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TRAVIS D. STIMELING

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# Music, Place, and Identity in the Central Appalachian Mountaintop Removal Mining Debate

Set in contemporary southern West Virginia, Ann Pancake's 2007 novel *Strange as This Weather Has Been* tells the stories of a West Virginian family that lives downstream from a massive mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mine. Like many families throughout the region, the Ricker family has lived in the same area for generations and has witnessed the ongoing cycles of boom and bust that accompany life in the coalfields. Living where the local stream bears their family name, the Rickers feel profound emotional connections to a surrounding landscape that serves as a constant reminder of their family history and their religious beliefs. Yet, the deployment of MTR on the nearby ridges fundamentally changes the local landscape and soundscape, transforming ridges into flat land and replacing the sounds of the surrounding Appalachian mixed mesophytic forests with those of sirens, blasting, and heavy equipment. As Uncle Mogyey, one of the eldest Rickers, recounts, these new sounds combined with the dramatic physical transformations of surrounding lands to defamiliarize his homeplace, resulting in ongoing headaches and strange dreams featuring "animals with metal for teeth" and the sound of "an alarm going off, a horn with a beat to it: *Mwaaa. Mwaaa. Mwaaa. Mwaaa.*"<sup>1</sup>

MTR is a surface-mining practice used to obtain coal located in seams situated near the tops of mountain peaks and ridges. Considered to be a cheaper, more practical, and higher-yielding alternative to deep min-

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ing, MTR was first practiced in the coalfields of the Central Appalachian Coal Region (CACR) in the 1960s. In 1977, Congress regulated all surface mining, including MTR, with the passage of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA), which required that mining companies work to return surface-mined lands to their premining state, and the Clean Water Act, which placed strict limits on the amount of particulate matter that mining companies could release into streams and other waterways.<sup>2</sup> These regulations slowed the expansion of MTR in the 1980s, but the passage of a 1990 amendment to the Clean Air Act, which sought to reduce acid rain by encouraging the use of low-sulfur coal (found in abundance in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky), has led to the increased use of MTR techniques throughout central Appalachia in the past two decades.<sup>3</sup>

In the past decade, MTR has come under increasing scrutiny in central Appalachian coalfield communities and in the broader debate about the United States' energy policy.<sup>4</sup> Centering on complex economic, environmental, and social issues, the MTR debate has unfolded in public debates, rallies, essay collections, documentary films, television series, and, most important for the purposes of this study, music. Music figures prominently in rallies organized by groups on both sides of the debate, and a wide variety of regionally and nationally known musicians representing diverse political perspectives and musical approaches have contributed to benefit concerts, film soundtracks, and albums in order to garner support for anti-MTR causes and to mobilize coal supporters in counterprotest.

This essay works to unpack the role that music and musicalized rhetoric have played in shaping public debate about the impact of MTR mining, a practice that eclipsed traditional deep mining and less invasive surface-mining practices in the early 1990s. Specifically, I seek to understand how music composed and performed by proponents and opponents of mountaintop removal invoke a variety of senses of place to articulate key strategic stances, to generate political capital, and to empower coalfield residents in West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee. My work on this subject lies at the intersections of musicology, cultural geography, and ecocriticism, intersections that have only recently begun to receive the attention they deserve in musicological studies, most notably in the recent and ongoing development of ecomusicological approaches in the work of Alexander Rehding, Mitchell Morris, Brooks Toliver, Denise Von Glahn, and others. Ecomusicology suggests that, much like language and the visual arts, music is simultaneously influenced by nature and a catalyst for new conceptions of it.<sup>5</sup>

Particularly instructive to this study is Nancy Guy's work on musical representations of Taiwan's Tamsui River; she demonstrates the viability of ecomusicological approaches in exploring how the lyrics, formal

conventions, and performance practices of popular song can reflect and affect contemporary attitudes toward the environment.<sup>6</sup> Yet, at the same time, Alexander Rehding has argued that “ecomusicology may represent a genuine departure from general musicological practice . . . [because] the field derives much of its relevance and topicality from a sense of urgency and from an inherent bent toward awareness-raising, praxis (in the Marxian sense), and activism.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Aaron S. Allen has recently posited a series of questions, informed by the work of ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty and extending Guy’s ethnomusicological inquiries, that reflexively interrogates musicology’s contributions to local and global ecologies, and Brooks Toliver has extended a long line of ecocritical thought by reminding musicologists that our scholarly “activity is held accountable to the reality of a failing environment.”<sup>8</sup> This study is, therefore, informed by this desire for environmental and cultural advocacy and takes up Allen’s call to “[confront] the cultural problem underlying the environmental crisis” by “seeking to understand the people, cultures, and ethical situations that created, perpetuate, attempt to solve, and face this crisis.”<sup>9</sup>

