

“Knock the EPA Out!”
Environmental Politics and Community Identity in Appalachian Ohio*

In May 1988, millions of Americans tuned into a special edition of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* broadcast from a small town in southeastern Ohio, a region hard hit by industrial and mining losses. “They were middle class people, once earning good money in the coal mines [and] in the steel mills,” the show’s opening sequence declared as Rust Belt imagery flashed across the screen. “But the rug was pulled out from under them. They never imagined themselves standing in welfare lines, never imagined relying on food stamps.” As they discussed the problems of job losses in the area, many in the audience, especially those laid-off from the region’s mines, mills and power plants, blamed new environmental regulations, particularly the Clean Air Act, and envisioned a return to the industrial past. “The whole bottom line is: knock the EPA out!” railed one audience member. “We want work. We don’t want the clean air. We want the factories back. We want the mines back.”¹

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a golden age for the communities of southeastern Ohio. Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, local residents benefited from an upswing in mining employment prompted by the increased use of coal in electricity production. By the mid-1980s, however, a variety of factors including a lack of economic diversification, low education levels, and inadequate transportation as well as the increasing environmental standards encoded in the Clean Air Act manifested in high unemployment, poverty and out-migration. As the above example suggests, by this time Appalachian Ohioans generally understood environmental issues primarily in terms of their effects on the local economy. This

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¹ Jim McPharlin, prod., “The Ohio Remote: American Dreams Shattered,” in *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (USA: WLS-TV, 1988). Transcript available from Burelles-Luce Transcripts.

interpretation stands in contrast to earlier environmental issues, such as the debate over the regulation of coal surface mining that took place during a period of economic prosperity and had local supporters on both sides of the issue.

While political historians have emphasized the powerful combination of “race, rights and taxes” in explaining the downfall of the postwar liberal consensus in the 1970s, they have paid less attention to the role of environmental politics in splitting the Democratic Party base.² This paper will explore the political culture of rural coal mining communities in Appalachian Ohio with an eye toward connecting local events with national environmental issues. In particular, I will focus on the debate over the regulation of coal surface mining in the early 1970s and the caps on SO₂ emissions in the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977. My intention here is to better integrate the social history of American workers with the social movement history of American environmentalism through a case study of a “deindustrializing” community in economic crisis.

Social History and Environmental Culture

Environmental history and labor history have shared a similar historiographical trajectory. Both fields emerged from the social movements of the 1960s with an explicitly political agenda and an eye toward the long-term social origins of historical events. Both fields also were heavily influenced by the cultural turn of the 1980s, which in turn led to, among other things, an increased attention to the gendered and racialized origins of both class and ideas about nature. For the most part, studies of environmental policy, however, have remained largely confined to the national story and the political economy, some might say political ecology, of

² A sampling of this literature includes: Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: the Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

interest groups, lobbying organizations, and the intricacies of horsetrading that went on in the halls of power in Washington D.C. or in various state capitals.³ The time has come to focus more on local and regional in order to understand the relationship between environmental policy and the shifting environmental attitudes that helped to drive the conservative victories of the 1980s and early 1990s.⁴

While there are a modest number of scholarly works at the intersection of political, labor and environmental history, a few recent studies suggest a model for examining Appalachian Ohio in the 1970s and 1980s. Set against the twin backdrops of urban/industrial expansion and subsequent decline, Andrew Hurley's *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race and Industrial Pollution in Gary Indiana*, for instance, explores the environmental worldview of a working-class community dominated by U.S. Steel and its subsidiaries. While pollution in Gary had remained fairly evenly distributed across the community, beginning in the 1950s the changing landscape of suburbanization insulated the white middle class from the smokestacks and sludge filled rivers near the plants, while working-class and especially African American residents

³ In terms of the Clean Air Act, for example, the existing and increasingly dated canon extends from Richard Vietor's *Environmental Politics and the Coal Coalition* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1980) and Bruce Ackerman and William Hassler, *Clean Coal/Dirty Air: or how the Clean Air Act became a Multibillion-Dollar Bail-Out for High-Sulfur Coal Producers and What Should be Done About It* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) to Gary C. Bryner's *Blue Skies, Green Politics: the Clean Air Act of 1990* (Washington, D.C. : CQ Press, 1993) and finally a pair of influential articles by the don of postwar environmental political history, Samuel Hays included in the anthology *Explorations in Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998).

