate.

A significant example of the kinds of cultural development processes currently taking place in Letcher County is the recent cultural entrepreneurship of Theresa and her husband. The couple decided in 2007, after living in the community for a number of years and lamenting the lack of a multifaceted community gathering place—coffee shop, concert venue, bar, etc.—to take a leap and open their own such establishment. See Figures 19 and 20 below for views of Summit City from the street and from inside.

¹⁵⁴ See the following for an example of the growing literature on rural gentrification: J. Dwight Hines, “Rural Gentrification as Permanent Tourism: The Creation of the ‘New West Archipelago’ as Postindustrial Cultural Space,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010: 509-525.



Figure 19: View of Summit City from the street, downtown Whitesburg. Photo courtesy of Tarence Ray.



Figure 20: View of Summit City from the inside. Photo courtesy of Tarence Ray.

Theresa describes some of their motivation for opening Summit City as follows:

I think it was also just selfishness of me and Ben being like, the things that we would routinely leave every weekend to go do, which was drink nice cocktails, go see live music, you know, have coffee in the mornings, whatever, we just put all that together.

Summit City has never been just about entertainment and good coffee and cocktails, however, as anyone who spends any time talking with Theresa about its mission will soon learn. Establishing Summit City as a business and a local institution was not an easy endeavor to begin with—from the financial, legal, or logistical perspectives—and once established, it came to represent something more substantial than simply providing a fun and cozy local spot for residents to gather and drink coffee and beers or watch live music. Theresa says the following in explaining the roots of Summit

City's institutional philosophy and the motto that crystallizes that philosophy: "Hain't it funny how places like this just bring people together?"

I think that's, from the very beginning, one of the kind of philosophies of Summit City has been the creation of, it's not a neutral space by any means, but a space that allows for, you know, really diverse viewpoints and really diverse sets of people to feel comfortable and feel welcome. We have some pretty, this is not written in code or anything, but, sets of behavior expectations, I mean that you can't have racist language in the space, and you know, that there's definitely things that we're like, this is our space and that doesn't happen in here kinda shit, but also, I mean our motto, like our motto of our whole place is "Hain't it funny how places like this just bring people together?" and that's really just been, instead of me putting a big anti-mountaintop removal sticker on our front window, I make a space where anti-mountaintop removal people are completely welcome to be in here and are very likely to sit down next to strip miners and actually have a conversation, and that's much more transformative than whatever sort of token stances I might throw out there.

Theresa's explanation of her understanding of the political role(s) played by Summit City as a community institution and a kind of neutral meeting ground is quite compelling and striking. Also poignant is her statement in concluding the above meditation: "it removes that ability to contain that other person in the other when you actually have to sit with them and drink beer at the same bar." Indeed, Theresa and her husband have created an institution where they very consciously work to undermine tendencies toward othering, marginalizing, excluding, and otherwise dehumanizing or dismissing other people. This is not to suggest that Summit City is somehow immune to the disagreements and arguments and hurt feelings that are bound to occur from time to time in any place where groups of people gather, but it is to say that this institution works very hard to keep those occasional occurrences from being ignored or normalized or even encouraged in the way that they may be in other local institutions. Theresa and her husband as owners of Summit City take responsibility for the tone and content and shape of what happens within the institution's walls, acknowledging that it is a political space

just like any gathering space, and working to endow the space with as much common wealth and respect and inclusivity as possible. They work to make this a space that practices place in the most productive of ways—spurring positive place-talk, generative and creative landscapes of place, and ultimately nurturing common wealth that will in turn nurture further common wealth.¹⁵⁵

Theresa also sees what I referred to above as the “gentrifying” component of Summit City’s presence—i.e. the spurring of the local cultural and arts and entertainment arenas—as a kind of common wealth. She sees it as a kind of “can-do” common wealth that reminds residents that “the tyranny of lowered expectations” does not always have to stymie efforts to increase local productivity in the cultural and economic realms. As she explains below, the presence of Summit City in Whitesburg has forced “some of the powers that be to reckon with what we actually can have.”

So Summit City I think, if it’s done anything here, it’s shifted, it’s forced some of the people, especially the people in the powers that be, to reckon with what we actually can have, you know. We can have a place that will stand up to any place in the cities that you routinely travel to to go and have your fun, we’ll have it here, ... so now suddenly there’s a whole dialogue in Whitesburg about what role can arts play in community economic development, that’s I think sprung from what we did, and, you know, from the sort of, some latent passion in that direction [toward the merging of the arts and development] that everybody has constantly always suppressed because there’s always this sense of despair, of what’s possible and what’s not possible. So having something come out of nowhere.

Active Engagement with the Making and Re-Making of Place

In addition to practices such as these that create new kinds of common spaces and provide or promote increased access to common (and un-common) spaces, my research

¹⁵⁵ Much of Theresa’s explanation (and indeed the apparent reality) of how Summit City functions as a gathering place in Letcher County is reminiscent of Ray Oldenburg’s influential work on such gathering places: Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1989).

participants also carry out the participatory ethic by virtue of their efforts not just to engage actively in the life of their communities, but to encourage others to do so as well. Several of my research participants practice unique and compelling means of encouraging creative, affective, and social expression of one's sense of place, thus helping fellow residents to actively shape, create, and re-create the physical and conceptual landscapes of place in their communities.

Almost all of my research participants recognize and profess value in the very act of participating, involving oneself in everyday life and place, and creating common wealth for oneself and one's community. Keith in Letcher County describes in the following excerpt a friend of his (now deceased) who was known in the community, and sometimes resented, for his outspoken involvement on issues that he believed to be important:

One guy, one of the magistrates in the court meetin' said, John, you're against everything! And the truth about it was, he did complain about a lot of stuff. But, it was stuff that needed to be done. He was out there all by hisself, standin' up for all the rest of the 30,000 people in the county, and nobody liked him. Everybody hated him because he was against everything. Now, I knew better, and a lot of others knew better, and I supported John every way I could, because he was way ahead of the curve as far as everybody's concerned, you know. He recycled before anybody knew what it was, you know, and I remember years and years ago we went to McDonald's and he told 'em he didn't want his hamburger in one of them Styrofoam things, he wanted it on a piece of wax paper. And I said, John, you're just bein' a prick. And he said, No, it makes a difference. And, thirty years later they bring ya hamburger on a piece of wax paper. You know, and so, but he had a bad name, you know, you're against everything, John, and it's not popular to do the right thing, most of the time.

Kwame also discusses his penchant for this kind of involvement, even when it is viewed by some as being intrusive or irksome. "Everywhere I went I did something significant, got involved in something significant," says Kwame, as part of an explanation of how he has participated in the everyday life of the various places he has

lived. “I didn’t go anywhere to just be like a bump on a log,” he continues. “I made noise wherever I went.”