If the imperatives of ecocriticism require that we investigate more fully the connections between music and the environment, the field of cultural geography offers a rich understanding of the ways that people invest their physical environments with meaning. Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that, while landscapes have no inherent meaning, individuals and groups of people interpret the landscape in ways that suit their own cultural needs and mesh with their own experiences, often resulting in *topophilia*, or “the human being’s affective ties with the material environment.” The study of these “affective ties” has been the subject of much musicological inquiry over the past decade or more, most recently manifested in articles by Daniel M. Grimley, Denise Von Glahn, and Holly Watkins.<sup>10</sup> Unfolding in a region where land ownership is divided between “surface” rights and “mineral” rights, the recent debate over the application of MTR in central Appalachia reveals a fundamental conflict between what Tuan identifies as “mythical” and “pragmatic” spaces.<sup>11</sup> Pragmatic space, Tuan suggests, comes with the identification of a practical use for a tract of land, as in soil suitable for agriculture or, as is the case in the central Appalachian coalfields, the discovery of rich mineral deposits. Mythical space, on the other hand, might be described both as “a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known . . . [that] frames pragmatic space” and as “the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities.”<sup>12</sup> The place-based rhetoric found in the central Appalachian MTR debate is a common strategy in protest and community-action movements, and, as geographer Deborah G. Martin has observed in her study of neighbor-

hood organizations in St. Paul, Minnesota, “organizations discursively relate the conditions of the place—the common experiences of people in place—to their different agendas for collective action.”<sup>13</sup>

Participants in the MTR debate have frequently deployed three common varieties of place-based rhetoric identified by communications scholars Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook as central to many protest movements: “place-based argument,” in which place provides the key evidence for an argument; “place-as-argument,” in which people change the physical space to create meanings; and “place-as-temporary-argument,” a discursive strategy in which place is temporarily changed during a protest.<sup>14</sup> The latter two species of place-based rhetoric are most frequently found in the posting of roadside billboards reminding drivers that “Coal Keeps the Lights On” and the stream cemetery built by anti-MTR protestors on the grounds of the West Virginia State Capitol in April 1998, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Although the music sung and played during rallies carries the same power to transform place as signs and displays, the deployment of place-based arguments in song has proven to be a particularly effective tool to help coalfield residents on both sides of the MTR debate express their feelings about the practice. Moreover, songs engaging with the MTR debate frequently deploy musical practices from the region’s rich musical heritage, including bluegrass, gospel, and country, as well as such lesser-known but protest-oriented musics as punk, allowing musical sounds to invoke local and regional understandings of place, history, and regional identity. The musicalized MTR debate continues to draw upon a commonwealth of local history and a rich musical heritage by evoking deeply felt and highly personal understandings of the local environment, culture, and history.

### *Mountaintop Removal Mining: Practices, Benefits, and Impacts*

MTR generates high coal yields with a small workforce of heavy machinery operators. After identifying a viable coal seam, logging crews are employed to clear-cut native forests, and the timber is sold to sawmills and paper mills. After all of the vegetation is removed, blasting crews arrive to remove layers of “overburden” or “spoil”—tree stumps, topsoil, and layers of rock above the coal seam—using an explosive mixture of ammonium nitrate and fuel oil.<sup>16</sup> Using large dragline shovels, the overburden is relocated to valley fills, often burying streams in the process. Draglines then remove the coal from the seam and transport it to market via truck and rail. After the seam has been removed, reclamation crews arrive at the site to use the remaining overburden to recreate the “approximate original contour” of the land (as stipulated by the 1977 passage of SMCRA), to replant the deforested land, to install erosion

barriers, and to encourage the return of native wildlife to the site. This process often plays out over the course of several years, during which coal companies frequently relocate crews to adjacent ridges, expanding MTR sites over thousands of contiguous acres and reshaping the region's topography over the course of a decade or more.

The coal industry is intimately tied to the local histories and economies of communities throughout central Appalachia.<sup>17</sup> Although the mechanization of the coal industry has dramatically decreased the number of available mining jobs in the region since the middle of the twentieth century, the presence of coal profoundly shapes local understandings of the region's economy.<sup>18</sup> Proponents of MTR and other surface-mining practices point to the immediate and long-term economic benefits that coal mining brings to communities throughout the historically impoverished central Appalachian region, although researchers Brad R. Woods and Jason S. Gordon have indicated that there is "no supporting evidence suggesting MTR contributed positively to nearby communities' employment."<sup>19</sup> MTR mining jobs offer wages that are comparatively higher than other types of jobs in the region; they also support numerous associated industries, including timber and transportation, and create a demand for white-collar jobs as well.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, because the region's narrow valleys and steep slopes provide little level ground for construction, MTR advocates point to the long-term economic development opportunities afforded by the thousands of acres of newly created flat land that the process generates, citing the construction of new strip malls, airports, and golf courses as successful postmining uses of the land.<sup>21</sup> Additional studies have indicated that new industries might capitalize on the byproducts of MTR and other regional mining practices to create a sustainable economy following the extraction of coal, although several economic studies suggest that the development of a noncoal, locally owned, "green" regional economy may yield greater long-term economic stability and prosperity for the region's residents.<sup>22</sup> Finally, MTR allows coal companies to produce high yields at considerably low short-term cost, benefiting the operators' shareholders and filling state treasuries with coal excise taxes that support government projects throughout the region.