⁴ A number of journalists and other scholars (though fewer historians) have begun to tackle this issue, see: William Dietrich, *The Final Forest: The Battle for the Last Great Trees of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992); R. McGregor Cawley, *Federal Land, Western Anger: The Sagebrush Rebellion and Environmental Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); David Helvarg, *The War Against the Greens: The "Wise-Use" Movement, the New Right and the Browning of America*, Rev Upd. edition (Boulder, Colo.: Johnson Books, 2004). Samuel Hays also addresses these issues in terms of national politics, though with little attention to the local level. See, Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

increasingly bore the social costs of industrial expansion.⁵

Hurley's focus is on the contested terrain of environmental politics as three distinct strains of environmental activism emerged from this social context to challenge the powerful corporate equation of economic growth with social progress, damn the consequences. These strains included: 1.) a middle environmentalism focuses on social amenities and neighborhood stability; 2.) a working-class equation of workplace pollution with corporate exploitation, and; 3.) an African American environmental justice movement tying environmental issues to larger racial inequities that may or may not have had the potential for a cross-race and cross-class coalition under Gary's first African American mayor in the early 1970s. Though somewhat weak in the connection between these conceptions of the environment and actual political results, Hurley provides a potential model for a more cultural history-oriented exploration of the varied and evolving understanding of humans relation with the natural world during the postwar period.

While looking at a similar set of issues, Chad Montrie's *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Surface Coal Mining in Appalachia* is thematically focused, following the movement to regulate surface mining that extended from local communities in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky to the national level.⁶ Beginning with opposition to coal surface mining among farmers in Appalachian Ohio, Montrie tracks the massive expansion of surface mining operations during the 1950s and 1960s that prompts agitation for government regulation first on the state level and finally the 1977 passage of the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

Largely told as a David and Goliath story (a narrative structure familiar to labor

⁵ Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race and Industrial Pollution in Gary Indiana* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁶ 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).

historians), Montrie nevertheless points out the complexity in local struggles that split both the membership and leadership of the United Mine Workers, sometimes featured conservation-minded coal operators and divided rural communities who wanted both jobs and environmental protection. While his story is one primarily of social movements within the formal political sphere, Montrie does discuss the evolution of environmental worldview from one based in Christian stewardship and conservation to the more socially charged and activist environmentalism of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Finally, a recent edited volume by sociologist Melanie DuPuis, *Smoke and Mirrors: The Politics and Culture of Air Pollution* provides, perhaps, the best theoretical model for understanding the complex relationship between the cultural construction of nature on the one hand and the political economy of environmental regulation on the other. In her introduction to the work, which covers topics from the late Victorian era to the present and includes case studies in both North American and European contexts, Dupuis argues for a conception of environmental politics as struggle not only over power, but also of meaning. In contrast to studies of formal policy development, the scholars represented in *Smoke and Mirrors* work to understand the entire social and cultural context in which political changes occurred. “Without seeing pollution [and pollution control] as a mirror of society,” she argues, “we miss what really happens in the formulation” of public policies.”⁷

For example, Angela Gugliotta's study of air pollution in interwar Pittsburgh describes the competing meanings of smoke control in relation to the city's economic and cultural transformations. In her discussion of the emergence of pollution measures and abatement programs, Gugliotta found that the inability of industry-backed research to resolve basic

⁷ E. Melanie DuPuis, *Smoke and Mirrors: The Politics and Culture of Air Pollution* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 5.

questions of how to define pollution itself and exactly why and for whom smoke was a problem undermined the political effectiveness of reduction efforts.⁸ While each of these texts have weaknesses as a full-blown model for my work, taken together they suggest a number of potential avenues for exploring the intersection of environmental politics and community identity in the two snapshots of Appalachian Ohio explored below.