Likewise, while she would probably not describe it as “making noise,” Joyce professes a similar penchant for involving oneself in community life and creating one’s own opportunities for recreation and leisure. She finds the concept of boredom to be particularly baffling, and is disheartened that her children and grandchildren and so many of the young people she encounters claim to be regularly bored. She does not blame them directly for their professed inability to create leisure or pleasure for themselves, and in fact she blames her own generation for perhaps not teaching their children creativity and self-reliance as well as they might have done. But she nonetheless finds it hard to imagine the actual feeling, as her grandchildren and others describe it, of being bored.

Now the kids say, when my daughter was growing up, she would say, there’s nothing to do here, and you know, I’ve never been able to understand that, cause I, you know, we were raised, you entertain yourself, you know, your parents, your mother was busy cookin’ and washin’ clothes and just generally taking care of our physical needs, and we had to take care of our own entertainment. And, we just, I think when we grew up and got decent jobs and had a little extra money, we all spoiled our children, we didn’t teach them to work, they just didn’t get a good work ethic, and apparently spent too much time entertaining them because they can’t entertain themselves. (Laughing.)

Melissa provides a kind of unwitting affirmation of Joyce’s linkage between general satisfaction and being engaged and active, explaining that she sees her activism and community engagement as entwined with her burgeoning sense of Appalachian identity and pride. “I think that being more active was like my way to learn to love it here,” says Melissa, implying that she may once have felt the same kind of boredom and dissatisfaction that Joyce sees in her children and grandchildren. Melissa continues, “I just feel like maybe I’ve learned to love it [Letcher County in particular and Appalachia

in general] a little more through working on it.” Melissa also strives to generate some of this satisfaction and sense of agency among others in her community, particularly young people. She has helped design and lead several community arts projects through her internship with Appalshop. In one of her most successful efforts with outreach via the arts, Melissa and a colleague went into classrooms in the local schools, asking the students to make drawings or photographs of particularly cherished local landscapes or objects. The images were then made into postcards which were put on display as part of a local art walk; visitors were asked to write on the backs of the postcards the words and ideas that sprang to mind when they looked at the images. Some 200 stories were collected on the postcards, and Melissa and her colleague are now in the process of compiling the postcards and stories into a book. She describes the intensely positive local reaction to this project—which was centered on ideas of home and place among Letcher Countians—as follows:

We had people who cried at the exhibit, who would come up and they were like crying because they couldn’t believe the kids cared this much, they never expected to see this. One teacher cried because she said that it was really exciting to see the kids that excited, and then teachers were like, You should have come to my class! Why weren’t you in my class? Why didn’t you come to my school? And then one of the sixth grade girls, her grandfather came, and he was actually on one of the postcards we had printed, and the postcard was him with his tiller in the garden, and it’s a beautiful picture and she interviewed him and did an interview and a book about him to put out. So he came and he was just so proud and so excited and he took pictures with her in front of her art display and he wanted extra postcards to send out as Christmas cards, and that was like, that was the most rewarding thing we could have done was to know that, because a lot of times as artists you feel like maybe kids aren’t getting that reassurance that it’s something to be proud of, and so it was really exciting to see her grandfather be so proud of her.

Melissa is rightfully encouraged by this positive reaction not just to her project as a whole but to the artistic work and thought of the students and other participants that

went into making it. She also sees the love and care and sense of connection that are etched into such artistic works as the photo of the girl's grandfather in his garden—plus all the stories that were layered onto this initial image—as themselves functioning as positive place-talk, and as helping to generate further positive place-talk. This is particularly true for those members of the community whose voices do not often resonate as loudly as more elite voices in the pitched discursive war over coal and community. With profound insight, in the quotation below on the power of artistic work for nourishing place-based common wealth, she suggests that through art, “people are talking without even realizing that they’re talking.”

... just having, you know, these small stories of people who aren't heard, like there's so much of these two sides [fighting over the coal industry and the economic future of the region] that just clash, but there's this whole group of people that I think was probably where I was before I left and came back, that are never heard and they never speak up and they're never asked what they think about this, and so my hope is that maybe the more I stay here and the more work I do, that I can help find these people and like, give them the opportunity to be heard. And my thing is that I do a lot of things through art projects and artwork, and sometimes that's the best way to do it because people are talking without even realizing that they're talking.

Michael in Southeast D.C. also speaks of devoting time and energy in his community to nurturing relationships among neighbors and residents, and of the satisfaction of seeing his own participatory work help generate local opportunities that did not previously exist. He is not as focused on creating agency or “giving voice” to residents as Melissa above, or as some of my other research participants, but he is very devoted to nurturing strong social and residential networks in the community. In the quotation below, he describes his work in helping lead the Historic Anacostia Block Association, or HABA, a local organization that works to facilitate neighborly interaction and information sharing:

The goal of the Block Association is just to keep our neighbors informed and involved in what's going on in the community, ahm, cause we found out that, you know, there was stuff going on that we didn't know about, and it was like it was kept in a secret silo and you had to go search it out to get it, ahm, so that was the main goal, and that *is* the main goal, to keep people informed. Ahm, now, outside of that we've done a lot of, you know, just social activities, because we're a social group, so you know, hand dancing, line dancing lessons, game night, just to get people out having fun.

And in the quotation below, Michael describes his initiative and leadership in founding the local organization River East Emerging Leaders, or REEL. As noted earlier, REEL has been a source of some contention between newer and longer-term residents of Southeast, and also between younger and older residents, but it is undoubtedly a source of strong local participatory energy among its members:

During the election [of 2008] I noticed that there was a huge gap as far as the traditional Ward 8 voter and the new young Ward 8 voter. I didn't see them, anyway. There was no group out there to say, Here is a voice for young, energetic, progressive-type folks, and ah, I saw that there was a need, so I was, you know, saying, okay, after the election is over I'm gonna focus on this, and try to build this organization to make it happen. I started identifying people as I met them throughout the summer, and so essentially I called them all together, and we met last November, and I said, Hey, here's an idea. Let's create an organization of young people in the ward to get us ready to take over leadership positions as the, you know, seniors move aside. And everybody was very enthused about it, and ahm, we worked really hard over like a three-month period just to get the idea and the concept together, and we started to become active since February of last year [2009], and it's been a grand success so far.

The case can certainly be made (see chapter two) that some of Michael's participatory work in Southeast D.C. is aimed at constricting rather than enlarging access to local common wealth—and indeed that HABA's appeal to homeowners and REEL's appeal to new, young residents together represent a distinct orientation toward the population most responsible for leading the current charge of gentrification. Nevertheless, the case can also be made quite strongly, as I am doing here, that Michael values local participation and interaction significantly enough to help found two organizations

devoted to those goals. As with all efforts at participatory place-making, there is “un-common wealth” embedded in common wealth, and common wealth embedded in “un-common wealth.” This is not to deny or to de-emphasize the “un-common” elements of Michael’s work and his philosophy, but is simply a recognition that the “common” elements cannot be ignored merely because they exist alongside a healthy does of “un-commonness.”