Despite the immediate economic benefits of MTR, numerous environmental impact and economic studies reveal the devastating and irreparable environmental impact of MTR on the CACR and its residents.<sup>23</sup> In their 2008 study of land cover trends in the central Appalachian region, the U.S. Geological Survey noted that coal mining contributed to "most of the change" in land use between 1973 and 2000.<sup>24</sup> Although published statistics regarding the extent of MTR's effects vary widely, it is clear that MTR has come to account for an increasing share of the total scope of surface mining in the CACR since the advent of SMCRA, while less-invasive surface mining has remained relatively stable over the same three

decades.<sup>25</sup> In a region with notoriously poor topsoil, MTR contributes to the loss of native soils through both the removal of overburden and the post-MTR erosion resulting from the often dramatic slopes of valley fills and inadequate erosion barriers. Blasting, valley fills, and the cleaning of coal also result in groundwater pollution, including especially increases in calcium, magnesium, manganese, selenium, and particulate levels in streams near MTR sites.<sup>26</sup> Evidence suggests that people who drink, cook with, or bathe in water originating near MTR sites may develop digestive disorders, kidney failure, cancer, and other medical ailments as a consequence, and additional studies have suggested that combinations of environmental and socioeconomic factors have contributed to higher mortality rates and generally poorer health among CACR residents than among residents of American counties with no coal mining.<sup>27</sup> Blasting sometimes disrupts the water table, killing wells and springs that had sustained rural homesteads for generations and forcing local residents to truck water into their communities from neighboring communities or purchase bottled water because of local anxieties about water pollution.<sup>28</sup> MTR also changes drainage patterns in the narrow valleys of the CACR, generating extensive silting, burying once vibrant streams, forcing rainwater into narrow valleys, and causing extensive flooding.<sup>29</sup> In addition to making the mountains and valleys of the region inhospitable to human life, the environmental degradation caused by MTR has also resulted in the destruction of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitats and forest degradation during the mining and for years following the reclamation process.<sup>30</sup>

Although scientific studies convincingly demonstrate the negative short- and long-term environmental and public health impacts of MTR, regional cultural responses to the practice have differed widely. MTR—and coal mining, more generally—is a highly contentious and complex issue in the local communities that have been affected by it. The jobs created by MTR and the industries associated with coal mining often allow local residents, many of whom have multigenerational ties to the region, to remain in the area rather than relocating to a surrounding state to find work.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, coal mining is itself intimately linked to local histories and regional senses of place, and many coalfield residents proudly display pro-coal bumper stickers, shirts, and hats proclaiming their family's coal-mining heritage, and attend festivals celebrating the local coal industry. And, while many opponents of MTR point to the long-term environmental impacts of the practice and the relatively short-term economic gains created by it, even the most ardent coal supporters also care deeply about the landscape and ecology of the region, most notably working for the conservation of hunting and fishing lands, feeling strong emotions about the physical changes to the local landscape, and demonstrating concern for the environment that their descendants will inherit.

Despite the ambivalence of most coalfield residents toward the practice of MTR, the debate surrounding its deployment in the past decade or more has often been cast as a battle between outside environmentalist agitators and local coal supporters. As geographer Jen Osha has demonstrated in her ethnographic study of residents in West Virginia's Coal River Valley, however, "this paradox—the local miner fighting for his/her job against outsider environmentalists—[is] . . . largely a fallacy. . . . Many of the most vocal opponents to mountaintop removal coal mining are in fact residents who are speaking out about decreasing quality of life and increasing risks to their family and their community."<sup>32</sup> Local efforts against MTR have, therefore, been predominantly grassroots in nature, recalling similar efforts to unionize the coalfields, to fight for recognition and treatment of black lung disease, and to protest earlier efforts to surface mine the region.<sup>33</sup> Led in large part by such groups as Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), and Coal Mountain River Watch, these groups, as Osha has noted, deploy local knowledge to mobilize residents to reject the coal industry in their area.<sup>34</sup> Yet, as Rebecca S. Scott suggests, local understandings of work as a means to demonstrate one's masculinity, whiteness, and citizenship in the community often lead coalfield residents to support MTR for economic reasons, despite the immediate and long-term consequences of the practice. The carnivalesque elements of much anti-MTR protest and the simple fact that protesters appear as though they are not working, when combined with statements from the coal industry that decry protesters as outsiders, thus exacerbate divisions within the local community and make the MTR debate all the more contentious.<sup>35</sup>

### *Music, Theology, and MTR*

For many residents of central Appalachia, especially those with long-standing ties to the area, the mountains offer economic opportunities (whether based in extractive industries, tourism, or the "green" economy), but they also represent sacred places that link the current generation with generations past and that remind residents of the glory of God's creation.<sup>36</sup> Although most mainline denominations and several church-related groups have issued resolutions and supported initiatives against MTR, many of the songs that have been composed about MTR draw their inspiration not from mainline Christian theology but from the theological outlooks and musical practices of what Appalachian historian Loyal Jones has described as "mountain religion."<sup>37</sup> Encompassing such common central Appalachian denominations as Primitive, Old Regular, and United Baptists as well as some United Methodist congregations, practitioners of mountain religion frequently turn to "the Old Testa-

ment . . . for its revelation of creation."<sup>38</sup> Dozens of Hebrew Testament scriptures depict mountains as sacred places upon which God reveals himself to his people and upon which his people can communicate more directly with him, and the psalmists frequently invoke the stability of the mountains as proof of God's permanence.<sup>39</sup>