Strip Mine Salvation

January 4, 1973, will live on in the collective memories of an entire generation of southeastern Ohioans as the day the shovels crossed the road. In the wee hours of a bitterly cold winter morning, two of Consolidation Coal Company's (CONSOL) mammoth earth moving machines, the *Mountaineer* and the *Tiger*, crossed one of the nation's busiest highways, Interstate 70 (I-70), closing it to traffic for an unprecedented twenty-four hours.⁹ An expansion of surface mining operations in the company's Egypt Valley Mine to an area south of the highway prompted the move, which took place during increasing state and national attention to the issue of surface mining.¹⁰ The symbolism of the road crossing was not lost on the residents of Barnesville, a small community of about four thousand people four miles to the south. The announcement of the crossing in 1971 sparked a debate within the community pitting those who supported the financial benefits of surface mining against those concerned about the environmental and economic impact of mining near the village. As a result, among the

⁸ Gugliotta explores this connection between public policy and the cultural construction of pollution at greater length in her research. See, Angela Gugliotta, "How, When, and for Whom was Smoke a Problem in Pittsburgh?" in Joel Tarr, ed., *Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh and its Region* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003) and "Hell with the Lid Taken Off": A Cultural History of Air Pollution in Pittsburgh" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004).

⁹ "Ohio to Shut Interstate a Day for Shovel Crossing," *New York Times*, January 1, 1973. Consolidation Coal or Pittsburgh Consolidation Coal changed names a variety of times between the 1950s and the 1990s. I use the term CONSOL in this paper to refer to the company throughout the postwar period.

¹⁰ For the purposes of this paper, I use the terms surface and strip mining interchangeably. Strip mining actually refers to a particular subset of surface mining and the majority of surface mining discussed in this chapter is properly described as wide area or contour surface mining.

thousands who gathered to watch the event were several dozen protestors who staged a mock funeral for Barnesville complete with eulogies, candles and a coffin.¹¹ “The demonstration,” according to a *Washington Post* reporter covering the event, “while short and peaceful, was one of the first of its kind seen in this coal oriented region.”¹²

CONSOL’s decision to expand mining operations south of I-70 exposed a simmering contest over who would define the economic and environmental priorities of Appalachian Ohio. The crossing debate occurred in an era of increasing national attention to environmental problems and in the midst of a battle in the state legislature over the Ohio Strip Mine Law, a stringent new measure that required companies to “return strip mined land to [its] approximate original contour.”¹³ During the late 1960s and 1970s, national environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council and the Friends of the Earth declared themselves in favor of a total ban on surface mining.¹⁴ Many locals met the company’s announcement in late 1970 with apprehension, and in the year leading up to the crossing some of the more militant, including Barnesville City Council member Richard Garrett, formed Citizens Organized to Defend the Environment (CODE), a grassroots effort aimed at halting or mitigating the environmental impact of surface mining. In August 1972, CODE joined the Ohio Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) in a lawsuit attempting to block the Interstate crossing entirely. “We,” stated Garrett, “are going to fight every one of those machines when they try to bring them across.”¹⁵

¹¹ John Chancellor and Lou Davis, NBC Evening News for Friday, January 5, 1973, Headline: Strip Mining (1973); Debbie Phillimore, “Environmentalists Protest Peacefully,” *Martins Ferry Times Leader*, January 5, 1973.

¹² William Richards, “Strip Miners’ Move Alarms Ohio Town,” *Washington Post*, January 4, 1973, A4.

¹³ Division of Mineral Resources Management, *Ohio Abandoned Mine Lands Reforestation Program* (Columbus: Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 2005). For the growth of the postwar environmental movement, see Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). For opposition to surface mining in Appalachia, see Montrie, *To Save the Land and People*.

¹⁴ Montrie, *To Save the Land and People: A History of Opposition to Coal Surface Mining in Appalachia*, 147.

¹⁵ “Suit Eyed to Stop GEM Move,” *Martins Ferry Times Leader*, August 7, 1972, 1.