Kwame provides a final example of enacting his views on place and community, and also of social justice. He also offers a glimpse of the powerful generative force of the conversation that is begun when such enactment happens, as well as the sense of agency and authority that can be sparked. He describes below the community reaction and the conversation that was sparked following a screening of his film in Southeast, D.C.:

The film kinda spoke for itself. ... then people from the community shared their stories of, you know, how they’ve been harassed, and one girl started cryin’ as she was sharin’ her story, I mean it was powerful dialogue. ... a young brother stood up and asked a good question, he said, why is it so easy to get in trouble, it take just a snap of the fingers, but it’s so hard to get out. He said he got into trouble in the blink of a eye and took three months to get out, you know. It was just this kinda dialogue. And then, you know, the elders got up and got excited about their stories.

Aware though he is of the value of culturally productive efforts such as his film, nevertheless, Kwame also provides a useful and humbling note of warning about any easy attempts to elevate the work of more privileged residents such as him (and indeed all of my research participants) beyond its actual value. This work is important, and it matters greatly in helping to spur ongoing participatory work among residents of all stripes, but by itself it is not enough, particularly when it is only being produced at the hands of the least marginalized members of the community:

Now if this film is a catalyst for motivatin' people to do something about it, then that's good, but primarily, the film is not gonna make anybody make an action. The film is just gonna get people as much information as they already had, or maybe a little bit more. It probably should give people more information than they already had, since it's gonna come from the perspective of a person who doesn't work with the city. But even after that, the film is not gonna make anybody take action. ... I'm not really proposing any strategy or anything that people don't know, my stance is just like, yo, you're either gonna do something or you're not. Yeah, my responsibility is to capture the reality, for all to see the reality. Learn from the reality, and be influenced, yeah, be influenced more so by the reality than the fantasy. But at the same time, my job isn't to save anyone.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have continued the exploration of my research participants' understandings of place-based common wealth that I began in the previous chapter. I have focused here on how they view the overall well-being of their communities in light of ongoing marginalization and the current disruptive changes of mountaintop removal mining and redevelopment and gentrification. I have also explored my participants' visions of how best to nurture and support community common wealth, and their understandings of how their own engagement in their community enacts some of those visions. I have termed these broad, holistic assessments and visions the integrative ethic and the participatory ethic, respectively.

My participants' expressions of these integrative and participatory values vary to some extent along the lines of the two locales examined here. For example, the Letcher County participants speak at greater length about environmental integrativeness and the Southeast D.C. participants speaking more about historical integrativeness. There is also variation between the participants within each locale, suggesting differences in individual attitudes and cultural standpoints. Most significant, however, is the strong patterns and resemblances among *all* the participants in *both* locations in terms of how they articulate

their large-scale assessments of life in their community and their visions of what needs to take place in the future. Even more than with their expressions of marginalization and identity and preservationist values, I find in their articulations of integrative and participatory values the strongest parallels of all. Some parallels are to be expected, given that all eight of my research participants share in a number of qualities, most notably their levels of education and mobility and their simultaneous identification as insiders and outsiders in their communities. However, to the extent that each of them is closely attuned to and embedded in the general cultural rhythms of their community—and I believe this to be true of all of them—the broad resemblances they articulate about how place matters in marginalized communities undergoing change are remarkable and important.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation project has been an attempt to consider how people in marginalized places think about place. More specifically, it has been an attempt to use ethnography to explore how two particular assortments of residents in two marginalized places—Letcher County, Kentucky and Southeast, Washington D.C.—think and feel about place. I have considered not only what these people have to say about place—and specifically in its connections to marginalization and disruptive structural changes—but how what they have said matters and what it might mean in a broad, relational sense. I have explored how residents understand the characteristics of their surrounding environment, the historical and contextual connections they make between these environments and their sense of identity, and their complex and conflicted sense of the changes that are taking place, and I have noted the extent to which their formulations are similar and different.

Since embarking on this project, I have been keenly aware that while “place” as a concept is the heart and the central guiding premise of this project, by itself it is simultaneously “too small” and “too big” a concept to capture the full complexity of individual people’s notions of what it means to be geographically situated and “emplaced.”¹⁵⁶ I have asked my research participants whether, and how, they think and act with place, so to speak, but doing so required providing them with some additional conceptual frames for fleshing out the lived, day-to-day dynamics of their “place thinking” and “place acting.” In crafting my interview questions and then co-producing

¹⁵⁶ Edward Casey uses this term in *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*.

the interview conversations with my research participants, I asked questions relating to the specific structural changes taking place in each community, in addition to queries into their thoughts on identity, community, and history. I frequently used the terms “place,” “home,” and “environment” to spur my research participants to think in terms of geography, location, dwelling, and their cultural and conceptual landscapes. In my interview methodology, therefore, the circumnavigational terms I employed to help encompass the breadth of place-based thinking and to supplement “place” by itself were “home” and “environment.”

In shifting from conducting interviews and ethnographic observation and participation to analyzing the ethnographic material I had gathered, I found that alternative circumnavigational terms would more accurately and precisely capture the contours of my ethnographic material, providing that material with an interpretive framing that would reflect its breadth as well as specificity. “Home” and “environment” had been effective circumnavigational terms in crafting conversational themes and guides for my interviews, but through the process of deeply reading, analyzing, and interpreting the ethnographic material, the concepts of “common wealth” and “conceptual landscapes of place” began to emerge as key points of continuity and commonality underlying the vast and diverse body of material from my research participants.

Chapter Summaries

In chapter one I introduced the general orientation of this project, establishing the research questions I am exploring and the methodologies and theories I am using to explore and situate those questions. I identified “place” as the key conceptual focus of this dissertation, and located the two specific places explored here—Letcher County,

Kentucky and Southeast Washington, D.C. as geographical locations that have been structurally and discursively marginalized, and in both differing and overlapping ways. I also described the current disruptive structural changes taking place in both locations—mountaintop removal mining and gentrification and displacement, respectively. In presenting my ethnographic approach to place, I discussed my textual, observational, and ethnographic interview strategies, and identified my own cultural location as researcher in relation to the people with whom I was working in these communities. And lastly, I briefly introduced my eight key research participants—four from Letcher County and four from Southeast D.C., describing each of them in terms of their cultural locations within their communities and the general contours of their identities and orientations. I also presented the theoretical foundations of this project and provided a review of the relevant literature relating to this topic.