In the first years of the nineteenth century, early settlers in central Appalachia drew an immediate connection between their studies of the Hebrew Testament and the rolling mountain topography, naming their new communities and churches after the natural environment or Hebrew Testament places and burying their dead upon the tops of the mountains so that, among other things, they could be placed closer to the heavens.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, as religious historian Richard J. Callahan Jr. has noted of nineteenth-century eastern Kentucky residents, nature "was all part of a grand design created by God in which human beings played a particular role as the benefactors of what God provided." In central Appalachia, the relationship between people and the natural environment is frequently explained through what ethnomusicologist Jeff Todd Titon has described as "the metaphor of husbandry," a metaphor that Callahan notes "might be understood as both a responsibility and a term of authority, closely connected to the idea of *dominion* that appears in Genesis when God created human beings and gave them dominion over all the earth."<sup>41</sup>

Varying interpretations of "dominion" are frequently found in songs on both sides of the central Appalachian MTR debate. Songwriters who stand against MTR draw frequently upon imagery and place-based rhetoric that suggests that residents should serve as stewards of the land and should save the Appalachian Mountains, its diverse ecosystem, and the physical reminders of local history from MTR because the practice is sacrilegious.<sup>42</sup> For example, West Virginian author, activist, and 2000 Mountain Party gubernatorial candidate Denise Giardina has described MTR as a "desecration," arguing that

mountaintop removal is evil, and those who support it are supporting evil. The mountains of West Virginia are God's greatest gift to West Virginia. To destroy the mountains is to spit in the face of God Almighty. . . . Blowing apart these beautiful mountains is an attack upon this state, its people, and the natural wonders God has bestowed upon us.<sup>43</sup>

Through explicit biblical allusions and musical settings that invoke the soundscapes of central Appalachian religious practice, anti-MTR songwriters, drawing on sentiments found throughout much of the anti-MTR movement, frequently remark that the mountains are filled with God's presence or that they are evidence of God's creation. These claims are made more powerful in those songs that connect the sacralization of the

Appalachian Mountains with the deep cultural history of Appalachian residents performing sacred rites upon the mountains. At the same time, proponents of MTR and other extractive industries in central Appalachia frequently invoke rhetoric such as that offered by Samuel Maggard, vice-president of Miller Brothers, a Kentucky coal operator, in *Deep Down*, a documentary film that looks at a Kentucky community's efforts to deal with MTR: "I feel God put coal and other natural resources here for a purpose. That purpose is for energy requirements and for jobs."<sup>44</sup> Read through this theological lens, then, coal extraction is a means to redeem God's promise to provide for humans' basic needs, and efforts to put an end to MTR and related practices might also be read as a sacrilege.<sup>45</sup> These perspectives are not irreconcilable, by any means: stewardship calls for sustainable use of the land, and many proponents of coal point to reclamation as an effort to care for the land.

Reflecting on the common notion that "mountain peaks are where holy people go to seek enlightenment," Parkersburg, West Virginia, singer-songwriter Todd Burge suggests that the central Appalachians are sacred in "What Would Moses Climb" (2009), a song cowritten with Llyse Smith Wylle and Nelle Howard. Written over Facebook and posted to YouTube on August 20, 2009,<sup>46</sup> the song invokes the many stories from the Book of Exodus in which Moses meets with God and the Angel of the Lord atop Mount Sinai. It was there that Moses received instructions for helping the Israelites escape from captivity in Egypt and where he received the Ten Commandments, suggesting that the mountains provide a meeting place where humanity can glean some of the wisdom of God. But, as the speaker observes the "massive shovels scrap[ing] the mountains away" and the hills transformed into "West Virginia plains" in order to satiate the American demand for cheap electricity and the coal companies' demands for easy profits, he wonders to himself how humanity will find wisdom in a post-mountain world. Without mountains, the speaker maintains, "lost souls [will] simply blow and roll right through this new dust bowl" while humanity continues in a period of inevitable, godless decline. Featuring Burge's plaintive voice accompanied by a simple, finger-picked acoustic guitar, the demo recording and video montage posted on YouTube blend the region's deep traditions of acoustic string-band music with the common-sense biblical wisdom of a mountain preacher, combining to create a powerful reminder of the valuable role that mountains play in the central Appalachian beliefs about God's presence in the natural environment.