Coal executives, such as CONSOL Hanna Division President Ralph Hatch, presented a different vision of the Steel Valley's rural communities, arguing that the imperatives of industry demanded the extraction of coal in the cheapest way possible.¹⁶ A lay-minister in the local Presbyterian Church, Hatch pointed out that the average income of Belmont County farmers in 1969 was \$34 per acre. "Is it any wonder that the farmer wants to sell his land?" he continued. "He can't make a living at it."¹⁷ In the years leading up to the crossing, surface mining companies also increasingly co-opted the language of conservationism, boasting of their ability to turn "worked-out soil and hilly terrain" into tourism-generating recreation areas complete with lakes, forests, and abundant wildlife.¹⁸ One article by a Columbus sportswriter invited to tour the Egypt Valley Mine even compared the hundred foot cliffs, or high walls left by surface mining, to the landscape of Colorado, stating that while others might travel 1,500 miles for scenery, he could find his "among the hills of Ohio and right in the middle of the surface mining area."¹⁹

Support for mining operations had a firm base within the local community, where increases in mining employment beginning in the mid-1960s were helping to reverse postwar economic and population declines. "I don't like stripping or any part of it," noted Barnesville furniture storeowner John Kirk, who had recently traveled to Columbus to protest new mining regulations. "But it isn't that simple. Better than 10 percent of the work force in this county works for the mines." *Barnesville Enterprise* editor Bill Davies agreed, "Our future is definitely tied to the strip mining industry – it's more important to us that you think." "We are pretty strongly divided," declared Mayor George Fitch, "but I think the majority clearly favors the

¹⁶ Hanna Coal Company became a subsidiary division of CONSOL in 1945, but many local residents continued to refer to the company's surface mining operations as Hanna Coal or just Hanna.

¹⁷ Ben A. Franklin, "Strip-Mining Boom Leaves Wasteland in Its Wake," *New York Times*, December 15, 1970, A1, 34.

¹⁸ Hanna Coal Company, *Egypt Valley ... Today and Tomorrow* (Cadiz, OH: The Company, 1967).

¹⁹ Bob Rankin, "A Second Look at Surface Mining," *CONSOL News*, January-February 1966, 7.

move... Hanna's payroll pumps a lot into this town. We're pretty dependent on that mining."²⁰

Between these positions, other local leaders and residents sought to retain coal employment while requiring a level of reclamation conducive to industrial and community development.²¹ After learning of the coal company's plan to begin mining on the south side of I-70, Barnesville planning commission president Norma Schuster and local textile plant manager Carla Rizzi enlisted the aid of Ohio governor John Gilligan, who was at loggerheads with the surface mining industry over the proposed new Ohio Strip Mine Law. "We've been a sleepy little town up until now," declared Rizzi, "but now the newer people in town are trying to get it going forward. We are trying to attract industry, but we need to have room to grow."²²

With Gilligan's support, the two women met with Hatch to discuss the future of the community. On December 27, 1972, days before the crossing and less than two weeks after the failure of the CODE-PIRG lawsuit, the Ohio Department of Development signed a contract with the village of Barnesville for a community planning project designed to develop local industry and tourism. The heart of the deal was an agreement between Hatch, Governor Gilligan and the Barnesville Planning Commission establishing a "Greenbelt," limiting mining activities in the direct vicinity of the village and requiring reclamation up to the more stringent provisions of the Ohio Strip Mine Law.²³ While protestors, many of them from outside of the immediate area, still attended the crossing, the majority of local leaders turned to the difficult task of balancing the negative consequences of surface mining with the imperatives of economic development.²⁴

Coal and Clean Air

²⁰ John S. Brecher, "A Stripper Threatens to Invade Ohio Town; Citizenry is Divided," *Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 1972, 12.

²¹ Author's Interview with Aida Rizzi, December 2004.

²² Richards, "Strip Miners' Move Alarms Ohio Town."

²³ "Hatch Pledges to Aid Barnesville Leaders," *Columbus Dispatch*, March 15, 1972.

²⁴ Rizzi Interview; Author's Interview with Richard Garrett, November 2004; Author's Interview with Theodore Voneida, December 2004.