Chapters two through four serve as the interpretive core of this dissertation, with each one focusing on a different theme or set of themes in relation to “place” that emerged through my ethnographic interactions with my research participants. In chapter two, I examined the concept of marginalization, exploring how it relates to understandings of identity. I explored how the various factors of marginalization that shape identities in both Letcher County and Southeast, D.C.—race, class, and “status” among others—are understood and experienced by my research participants, and how those factors of marginalization shape their notions of identity. I identified a mutually iterative process that appears to take place with respect to how conceptions of marginalization and identity co-produce each other within my research participants’ thinking, terming this process the matrix of marginalization and identity. I also examined

the concepts of boundaries, insider-outsider status, ownership, belonging, and other geographically-oriented terms of positionality. These terms were voiced frequently by my research participants in their discussions of how they experienced and articulated marginalization and identity; as such, they helped elucidate the role of marginalization—as both a process and a set of characteristics—in shaping my research participants’ understandings of their identity in relation to place.

Significantly, in this chapter I began to see evidence of certain resemblances between the kinds of understandings of place, marginalization, and identity that were being expressed by my research participants in both Letcher County and Southeast, D.C. Their discussions of these concepts were far from identical, but there was an underlying thread of commonality in terms of their frequent reference to a set of core values regarding place that I am calling “common wealth.” The detailed exploration of several of the most significant sets of “common wealth” values explored by my research participants served as the subject of both chapters three and four.

In chapter three I explored what I am calling the “preservationist” value, or ethic, that was commonly expressed by my research participants in both locations. This preservationist value was often articulated in terms of research participants’ embrace of preserving, conserving, and stewarding those elements of their location that they identify as common wealth. I divided the preservationist ethic, as expressed by my research participants, into two central streams in accordance with the two key ways in which they discussed their embrace of this value: historically-oriented preservation and environmentally-oriented preservation. I noted in concluding this chapter that while certain research participants expressed preservation as a stronger value than others, and

while certain participants spoke much more of one “stream” of preservationist thinking than the other, on the whole they expressed a relatively strong and relatively even embrace of preservationist thinking in terms of the “common wealth” that they value in their communities. Significantly, perhaps the greatest divergences in this chapter emerged not between residents of Letcher County and residents of Southeast, D.C., but between certain research participants *within* each place in terms of how they interpret preservation and common wealth. Indeed, certain research participants in Letcher County spoke in ways that bore more resemblances to certain research participants in Southeast, D.C. than to some of their fellow Letcher County residents, and vice versa.

In chapter four I examined the holistic, “big-picture” assessments offered by my research participants in terms of how they broadly characterize their communities and what they see as the best course of action for addressing the challenges facing their communities both in terms of general marginalization and the more specific structural changes taking place. I divided these “big-picture” assessments into what I term the “integrative component” and the “participatory component.” In laying out the integrative component, I explored participants’ expressions of how they characterize the various components of “common wealth” that they identify, and how they understand those components as functioning integratively in relation to one another. In laying out the participatory component, I emphasized the value most of my participants place on active practice and participation within one’s community. I explored how they conceptualize their own role, sense of agency, and participatory potential in regard to putting into practice their values of preserving and creating place-based common wealth. As with chapters two and three, I continued to identify broad and significant parallels between the

research participants in Letcher County and Southeast, D.C. in terms of their assessments of what is at stake in their communities and what needs to be done to preserve and “grow” common wealth.

Relational Implications

As we have seen, Letcher County and Southeast, D.C. are very different kinds of places—the one a poor, rural, predominantly white Appalachian mountain community in Kentucky, the other a poor, urban, predominantly African American community in Washington, D.C. Both, however, are undergoing profound experiences of change and strain on their existence as physically and socially intact communities—intrusive and disruptive mountaintop removal coal mining in Letcher County and gentrification and displacement in Southeast, D.C. Considered relationally, one of the more striking aspects of my interview findings is the often quite similar ways in which many of my key participants speak about what is happening to their communities. For example, all of them agree that the broad contours of day-to-day life that comprise the common wealth of these places is valuable and worth protecting and nurturing, even while they may disagree on the particulars of exactly what constitutes the common wealth of their community, or what kinds of factors in general ought to constitute a community’s common wealth. Furthermore, all of them firmly reject the negative constructions by outsiders of their place identity, crafting instead more positive and enabling foundations for understanding their identity as residents of these places. Their individual views on the issues of mountaintop removal and gentrification and displacement, respectively, do vary considerably. However, looking beyond this more obvious source of distinction to the larger arguments being made about place and about how change ought ideally to play out

in order to avoid damaging or destroying common wealth demonstrates a rather profound resemblance, both between the two places and between the different research participants in each place.

Why might this be the case? Mountaintop removal and gentrification and displacement are highly contentious issues in these communities, and they are issues that have emerged amidst a historical backdrop of marginalization that has generated a great deal of contention and polarization of its own. One would not expect to find these broad similarities of purpose and intent among a selection of residents from these two communities, even and perhaps especially when their views on more immediate issues such as the structural changes taking place vary. One possible explanation, addressed throughout this dissertation and most explicitly in chapter two—seems to be that despite their differences, both places have traditionally been marginalized by the dominant culture and by more affluent surrounding areas. Residents of both places have developed a somewhat similar set of feelings of loyalty and identification with their home places and a generally suspicious and defensive stance towards the dominant culture and toward outsiders in general. Given this historical and cultural context, it is striking but not completely surprising to see what we have seen, namely that members of each community often speak in rather parallel ways about the extremely disruptive changes that are currently shifting and threatening their communities. It is almost as if they speak from a common local script that they have all imbibed, a script that suggests how marginalization of necessity shapes and colors their experience of interaction with and specifically of disruptive change at the hands of outside entities.

Significantly, this foundational script of rejecting the inferiority associated with marginalization is similar within and between the two places, but it is flexible enough to be utilized toward very different and even opposing arguments, as in the case of the changes currently affecting the two places. For example, both Michael and Sharon speak passionately about wanting improvements in Southeast D.C. so that it can be a more convenient place to live in terms of amenities and cultural life; their notions of how and whether the poorest and most destitute residents of Southeast D.C. should be able to participate in this desired renaissance differ significantly, however, as do their views on whether displacement should be tolerated. In an example that highlights these parallels in foundational scripts as they exist between the two places, both Melissa in Letcher County and Ruth in Southeast, D.C. speak at length about their discomfort and wariness with people coming in from “outside” their communities and assuming too much immediate authority to understand the place, to speak “for” its residents, and to take charge of its leadership. They inflect their understandings of the factors that constitute outsidership differently, with Melissa focusing more on a combination of class and region and Ruth emphasizing a combination of race and age. Nevertheless, they agree on the foundational idea that “insider” authority must be earned, and cannot be assumed to exist simply as a result of coming into the community.