The notion, derived from the practice of mountain religion, that the residents of central Appalachia are God's chosen people is manifested in the natural landscape, which abounds with biodiversity, offers a rich variety of ways for local residents to sustain themselves, and, as anthropologist Brian T. McNeil has demonstrated, are treated as a sort of commons by many coalfield residents.<sup>47</sup> Donna Price and Greg Treadway echo

this theme in the 2002 bluegrass gospel composition “The Mountains of Home,” which appeared in the 2004 OVEC compact disc compilation *Moving Mountains: Voices of Appalachia* and is heard on the soundtrack to the 2006 Christians for the Mountains film *Mountain Mourning*.<sup>48</sup> The song depicts the effects of MTR on life in the Coal River Valley of Raleigh, Boone, Logan, and Kanawha counties in West Virginia. A life-long resident of the valley, the speaker and his ancestors have lived “in the shelter of mountains as ancient as time,” but, because they were unable to protect their land from the coal companies, they are forced to leave their ancestral homelands in search of work and a more hospitable environment. The speaker notes that the mountains are filled with reminders of God’s omniscience and omnipresence, as the blooming flora and the glorious sunrise over the mountain peaks “display all God’s glory with every new dawn.” The reference to dogwood trees in the second verse adds further evidence that God’s hand is visible throughout the mountain landscape. Although not based in scriptural evidence, regional legend suggests that the dogwood’s diminutive stature and distinctive blood-stained, cross-shaped blossom were created to remind humanity of Christ’s sacrifice at the crucifixion. In the refrain, Price and Treadway posit that the Coal River Valley was an Edenic paradise that might be equaled in the afterlife but that might just as well have been reserved for God’s chosen people in the region.<sup>49</sup> This sentiment is further reinforced in the song’s use in the *Mountain Mourning* film, where Treadway’s voice underscores a montage of images of run-down coal towns, active MTR sites, and a clear mountain stream accompanied by scriptural references to God’s role as creator and a series of voiceovers noting, among other things, that “God didn’t set those mountains and valleys there to be destroyed” and that “anytime that you come in and you destroy a stream and the fish in that stream and the animals in those mountains, you’re affecting God’s creation.”<sup>50</sup> Although SMCRA requires that coal companies return the land to the “approximate original contour” of the mountain landscape and coal supporters frequently note that the reclamation process returns the land to an improved state, this suggestion that, as activist Larry Gibson remarks in the 2006 film *Keeper of the Mountains*, the coal companies could “make [the land] better than the Good Lord did” stands in stark contrast to the belief that God provided everything that the people need to survive within the mountain landscape.<sup>51</sup>

These themes are echoed in the frequently anthologized 1977 recording of Kentucky folksinger Jean Ritchie’s composition “Now Is the Cool of the Day,” a song that has its roots in the anti-surface-mining campaigns of the mid-1970s. In addition to appearing on two anti-MTR compact discs, the song is frequently sung at anti-MTR rallies, and Ritchie herself sang it at the 2007 Concert for the Mountains, an event held in conjunction with the United Nations Conference on Environmental Sus-

tainability, which was attended by a delegation of people who have been affected by mountaintop removal.<sup>52</sup> Using King James–style English and set in the *a cappella* style found in Appalachian balladry and Old Regular Baptist singing, Ritchie’s composition attempts to remind listeners of their solemn duty as stewards of God’s creation. Much as God did in the Garden of Eden, God asks the speaker to “keep the grasses green,” “feed the lambs,” and “keep my people free” in exchange for the privilege of living in the garden. The speaker is responsible for tending the Lord’s garden until he returns “in the cool of the day,” which, unfortunately for the people who allowed surface mining and MTR to take place in the mountain paradise, is now. As such, the song suggests that we have not done enough to protect the garden, but perhaps there is the potential to salvage part of the garden before MTR devastates the entire region. Although the song sounds austere and perhaps even a bit fatalistic, “Now Is the Cool of the Day” demands immediate attention to the environmental devastation caused by surface mining of all varieties. But, perhaps more important, the social justice imperative of the final verse serves as a stark reminder that not only has the garden been destroyed, but the people who God chose to live in the region have been forced from their land by the blasting of MTR, constantly falling home prices, and the deep psychological wounds inflicted by the destruction of ancestral homelands. This message, as expressed in Ritchie’s performance of the song, exerts a remarkable emotional impact, as authors Silas House and Jason Howard have noted from their observations of Ritchie’s performance at the 2008 commencement at Union College in Barbourville, Kentucky:

At [the end of “Now Is the Cool of the Day”] . . . , the only sound in the huge room is that of people crying. They may not know that they’ve just heard an environmentally minded hymn, but they all are aware that they’ve just witnessed something very powerful. Perhaps a few of them have even been changed forever. Then they stand up, with none of the hesitation that usually occurs with standing ovations. Everyone is on their feet, and the applause is thunderous.<sup>53</sup>

Anti-MTR audiences react similarly to historian and anti-MTR activist Shirley Stewart Burns’s 2009 composition “Leave Those Mountains Down.”<sup>54</sup> The song is lyrically and melodically based on the familiar song “Which Side Are You On,” a pro-union song written by Harlan County, Kentucky, resident Florence Reece during the Harlan County Mine Wars of 1931. Singing in the same *a cappella* style as Ritchie’s song, Burns, a native of Wyoming County, West Virginia, offers a call to arms that she claims came to her while she was sleeping and that is “a direct gift from above.”<sup>55</sup> The song’s opening refrain challenges the coal miners and—more important—the coal operators to “leave those mountains

down” and not to “tear up what the heavens bore,” casting the mountains as sacred creations and suggesting that miners, who are themselves residents of the region and may well be family members of anti-MTR activists, think twice about the implications of their work. Interestingly, the refrain is modified at the conclusion of Burns’s performances, making God’s role in creation more explicit by imploring the miners and operators not to “tear up what God has given.”