Despite the fierce battle over surface mining during the early 1970s, it was not the eventual passage of the federal Surface Mine Control and Reclamation Act, but another 1977 law that had the most dramatic repercussions to the economy of southeastern Ohio. Coal produced in Ohio has a high sulfur content, which when burned produces the noxious gas sulfur dioxide, a key component of acid rain. As a result of amendments strengthening the Clean Air Act in 1977 and again in 1990, Ohio coal became progressively less cost efficient compared to natural gas as well as low sulfur coal mined in other regions, particularly the Rocky Mountain West.²⁵ Unlike the regulation of surface mining, the provisions of the Clean Air Act offered little obvious environmental advantage to local rural communities upwind from the power plants and steel mills of the Ohio River Valley. Consequently, there were fewer residents willing to support air pollution control aimed at ameliorating distant environmental threats, especially in the face of dire warnings about the economic disaster such controls would mean for local communities.

This was the state of affairs when Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Doug Costle, Ohio Senator Howard Metzenbaum and Governor Jim Rhodes as well as a whole host of local residents gathered at a local hotel in August 1978 to discuss the possible activation of Section 125 of the Clean Air Act. This provision was pushed through by Metzenbaum and would require utilities to install costly pollution abatement equipment in order to “prevent or minimize significant local or regional economic disruption or unemployment that might result

²⁵ While several reasons can be cited for the general decline of Ohio’s coal industry from 1977 to 1990, the effects of the Clean Air Act can be seen in the amount of Ohio coal being “washed,” a process which decreases its sulfur content. The amount of coal consumed by Ohio utilities rose from 34 million tons in 1970 to 51.5 million tons in 1993. During that period, however, the percentage of Ohio coal being used in those facilities decreased from 69 to 45 percent and the amount of Ohio coal being washed increased from 34 to 63 percent. The trends indicate that Ohio utilities, while trying to meet increased electrical demands and comply with emission standards, are consuming greater amounts of out of state fuel even though greater amounts of Ohio coal is being washed. Statistics from: Douglas Crowell, *History of the Coal Mining Industry in Ohio* (Columbus: Ohio Division of Geologic Survey, 1995).

from the use of outside coal.”²⁶ Peg Graham, one of the main organizers of the nearly 5,000 mine workers and their families crowding the Sheraton Hotel’s ballroom for the hearing, expressed a widely held opinion when she declared she would “rather feed the kids than breathe clean air.” “What happens to a man who loses his job?” she continued. “He loses his self-respect and his right to call himself a man.”²⁷ The majority of those attending made their point silently, but just as effectively with banners such as “Take Your Western Coal and Shove It” and “Abolish the EPA.”

While much of the meeting was dominated by political speeches with the same theme – save the miners’ jobs and prevent economic disaster – the transcript of the hearing does give some indication of the hardening of positions since the early 1970s. Unlike the Barnesville Greenbelt compromise over surface mining in the early 1970s, the federal nature of the Clean Air Act debate made finding local solutions, even temporary ones, impossible. In his speech at the Sheraton, state representative Wayne Hays, who had been a proponent of federal environmental regulations during his long tenure as a congressman, advocated “cooperation rather than confrontation” between miners and EPA officials.²⁸ However, Section 125, itself a compromise of sorts brokered, was weakened by amendments from the start and did not survive a series of lawsuits in 1979.²⁹ Indeed, beginning in the late 1970s, Appalachian Ohio Democrats, such as Wayne Hays and his successor Congressman Douglas Applegate, who were moderates on environmental issues, found themselves increasingly vulnerable to conservative Republicans

²⁶ Unites States Environmental Protection Agency, “Public Notice: Saving Miners’ Jobs and Keeping Ohio’s Air Clean,” *St. Clairsville Gazette-Chronicle*, August 3, 1978.

²⁷ Debbie Kenney, “EPA Hearings in St. Clairsville: ‘The Economic Well-Being of All Southeastern Ohio is at Stake,’” *Monroe County Spirit of Democracy*, August 25, 1978.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See Ackerman and Hassler, *Clean Coal/Dirty Air*, 44-48; Arlen J. Large, “A Rule on Dirty Coal Supported by UMW Could Be Erased in Congress Conference,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 24, 1977, 8; Iver Peterson, “U.S. Judge to Hear Ohio Coal Dispute,” B10; *New York Times*, March 26, 1979; Daniel Lewis and Caroline Rand Herron, “Unusual Challenge to the Clean Air Act,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1979, E4; L.G. Loukkola, “McCoy-Elkhorn Coal Corp. v. EPA, 622 F.2d 260 (6th Cir. 1980),” *Environmental Law* 11, no. 3 (March 1981).

more willing to attack the legal and administrative underpinnings of environmental regulation itself.