A second explanation for the resemblances in the broad contours of the thinking articulated by my research participants seems to have to do with the cultural location of these eight participants. As we have seen, all are firmly rooted in their respective communities and identify very closely and strongly with them. All of them but Michael grew up and came of age in their respective community or its immediate environs, and all

but Ruth currently reside in the community.¹⁵⁷ And all of them, including both Michael and Ruth, are active participants in the cultural life of their communities and devote significant portions of their professional and/or personal time to civic activities. However, all eight are also partially outsiders. All have spent time outside their home communities, all are relatively highly educated, most are well-read, and most have received at least some of their education elsewhere. They therefore all exist to some extent in the in-between space of simultaneous insider-outsider status. While they were all very articulate and insightful in speaking about their understandings of the unique qualities of collective, “insider” formulations of local identity, and indeed spoke firmly from “within” that formulation in most cases, these insider-outsiders were also all attuned to versions of “outsider” discourse more commonly circulated at the national level of social media and public discourse. More specifically, they were mostly all familiar with somewhat similar progressive-leaning cultural critiques currently disseminated in counter-cultural zones of the dominant culture. This seems to have been another source of the parallel perspectives offered by many of the participants.

Indeed, among those research participants who have more strongly absorbed these progressive discourses, there was often more similarity between the arguments of a particular participant from Letcher County and a particular participant from Southeast, D.C. than between that participant and certain other participants in their community. For example, Kwame’s meditations on the hypocrisy he sees as inherent in much

¹⁵⁷ As noted earlier, Theresa grew up one county over and just across the state line from Letcher County; Michael’s dissimilarity in not having grown up in Southeast, D.C. is significant and necessary because of his status as a member of the newly arriving population of Southeast D.C. residents. Ruth grew up in a family with very strong roots in Southeast D.C. and still participates actively in the cultural life there, but she chooses to live in nearby Prince George’s County, Maryland because of her disregard for the political leadership of Southeast D.C. and her sadness at seeing it changed from how she recalls it being during the first several decades of her life when she did reside there. Significantly, Ruth’s mother continued to reside in their family home in Southeast D.C. until her death in 2011.

contemporary economic development and redevelopment bears much more in common with Keith's similar meditations on the general untrustworthiness of large extractive industries than it does with fellow Southeast D.C. resident Michael's much more optimistic views on economic development and redevelopment projects. Furthermore, Keith has much more in common with Kwame in terms of these views than he does with Joyce, for example, who views extractive industry's massive presence in her community not just as desirable but as a necessity. As another striking parallel between individual participants in the two places, both Ruth and Joyce share in a quite strong sense of sadness at what they see as the overall decline in the quality and strength of character of the residents of their communities in the time since they were growing up there. Both speak frequently in nostalgic tones that are more reminiscent of each other than of any of the other meditations on place and history from their fellow participants in both locations. Significantly, both Ruth and Joyce, as discussed in chapter three, are educated, middle-class women in their sixties, which suggests that identity categories such as age and class—viewed from outside the prism of place and geography—may sometimes carry more resonance than do the versions of these categories that are more explicitly refracted through place.

Other Scholarly Implications

This study, I believe, offers a number of implications for scholarly work on place, including several methodological implications. First, I would argue that this study shows the tremendous value of bringing ethnographic methods to bear on place. Understandings of place and feelings on place tend to be highly subtle and complex, and as such, they are ideal subjects to explore via the nuanced and flexible methods of ethnographic dialogue.

Beginning with Clifford Geertz, ethnographers have stressed the importance of portraying the people and the issues being studied with careful, “thick” description, but in this context we might also speak of the importance of cultivating “thick” conversations with research participants. Such “thick” conversations allow for the careful exploration of shades of understanding and emotion that are not frequently or easily expressed. Indeed, even when the articulations produced through such conversations fail to capture the full richness of our participants’ thinking, as they invariably do to some degree, they nonetheless produce articulations that are more subtle and nuanced than those elicited through more formulaic and less flexible methods of examining thinking on place. Because the ethnographer can actively participate in hearing and interpreting the research participants’ responses as they are spoken, and can thus shape subsequent questions and areas of discussion that flow from those responses, there is much more room for conversational crafting in ways that take into account the ongoing unfolding of the research participants’ thinking.

The other side of this interactive flexibility, of course, is that the ethnographer may also exert somewhat more moment-to-moment influence over the frameworks structuring the interaction than in less flexible encounters. There is undoubtedly always a risk of the ethnographer exerting too much control over the interview, and perhaps especially of “priming” the research participant to focus their attention and sometimes even their interpretation in ways that conform to what the ethnographer wants to hear. Nevertheless, I feel that the benefits of this flexible and continuously adaptable method of “thick” ethnographic conversation far outweigh the potential risks. When exploring complicated and multi-layered subjects such as place, and in particular how people think

about place, there are few methods that generate as much richness of detail and insight as the ethnographic interview dialogue. In this study, the research participants in each place offered in their interviews marvelously rich articulations of how they as insiders experience, value, and understand their places, in addition to insightful assessments of the changes taking place around them. Analyzing, organizing, and interpreting this material provided tremendous insight into the question I address throughout this dissertation—that of how residents of marginalized communities undergoing changes think with, about, and through place.

A second methodological implication of this study is that insider-outsider research participants seem to serve as extremely valuable interviewees for scholarship on place. Such people think and feel with insider orientations but are also sufficiently detached and sufficiently immersed in broader discourses to speak about their places in ways that are often unavailable to those who are more unitarily rooted and submersed in their communities. The insider-outsider status of all of my research participants also presents a limitation, however, in that that status reflects an experience with place and locality that has been filtered in ways that may soften the roughest edges of the experience of marginalization. In my own future research involving marginalized communities, I believe it will be important to try and speak with people who are deeply and more or less solely rooted in a given place and have had little or no opportunity to travel or live elsewhere. In my current research area, I hope in the future to have my insider-outsider participants introduce me to those they know to be more uniformly embedded in the dominant material and conceptual realities of everyday life in these communities. Ideally such participants could then introduce me to still other such residents.

A third methodological implication of my study is the value it suggests of the relational approach to studying place. While avoiding essentializing forms of comparison, setting one place in relationship to another and allowing the discourses at play to be read both within and between, and ideally beyond, the geography and cultural landscape of each place creates an intellectual juxtaposition that allows for openness and creativity in interpretation. Reading and conceptualizing one set of interviewees who share in their geographical location in relationship to another set of interviewees who differ in their geographical location from the first set but may overlap with the first set also enriches the study of place. Such an interwoven and relational analysis elucidates both the broad resemblances that characterize understandings of place in shifting, marginalized communities as well as the specific particularities that characterize individual places and the people who inhabit them.