While the refrains serve as important reminders of the call to environmental stewardship, the song’s verses effectively recast the residents of the CACR as modern-day Israelites who have been made slaves to the coal companies and who, despite their piety, will be left in perpetual poverty as coal operators destroy their “promised land.” The first verse establishes the speaker—identified in her autobiographical writings to be Burns herself—as a long-time resident of the region and as the descendant of miners who worked in the deep mines that predominated in central Appalachia through the 1980s.<sup>56</sup> Her father and grandfather are identified as ideal coal miners, toiling in the mines without complaint and standing as loyal members of the union, yet they have “long since died for King Coal” and are now buried in the very mountains in which they worked. As such, the speaker establishes herself not as an outside agitator, but as a native West Virginian with deep ties to the coal industry, highlighting McNeil’s contention that opponents to MTR “specifically articulate what is different between the coal industry they grew up with and their current terrifying reality.”<sup>57</sup> This invests her words with greater value in a debate that often seeks to eliminate “inauthentic” voices. In the second verse, the speaker links the divine gift of the mountains to the religious practices of central Appalachians, noting that “this earth has housed our people, our sorrow with our pain. / We’ve climbed upon the mountaintops where we bowed our heads to pray.” After establishing herself as a moral, upright, and religious West Virginian, the speaker then challenges the coal companies, complete with God on her side. While God has given her the right to pray upon the mountaintops, the speaker demands to know “what gives you the right, King Coal, to tear those mountains down?” Whereas the permanent residents of the region can claim righteousness, the coal operators are only interested in the “treasures” and “riches” of the mountains, leaving the “citizens [of the mountains to] pay for all [their] lust-filled greed.” As such, Burns and her fellow impoverished yet pious neighbors are positioned on the moral right with the full approval of God.

While the musical protest against MTR has been expressed in a variety of genres (to be discussed further below), it is particularly interesting that many of the songs that evoke specific religious objections to MTR draw on musical practices that have long associations with mountain religion. By couching their criticism in a *cappella* and string-band sounds, these songwriters and performers implicitly and explicitly invoke a sense of tradition

that serves as a proxy vote against the devastating effects of MTR. That is, the generic conventions of bluegrass and Old Regular Baptist singing function much as these sounds have functioned since the late nineteenth century when folksong collectors first visited the region: as reminders of the “noble” wisdom of mountain residents.<sup>58</sup> As Holly Watkins has suggested, listeners often interpret musical sounds through a “field of associations [that] is not simply physiological but cultural and historical.” The invocation of such traditional sounds in the anti-MTR repertory combines with the theological outlook of mountain religion to, as Watkins notes of pastoral tropes and allusions to folk music in Euro-American art music, “metonymically allude to specific places by transposing the sonic traces of people who live (or lived) there into musical works.”<sup>59</sup> The musical settings that these songwriters and performers have chosen might, then, be heard as a reference to a time before coal or, at least, a time before MTR, a time inhabited by parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents whose musicalized pleas against MTR might constitute a more persuasive argument than could be conveyed through words alone.

### *Music, Living History, and the MTR Debate*

While many anti-MTR musicians have invoked notions of stewardship directly in several ways, the “Coal Is West Virginia” campaign, launched in spring 2009 by the West Virginia Coal Association (WVCA) and its subsidiary support group, Friends of Coal, blanketed West Virginian radio airwaves with new jingles and offered free ringtone downloads that encapsulate the primary arguments for a dominion-based theological understanding of the MTR. “A trade association representing more than 90 percent of the state’s underground and surface coal mine production,” the Friends of Coal offered six ringtone arrangements of a brief, four-word, six-note jingle that concisely tapped into a deeply felt sense of place that is held not only by native West Virginians but by people from around the United States.<sup>60</sup> As musicalized in the reverberated voices of this all-male chorus, this metaphor declares a conception of place that defines West Virginia as a “coal state,” a state in which the coal industry serves as the primary economic engine. This notion is stated directly in an advertisement titled “West Virginia Values—American Strength,” which argues that “West Virginia coal is the backbone of our nation’s economy . . .” and “can light the way to the future.”<sup>61</sup> Such coal-centered conceptions of the Appalachian regional economy have exerted a profound impact on the economic and ecological health of the state and its residents, as legislative representatives in the region frequently work to support the coal industry (in part because political campaigns are frequently derailed by charges that a candidate is “anti-coal”).<sup>62</sup> More to the point, the musicalized metaphor is even more striking when heard literally: coal is, indeed, West Virginia, the

land's surface and substrate removed, dynamited, and hauled away to supply electricity to consumers. Unlike the anti-MTR compositions discussed above, though, the male voices heard in the tag lines of the "Coal Is West Virginia" campaign advertisements resolutely argue that the minerals must be harvested in order to support the local, regional, and national economies and, invoking a tradition of religious thought that extends back to John Winthrop's *A Modell of Christian Charity*, to restore American greatness.<sup>63</sup>