This is not to suggest that the Clean Air Act had no local supporters in the upper Ohio Valley. In northern West Virginia and southwestern Pennsylvania, which were directly downwind from power plants on the Ohio side of the river public officials and local activists loudly protested dismal air quality.³⁰ Even in southeastern Ohio, a letter appeared in the Martins Ferry Times Leader shortly after the St. Clairsville hearing in which a group of “19 Valley Residents” from “in and around Belmont County” complained of the many days throughout the year “when the air is so thick with industrial muck that it is difficult to see, much less breathe.”³¹ The authors of the letter directly connected the fight over air pollution to the earlier struggle with surface mine regulation, rhetorically asking whether the local area hadn’t already “had its share of ravaging.” Further, despite the apparent retreat of nearly all local businesspeople from the position that an over reliance on mining might actually be a problem for the local area in the long run, the letter writers argued that while mining jobs might be lost, “it is equally true that no one area should be so totally dependent upon a single industry, especially if that industry happens to be high sulfur coal....”³²

This argument, however, seemed to hold little weight among miners’ families and communities dependent upon mining for their livelihood. Furthermore, the writers’ claim that power plant emissions “poisons the air of every living creature in the valley” rang hollow when one considered that the height of smokestacks and prevailing direction of the wind meant that

³⁰ “Follansbee Air Filthiest?,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 2, 1978. James Lewis Longhurst, “Don’t Hold Your Breath, Fight for It! Women’s Activism and Citizen Standing in Pittsburgh and the United States, 1965-1975” (Ph.D. thesis, Carnegie Mellon University, 2004); Samuel P. Hays, “Beyond Celebration: Pittsburgh and its Region in the Environmental Era – Notes by a Participant Observer” in Tarr, *Devastation and Renewal*, 193-215.

³¹ 19 Valley Residents, “Delayed to Long,” Letter to the Editor, *Martins Ferry Times Leader*, Sep. 27, 1978.

³² Ibid.

S02 emissions had little direct impact on Ohio communities.³³ While some local residents did still pay lip service to the need for environmental regulation this remained almost wholly a rhetorical device when faced with the reality of massive job loss. For example, during the strip mining debate, which took place on the federal level concurrently with Clean Air Act hearings, the United Mine Workers supported the strip mine regulation, in part, because surface mines employed far fewer workers on average than underground mines.³⁴ In Clean Air Act hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on Environmental Pollution, however, local resident and union official Charlie Grimm decried “rigid and arbitrary emission standards” resulting in “laying off of coal miners [and] mines shutting down ... while we continue to sit on the largest coal reserves in the world...” “EPA,” he concluded, “is partly to blame for this disaster to the economy of Ohio.”³⁵

Political Ecology of Environmental Policy

In conclusion, I will focus briefly on three key issues raised by the debate over environmental regulation in Appalachian Ohio. First, on the national level the failure of Section 125 and other measures to spread the economic costs of lowering sulfur dioxide emissions beyond local communities in northern Appalachia exposed a key weakness in the environmental politics of the Democratic Party, which was struggling to maintain control of Congress in the face of the resurgent conservatism of first Ronald Reagan and later Newt Gingrich.³⁶ We can

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Montrie, *To Save the Land and People*.

³⁵ Grimm testimony in United States Senate Subcommittee on Environmental Pollution, *Clean Air Act Amendments of 1977: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Environmental Pollution of the Committee on Environment and Public Works*, Ninety-Fifth Congress, First Session, on S. 251, S. 252, and S. 253 Bills to Amend the Clean Air Act as Amended, Pt. 2, February 10, 1977. For other examples of Grimm’s position on the Clean Air Act, see “Carter Urged to Save Ohio Coal,” *Martins Ferry Times Leader*, September 27, 1978 and “Economist ‘Unrealistic,’” *Martins Ferry Times Leader*, October 20, 1978.