In addition to methodological and theoretical implications, this study offers a variety of contributions to the scholarly literature. First, and most obviously, it provides a contribution to the scholarly literature focusing on central Appalachian coalfields communities and on the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. The literature on the effects of coal mining in Appalachia is enormous, but the majority of this literature still looks at the effects of mining in terms of quantifiable measurements of economic, ecological, or physical human health. Much less common is the kind of fine-grained qualitative study I have conducted looking at residents' understandings of place. Furthermore, while there is growing awareness, particularly within Appalachian Studies and the environmental humanities, of the importance of qualitatively exploring the damage caused by extractive industry in terms of affective understandings of place and

home, my exploration of place in Letcher County deepens this focus by grounding it not just in the present situation of extraction but also in the historical patterns and processes of marginalization as they have played out in Appalachian coalfields communities. And by thus participating in scholarly conversations on the historical (and ongoing) processes of material and discursive formation of “Appalachia” as a backwards, marginalized, and even “deviant” region, my study also suggests the usefulness of ethnographic approaches to exploring processes and understandings of marginalization as they play out in everyday life.

Similarly, there is an abundant literature that looks at the historical and sociocultural contours of the Washington, D.C. area, but relatively little that specifically highlights Southeast D.C.¹⁵⁸ That which does exist consists mostly of historical overviews of the area and does very little in the way of social or cultural analysis. Indeed, several of my research participants from Southeast D.C. speak of the area as a neighborhood that is in dire need of more attention from scholars, so my research makes a contribution in that most general sense of expanding the existing literature on a neglected area. It also, however, broadens the focus of the small historical and sociological literature that does exist in much the same way that my study expands the literature on the effects of coal mining in Appalachia—by framing scholarly issues not in terms of quantifiable measures of poverty, health, well-being, etc., but in the more complex and amorphous concept of place, and by seeking to elicit residents’ own understandings of the concepts of place, marginalization, and change, as opposed to

¹⁵⁸ For an exception to this general lack of work specifically on Southeast D.C., see the following two works: Gail S. Lowe, ed., *East of the River: Continuity and Change* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010); and Alex Baca, “Good Hope: Gentrification, Development, and Displacement in Anacostia” (Senior Honors Thesis, American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, 2010).

extrapolating from more conventional forms of “data” to help elucidate those concepts and processes. It is also important to note that while there is an abundant literature on gentrification and displacement in urban African American neighborhoods across the country, and even within certain Washington, D.C. neighborhoods that have been experiencing gentrification for longer than Southeast, D.C., there is very little scholarly work specifically examining how gentrification and displacement are beginning to play out more extensively in Southeast, D.C., and even less work that looks at how that gentrification and threat of displacement is experienced by community residents.

I also see my work here as contributing specifically to the large literatures on both urban redevelopment and gentrification and on mountaintop removal. While this study obviously provides a concrete case study on each of these processes, it further suggests the value of innovative theoretical frameworks in studying these and other similar processes. By focusing on place as the overall thread of connectivity between the differing processes taking place in the two communities and among the people studied in each, and by exploring place ethnographically, my work suggests the value of the ethnographic exploration of place as a framework for guiding other studies of urban development and gentrification, mountaintop removal, and indeed any process of disruptive structural change that threatens the ability of a community to remain physically and culturally intact.

Lastly, and most specifically, this study contributes to the virtually nonexistent scholarly literature that combines the study of place, rapid change, and marginalization. As noted in the introduction, environmental historian Joy Parr has written a very compelling series of case studies on the experience of rapid changes in the built and

physical landscapes of several Canadian communities during the late twentieth century, emphasizing in particular the multi-faceted ways those changes were sensed, interpreted, and made sense of over time.¹⁵⁹ None of the communities explored, however, were historically or contemporarily marginalized in the way that both Letcher County and Southeast, D.C. are. Furthermore, place itself was not the intellectual centerpiece of her work in the way that it is for mine. In carving out this relatively uncharted piece of scholarly territory, I hope to enliven already existing conversations on place, rapid change, and marginalization, suggesting some useful new ways of framing, interpreting, and connecting these very important conversations.

¹⁵⁹ Parr, *Sensing Changes*, 2010.

Works Cited

Standard Sources

- Adamson, Joni, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein, eds. *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002.
- Adamson, Joni, and Kimberly N. Ruffin, eds. *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship: Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons*. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Alanen, Arnold R., and Robert Z. Melnick, eds. *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Ammon, Francesca Russello. "Commemoration Amid Criticism: The Mixed Legacy of Urban Renewal in Southwest Washington, D.C." *Journal of Planning History* 8, 3 (2009): 175-220.
- Baca, Alex. "Good Hope: Gentrification, Development, and Displacement in Anacostia." Senior Honors Thesis, American Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, 2010.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Basso, Keith. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.
- Batteau, Allen. *The Invention of Appalachia*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990.
- Beckman, Rachel. "Making a Place for Art in Anacostia: A New Gallery Wants to Give SE a Boost, But Not Everyone Paints a Rosy Picture." *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2007. Accessed December 1, 2013.
<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410218703.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Jan+11%2C+2007&author=Rachel+Beckman+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writer&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Making+a+Place+for+Art+in+Anacostia%3B+A+New+Gallery+Wants+to+Give+SE+a+Boost%2C+But+Not+Everyone+Paints+a+Rosy+Picture>.
- Bennett, Larry, Janet L Smith, and Patricia A. Wright, eds. *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.
- Berry, Wendell. "Conserving Communities." In *Another Turn of the Crank*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995.

- Billings, Dwight B. "Supporting 'Conscious Hearts' and Oppositional Knowledge in the Struggle Against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 14, no. 1/2 (2008): 20-27.
- Bluestone, Daniel. *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.
- Bonds, Anne. "Profit from Punishment? The Politics of Prisons, Poverty, and Neoliberal Restructuring in the Rural American Northwest." *Antipode* 38, 1 (2006): 174-177.
- Boyd, Michelle. "Defensive Development: The Role of Racial Conflict in Gentrification." *Urban Affairs Review* 43, 6 (2008): 751-776.
- Bratt, Rachel G., Michael E. Stone, and Chester Hartman, eds. *A Right to Housing: Foundation for a New Social Agenda*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.
- Braun, Bruce. *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Bruntland Commission, "Towards Sustainable Development." In *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, edited by Stephen M. Wheeler and Timothy Beatley. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Bullard, Robert. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.
- Burns, Shirley Stewart. *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004*. Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press, 2007.
- Casey, Edward. *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- . *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Caughey, John L. *Negotiating Cultures & Identities: Life History Issues, Methods, and Readings*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006.
- Clark, Sherri Lawson. "Where the Poor Live: How Federal Housing Policy Shapes Residential Communities." *Urban Anthropology* 31, 1 (2002): 69-92.
- Cresswell, Tim. "Introduction." In *Mobilizing Place, Placing Mobility: The Politics of Representation in a Globalized World*, edited by Ginette Verstraete and Tim Cresswell. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.