Similar sentiments appear in a variety of coal-related songs, particularly those that celebrate the working-class heroism of the coal miner. Although told from the perspective of an underground coal miner, Dixie and Tom T. Hall's 2006 bluegrass composition "I'm a Coal Mining Man," anthologized on the 2007 collection *Music of Coal*, depicts a patriotic, hard-working coal miner who is proud to support his family and to "help make America's economy roll" by digging coal. Likewise, the video for Halfway to Hazard's 2009 mainstream country composition "I Know Where Heaven Is" celebrates MTR as part of a rural Kentuckian heritage that includes family and outdoor recreation by interpolating shots of the band playing in the bed of a Caterpillar F-Series mining truck with images from a outdoor performance at Hazard, Kentucky's Black Gold Festival and faded footage of people riding all-terrain vehicles through a stream.<sup>64</sup> Although the song's lyric does not address coal mining, the imagery presented in the video (which, at the time of this writing, had been viewed more than 40,000 times on YouTube) reveals that for many coalfield residents MTR is not interpreted as an abomination; rather, it is another element in the physical, economic, and cultural landscape that frames the activities of everyday life. Similarly, Beckley, West Virginia-based country band Taylor Made's 2009 contemporary country release "West Virginia Underground" offers one of the more effective musical efforts to capture the rhetoric of the pro-coal counterprotestors in central Appalachia. Listened to nearly 140,000 times since it was posted on YouTube in August 2009, the song is told from the perspective of the united voices of central Appalachian coal miners.<sup>65</sup> The speaker reminds protestors—particularly high-profile anti-MTR activists such as Daryl Hannah, who was arrested during a June 2009 protest in Raleigh County, West Virginia—that coal miners earn an honest living and provide a valuable service to the American people.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, he suggests that alternative energy solutions are little more than ideas and argues that MTR is safer than nuclear energy, positing that "I'd rather restructure a mountaintop / than have another Chernobyl in my town."

Songs such as these are particularly effective because they draw upon a less prominent but no less powerful place-based rhetoric that is rooted in the region's long history of coal mining and the often-bitter disputes that have erupted within communities throughout the region as a consequence of labor, safety, and environmental debates. Taylor Made's com-

position, for example, hypothesizes that anti-MTR protestors are predominantly outside agitators, ignoring the reality that many of the most vocal protestors can trace their heritage in the region over several generations. Similarly, many anti-MTR artists have contributed songs evoking regional coal history to recorded anthologies and concert performances in order both to celebrate the shared heritage of coalfield residents and to point to the intergenerational problems of coal. For instance, Nashville-based songwriter Darrell Scott's 1997 composition "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive," which has been recorded by a variety of artists including mainstream country singers Patty Loveless and Brad Paisley, recounts the story of a family who sold its mineral rights in order to escape the poverty of the mountains, bought a large farm where they struggled to pay the mortgage, and were forced to return to the Harlan County mines, where the family patriarch died.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, singer Natalie Merchant, who has spoken out on environmental issues for more than a decade, contributed her 2003 recording of Reece's "Which Side Are You On?" to the 2009 anti-MTR fundraising album *Coal Country Music*, drawing a direct comparison between the current MTR debate and the unionization fights in early twentieth-century Appalachia.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps most notably, Huntington, West Virginia-native and country singer Kathy Mattea's critically acclaimed 2008 album *Coal* offers interpretations of coal-related songs by Jean Ritchie ("The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore," "Blue Diamond Mines"), Billy Edd Wheeler ("Red-Winged Blackbird," "Coal Tattoo," "Coming of the Roads"), Merle Travis ("Dark as a Dungeon"), and Hazel Dickens ("Green Rolling Hills," "Black Lung"), as well as an interpretation of Scott's "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive."<sup>69</sup> Inspired to record the album after the 2006 Sago, West Virginia, mine explosion that killed twelve miners, Mattea has used her status as a native West Virginian and granddaughter of a coal miner to offer a nuanced critique of MTR and the coal industry that is at once respectful of the region's coal heritage, critical of recent developments within the industry, and concerned about the long-term impact of the practice; as she noted in a 2009 interview: "My task is not to say, 'You're bad [to coal miners],' because they are fulfilling a need [for electricity]."<sup>70</sup>

While many musicians who have spoken out against MTR have evoked the shared history of Appalachian coalfield residents to mollify tensions between anti-MTR and pro-coal advocates, still others have drawn upon that history, particularly the bitter struggles surrounding unionization, to articulate an oppositional politics. Many West Virginians and Kentuckians describe the efforts to unionize the coalfields in the period between 1912 and 1939 as "mine wars," with "battlefields" strewn across the region. Most notable among these conflicts were the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek War of 1912-13, when thousands of striking miners and armed mine guards from the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency engaged in open combat with one another, leading to the imposition of martial law in Kanawha County,

West Virginia; the battles of Matewan and Blair Mountain in 1920–21, which culminated in the deployment of 200 American soldiers and the dropping of homemade bombs on striking miners in Logan County, West Virginia; and the armed conflicts in “Bloody Harlan” County, Kentucky in the 1930s.<sup>71</sup> Discussed in the textbooks used in West Virginia’s state history curriculum and celebrated in several novels and local histories, these events have played a key role in shaping the identities of the state’s residents, effectively drawing together the stereotypes of the noble miner, the feuding hillbilly, and the exploitative coal company in a way that continues to divide communities throughout the state.<sup>72</sup> As historian Rebecca Bailey has recently written, this history has quite frequently been told from the perspective of the striking miners, who have been cast by contemporaneous journalists and New Left labor historians alike as a class of people—united in their trade—that was disenfranchised by inhumane and greedy corporations and who went on strike and engaged in violence only as a last resort.<sup>73</sup> Although, as Bailey suggests, the historical facts support a much more complex portrait of these conflicts, such a received history, mapped onto the very mountains where these battles took place, invests the mountains with great historical value.