³⁶ For other interpretations of this period, see Helvarg, *The War Against the Greens*; Robert Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Dan Carter,

gain insight into this rift from a June 1977 exchange between two powerful, liberal Democratic senators, Ohio's Howard Metzenbaum and Edmund Muskie of Maine, the representative from an acid rain-receiving state who championed the Clean Air Act. Comparing the potential regional divisiveness of Metzenbaum's provision to the rancor of the Constitutional Convention, Muskie challenged the inclusion of a provision with a "dominant thrust [that was not its] relationship to clean air, but its relationship to the economics of the areas it is designed to protect."³⁷ By separating acknowledgement of the economic impact of environmental regulations, in the eyes of local residents, Democrats on the national level thus betrayed one of the central tenants of the New Deal consensus.

More so than race, rights or taxes, opposition to, in the words of Charlie Grimm, the "influence of only an elite few ... who are bottling up the Nation's responsible development of its most abundant energy resource" drove the movement of many local residents from the Democratic to Republican parties, particularly in national races. Due in part to the Clean Air Act, which contributed to a 75% cut in annual mining output between 1972 and 1991, the local population in Belmont County declined by nearly 14 percent during the 1980s, the largest level of out-migration in the state.³⁸ In the face of these devastating losses, those Democrats, such as Wayne Hays, who had backed environmental efforts in the 1960s and early 1970s, found themselves vulnerable to a growing tide of anger against all things environmental. In 1980, Hays lost his seat as a state representative to Republican Bob Ney, who had explicitly attacked Hays' environmental record among other issues. In 1994, following the enactment of even tougher S02

From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

³⁷ Congressional Record – Senate (June 10, 1977), pp. 18488-18497. Retrieved October 5, 2008 from the Bates College Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library at <http://abacus.bates.edu/muskie-archives/>

³⁸ United States Bureau of the Census and Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, "County and City Data Book" (Ann Arbor, MI: ICPSR, 1972, 1977, 1988, 1994).

regulations, Ney again rode a groundswell of anger to victory in Ohio's 18th Congressional District, which had been held by a Democrat since 1949.

Finally, despite the anger and sense of community loss experienced by many Appalachian Ohioans, those pro-environmental positions outlined during the 1972 crossing debate, too, continued to influence a very small, but influential minority of local residents. Beginning in the mid-1990s, for example, a group of Barnesville residents began to mobilize around the issue of the Barnesville Greenbelt, which was agreed upon by the village, state and Consolidation Coal Company in 1972, but had never acquired any formal legal standing during the subsequent decades. When another mining company acquired the mineral rights, a group of residents, including some of those who had protested the original road crossing, petitioned the Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources to deny the company permits sparking a series of legal battles that continue through the present.³⁹

Indeed, to return the Oprah Winfrey broadcast with which I began this paper, even among those interviewed we can glean a sense of community identity that cautiously embraced the potential economic benefits from environmental limits on the coal industry. "These [unemployed] people ... they're adversely affected, no doubt," observed county development director Don Myers. "But the time has come for us to put together a program [to] turn this around.... We're coming back."⁴⁰ As with the voices of mining supporters and environmentalists, such sentiments reflected the complex, but everyday relationship between the natural and social landscapes from which the residents of

³⁹ Author's Interview with Pat Hunkler, November 2004; "Council Pledges Support to Greenbelt Advocates," Barnesville Enterprise, October 21, 1987. "Council Approves Greenbelt Resolution," Barnesville Enterprise, October 22, 1997; To Protect the Village of Barnesville with a Buffer Zone between the Village and Coal Mining Operations, Village Resolution #2075, October 22, 1997; "Warren Trustees Pass Greenbelt Resolution," Barnesville Enterprise, October 29, 1997.

⁴⁰ McPharlin, prod., "The Ohio Remote." In a subsequent interview with the author Myers was even more blunt than in 1988. "Coal," he declared, "is our past, it's not our future." Author's interview with Donald Myers, July 2004.

Appalachian Ohio sought to shape their individual and community identities.