- _____. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1991.
- _____. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, edited by William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.
- _____, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.
- Cummins, Steven, Sarah Curtis, Ana V. Diez-Roux, and Sally McIntyre. "Understanding and Representing 'Place' in Health Research: A Relational Approach." *Social Science & Medicine* 65 (2007): 1825-1838.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Deloria, Philip J. "Places Like Houses, Banks, and Continents: An Appreciative Reply to the Presidential Address." *American Quarterly* 51, 1 (2006): 23-29.
- di Chiro, Giovanna. "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environmental and Social Justice." In *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, edited by William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Dominguez, Virginia. "For a Politics of Love and Resuce." *Cultural Anthropology* 15, 3 (2000): 361-393.
- Drennen, William M., Jr. and Kojo (William T.) Jones, Jr. *Red White Black & Blue: A Dual Memoir of Race and Class in Appalachia*, edited by Dolores M. Johnson. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004.
- Duff, Cameron. "On the Role of Affect and Practice in the Production of Place." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 881-895.
- Duncan, Nancy, and Stephen Legg. "Social Class." In *A Companion to Social Geography*, edited by James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, and Richard H. Schein. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2004.
- Duneier, Mitchell. Photographs by Ovie Carter. *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1999.
- Eller, Ronald D. *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the American South, 1880-1930*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.

- _____. *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Gaventa, John. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980.
- Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Gillette, Howard. *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Green, Constance McLaughlin. *The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Gregory, Steven. *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Halperin, Rhoda H. *Practicing Community: Class Culture and Power in an Urban Neighborhood*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.
- Hawkes, Jon. "The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning." Victoria, Australia: The Cultural Development Network of Victoria, 2001.
- Hawkins, Don Alexander. "Anacostia's Developmental Geography." In *East of the River: Continuity and Change*, edited by Gail S. Lowe. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010.
- Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper, 1962.
- Hilton, Shani O. "Confessions of a Black Gentrifier: When Demographic Change Doesn't Involve Color." *Washington City Paper*, March 18, 2011. Accessed November 30, 2013.
<http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/40564/confessions-of-a-black-dc-gentrifier/>.
- Hines, J. Dwight. "Rural Gentrification as Permanent Tourism: The Creation of the 'New West Archipelago' as Postindustrial Cultural Space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (2010): 509-525.

- Hollan, Douglas. "Developments in Person-Centered Ethnography." In *The Psychology of Cultural Experience*, edited by Carmella C. Moore and Holly F. Matthews. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Holzman, David C. "Mountaintop Removal Mining: Digging into Community Health Concerns." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, 11 (2011): A476-A483.
- hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. New York: William Morrow & Company, 2000.
- Hopkinson, Natalie. "Farewell to Chocolate City." *New York Times*, June 23, 2012. Accessed December 1, 2013.
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/opinion/sunday/farewell-to-chocolate-city.html?_r=0
- House, Silas, and Jason Howard. *Something's Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Hutchinson, Louise Daniel. *The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930*. City of Washington: Published for the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum of the Smithsonian Institution by the Smithsonian Institution press, 1977.
- James, Portia. "'The Most Pleasant and Healthful Place in All the Country': The History of Settlement and Land Use Along the Eastern Branch." In *East of the River: Continuity and Change*, edited by Gail S. Lowe. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010.
- Johansen, Bruce. "Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland." PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2005.
- Kaufman, Ned. "Moving Forward: Futures for a Preservation Movement." In *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, edited by Max Page and Randall Mason. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Kellogg, Alex. "D.C., Long 'Chocolate City,' Becoming More Vanilla." *National Public Radio*, February 15, 2011. Accessed December 1, 2013.
<http://www.npr.org/2011/02/15/133754531/d-c-long-chocolate-city-becoming-more-vanilla>
- Korr, Jeremy. "A Proposed Model for Cultural Landscape Study." *Material Culture* 29, 3 (1997): 1-18.

- Lea, Diane. "America's Preservation Ethos: A Tribute to Enduring Ideals." In *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Robert E. Stipe. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991.
- Levy, Robert I., and Douglas W. Hollan. "Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation." In *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, edited by H. Russell Bernard. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 1998.
- Lewis, R. Barry. "Mississippian Farmers." In *Kentucky Archaeology*, edited by R. Barry Lewis. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996.
- Low, Setha M. "Symbolic Ties that Bind: Place Attachment in the Plaza." In *Place Attachment*, edited by Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low. New York: Plenum Press, 1992.
- Low, Setha. "Social Sustainability: People, History, and Values." In *The Heritage Reader*, edited by Graham Fairclough, Rodney Harrison, John H. Jameson, Jr., John Schofield. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Lowe, Gail S., ed. *East of the River: Continuity and Change*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010.
- . "Introduction." In *East of the River: Continuity and Change*, edited by Gail S. Lowe. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010.
- Lowenthal, David. "Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation." In *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, edited by D.W. Meinig. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Manzo, Lynne C., Rachel G. Kleit, and Dawn Couch. "'Moving Three Times is Like Having Your House on Fire Once: The Experience of Place and Impending Displacement Among Public Housing Residents.'" *Urban Studies* 45 (2008): 1855-1878.
- Martin-Felton, Zora, and Gail Sylvia Lowe. *A Different Drummer: John Kinard and the Anacostia Museum, 1967-1989*. Washington, D.C.: The Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 1993.
- Massey, Doreen. "A Global Sense of Place." *Marxism Today* 38 (1991): 24-29.
- Mazer, Katie M., and Katherine N. Rankin. "The Social Space of Gentrification: The Politics of Neighborhood Accessibility in Toronto's Downtown West." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011): 822-839.

- McDowell, Linda. *Gender, Identity, and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- McKittrick, Katherine, and Clyde Woods, eds. *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007.
- McKittrick, Katherine, and Clyde Woods. “‘No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean.’” In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007.
- Merchant, Carolyn. “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative.” In *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, edited by William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Humanities Press, 1962.
- Meyer, Eugene L. “A Comeback Story Decades in the Making.” *The New York Times*, January 30, 2008. Accessed December 1, 2013.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/realestate/commercial/30district.html>
- Modan, Gabriella Gahlia. *Turf Wars: Discourse, Diversity, and the Politics of Place*. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Montrie, Chad. *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Murray, Christopher J.L., Sandeep Kulkarni, and Majid Ezzati. “Eight Americas: New Perspectives on U.S. Health Disparities.” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 29 (2005): 4-10.
- Okihiro, Gary. *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994.
- Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts and How They Get You Through the Day*. New York: Marlowe & Company, 1989.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Parr, Joy. *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953-2003*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010.

- Pattillo, Mary. *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Popkin, Susan J. "The HOPE VI Program: What Has Happened to the Residents?" In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, edited by Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.
- Prince, Sabyiha Robin. "Changing Places: Race, Class, and Belonging in the 'New' Harlem." *Urban Anthropology* 31, 1 (2002): 5-35.
- Pulido, Laura, Laura R. Barraclough, and Wendy Cheng. *A People's Guide to Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Ravindranath, Mohana. "Entrepreneurs East of the Anacostia Share Space at the Hive 2.0." *The Washington Post*, December 31, 2012. Accessed December 1, 2013. [http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/1265735508.html?FMT=FT&MTS=ABS:FT&date=Dec+31%2C+2012&author=Ravindranath%2C+Mohana&desc=Entrepreneurs+east+of+the+Anacostia+share+space+at+the+Hive+2.0+\(Posted+2012-12-31+06%3A07%3A21\)&pf=1](http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/1265735508.html?FMT=FT&MTS=ABS:FT&date=Dec+31%2C+2012&author=Ravindranath%2C+Mohana&desc=Entrepreneurs+east+of+the+Anacostia+share+space+at+the+Hive+2.0+(Posted+2012-12-31+06%3A07%3A21)&pf=1).
- Rothman, Hal. *The New Urban Park: Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Civic Environmentalism*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Salyer, Robert. *Sludge*. 42 min. Appalshop Films, Whitesburg, Kentucky, 2005.
- Sandercock, Leonie. "Introduction: Framing Insurgent Historiographies for Planning." In *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History*, edited by Leonie Sandercock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Scanlan, Stephen J. "The Theoretical Roots and Sociology of Environmental Justice in Appalachia." In *Mountains of Injustice: Social and Environmental Justice in Appalachia*, edited by Michele Morrone and Geoffrey L. Buckley. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.
- Schein, Richard H. "A Methodological Framework for Interpreting Ordinary Landscapes: Lexington, Kentucky's Courthouse Square." *The Geographical Review* 99, 3 (2009): 377-402.

- _____. "Normative Dimensions of Landscape." In *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies After J.B. Jackson*, edited by Chris Wilson and Paul Groth. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.
- _____. "The Place of Landscape: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting an American Scene." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87, 4 (1997): 660-680.
- Sheridan, Mary Beth. "Planning Agency Approves Homeland Security Complex; Preservationists Fear Effect on St. Elizabeth's Campus." *The Washington Post*, January 9, 2009. Accessed November 30, 2013.
<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/washingtonpost/doc/410334688.html?FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&date=Jan+9%2C+2009&author=Mary+Beth+Sheridan+-+Washington+Post+Staff+Writer&pub=The+Washington+Post&edition=&startpage=&desc=Planning+Agency+Approves+Homeland+Security+Complex%3B+Preservationists+Fear+Effect+on+St.+Elizabeths+Campus>.
- Smith, Barbara Ellen. "De-Gradations of Whiteness: Appalachia and the Complexities of Race." *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 10 (2004): NA.
- Smith, Janet L. "Mixed-Income Communities: Designing Out Poverty or Pushing Out the Poor?" In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, edited by Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.
- _____. "Public Housing Transformation: Evolving National Policy." In *Where Are Poor People to Live? Transforming Public Housing Communities*, edited by Larry Bennett, Janet L. Smith, and Patricia A. Wright. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006.
- Smithsonian Anacostia Museum and Center for African American History and culture. *The Black Washingtonians: The Anacostia Museum Illustrated Chronology*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2005.
- Soja, Edward W. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- _____. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- _____. "Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination." In *Human Geography Today*, edited by Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1999.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

- Stewart, Catherine A. "'Crazy for This Democracy': Postwar Psychoanalysis, African American Blues Narratives, and the Lafargue Clinic." *American Quarterly* 65, 2 (2013): 371-395.
- Stipe, Robert E. "Where Do We Go From Here?" In *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Robert E. Stipe. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Sze, Julie. "Environmental Justice, Urban Planning, and Community Memory in New York City." In *Echoes from the Poisoned Well: Global Memories of Environmental Injustice*, edited by Sylvia Hood Washington, Heather Goodall, and Paul Rosier. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2006.
- Taylor, Monique M. *Harlem Between Heaven and Hell*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Thomas, June Manning. "Urban Renewal." In *Encyclopedia of Urban America: The Cities and Suburbs*. Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1998: 826-829.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perceptions, Attitudes, and Values*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974.
- Washington, Sylvia Hood, Heather Goodall, and Paul C. Rosier, eds. *Echoes From the Poisoned Well: Global Memories of Environmental Injustice*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.
- Whisnant, David E. *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.
- Whitaker, Charlie. Interview by author. Digital Recording. Blackey, Ky., 22 July 2009.
- Williams, Brett. "The Concept of Community." *Reviews in Anthropology* 31 (2002): 339-350.
- _____. "Life Inside a Watershed: The Political Ecology of an Urban River." In *East of The River: Continuity and Change*, edited by Gail S. Lowe. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, 2010.
- _____. *Upscaling Downtown: Stalled Gentrification in Washington, D.C.* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: A History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

- Wong, Amelia. "Museums, Social Media, and the Fog of Community." PhD diss, University of Maryland, College Park, 2011.
- Woods, Clyde. *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*. London: Verso, 1998.
- _____. "'Sittin' on Top of the World': The Challenges of Blues and Hip Hop Geography." In *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods. Cambridge, Massachusetts: South End Press, 2007.
- Wray, Matt. *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Yentsch, Anne. "Legends, Houses, Families, and Myths: Relationships between Material Culture and American Ideology." In *Documentary Archaeology in the New World*, edited by Mary C. Beaudry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988: 5-19.
- Web-Based Resources**
- Government of the District of Columbia, State Data Center. "District of Columbia Census 2010 Atlas." July 2012. Accessed December 1, 2013.
<http://dc.gov/DC/Planning/DC+Data+and+Maps/DC+Data/Reports/DC+Census+2010+Atlas/DC+Census+2010+Atlas>
- Kentucky State Data Center. "Letcher County Health Outcomes." Accessed December 1, 2013.
http://www.kentuckyhealthfacts.org/data/location/show.aspx?loc=67#src_3.
- United States Census Bureau. "Letcher County, Kentucky." *State & County QuickFacts*. Accessed December 1, 2013.
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/21/21133.html>.
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. *Mid-Atlantic Mountaintop Mining*. Accessed November 30, 2013. <http://www.epa.gov/region3/mtntop/index.htm>.
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. News Release. "EPA Issues Comprehensive Guidance to Protect Appalachian Communities from Harmful Environmental Impacts of Mountaintop Mining." April 1, 2010. Accessed November 30, 2013.
<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/3881d73f4d4aaa0b85257359003f5348/4145c96189a17239852576f8005867bd!OpenDocument>.
- United States Government Accountability Office. Report to Congressional Requesters. "Surface Coal Mining: Characteristics of Mining in Mountainous Areas of Kentucky and West Virginia." December 2009. Accessed November 30, 2013.
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d1021.pdf>.