This history has become especially contentious in light of recent efforts to deploy MTR on Blair Mountain in Logan County, West Virginia.<sup>74</sup> The site of one of the most infamous mine battles in the state’s history, Blair Mountain has been repeatedly threatened by coal mining, most notably in the early 1990s, when Massey Energy proposed to open a strip mine there, and in 1998 when Arch Coal proposed a 3100-acre mountaintop removal mine near the site.<sup>75</sup> More recently, efforts to list Blair Mountain on the National Register of Historic Places have met with great controversy as landowners and then-governor Joe Manchin petitioned to remove the site from the register less than four months after it was placed there in March 2009.<sup>76</sup> This most recent controversy has received a great deal of national attention, spurring an October 2010 open letter to the National Park Service and West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office signed by a wide array of respected historians, musicians, and film directors that called for the Park Service to relist the site on the National Register of Historic Places. Furthermore, in January 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) vetoed a previously approved Arch Coal permit, leading to a lawsuit filed by outgoing-governor Manchin and recent efforts to defund the EPA in the U.S. House budget package.<sup>77</sup> Most recently, hundreds of anti-MTR protestors and pro-coal counterprotestors gathered on June 4–7, 2011, for the “March on Blair Mountain,” an event commemorating the ninetieth anniversary of the Battle of Blair Mountain.<sup>78</sup> Thus, just as Blair Mountain once served as a battleground in the efforts to unionize the coalfields of Logan and Mingo counties, so too is it now a central locus in the battle against mountaintop-removal mining.

Just as central Appalachian songwriters have long composed music that reflected the struggles of miners and their families, galvanized support for relevant political and social issues, and challenged corporate control over the region's economics and ecologies, so, too, does Captain Catfeesh's 2010 composition, "Blair Mountain Battle March," participate in the region's rich tradition of grassroots musical protest to challenge residents to stand against the degradation of their homes, health, and histories. Captain Catfeesh posted "Blair Mountain Battle March" to YouTube on January 18, 2010, offering what he described as his "contribution to end mountaintop removal."<sup>79</sup> Sporting a knit cap, plaid shirt, and shaved head and playing an acoustic guitar adorned with stickers commemorating rebel icon Johnny Cash and cowpunk/metal-core/psychobilly artist Hank Williams III, Captain Catfeesh presents a song that draws freely upon the musical practices of punk and Appalachian balladry to challenge listeners to take up arms against the coal interests that seek to change the shape of Blair Mountain.

From the very outset, "Blair Mountain Battle March" invokes the long history of union battles and strikes both in the song's formal structure and its content. Like Burns's "Leave Those Mountains Down," the opening lines of "Blair Mountain Battle March" invoke Reece's "Which Side Are You On?" as well as Travis's "Dark as a Dungeon." Such an opening salvo is quite common in labor songs from across the United States, as it served a valuable role in helping union members, many of whom were forced to gather clandestinely, to learn and remember the latest news, to reinforce union ideologies, and to call for direct and indirect action against industry.<sup>80</sup> After calling his audience together, Captain Catfeesh succinctly describes the problems at hand, namely that deep mining is no longer effective, coal reserves are dwindling, and the coal companies are looking everywhere for more minerals to sate the nation's electrical needs. Finally, Catfeesh deploys another common labor-song technique, the invocation of a martyred hero, to remind his comrades of their solemn duties. In this case, the martyr is Sid Hatfield, the police chief of Matewan, West Virginia, who was assassinated by Baldwin-Felts agents on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse on August 1, 1921.<sup>81</sup> Hatfield's murder angered thousands of miners in the Coal, Little Coal, and Kanawha River valleys, prompting between seven and fifteen thousand miners to lead an armed march to Matewan to avenge Hatfield's death. While on the way there, they were stopped by Logan County sheriff Don Chapin, whose declaration that "no armed mob will cross Logan County" precipitated the Battle of Blair Mountain between August 25 and September 2, 1921.<sup>82</sup> By reminding his audience that Hatfield would have kept "an eye to the mines" and worked to "tear the rich apart," Captain Catfeesh here calls upon his listeners to act as heroes, volunteer to be martyred themselves, and act responsibly

on behalf of miners and, more important, the very land that sustains them. Thus, in the same way that other sites, including national battlefields and, more recently, the World Trade Center site, are sacralized and transformed into national symbols of heroism and sacrifice for the sake of an idealized cause, so, too, does “Blair Mountain Battle March” conjure the union dead in support of a contemporary political cause.

In the song’s chorus, Captain Catfeesh provides his listeners with the appropriate action: to “March on. / March by night. / Leave your name tags / In plain sight. / Remove the bodies / From the battlefield. / If black lung don’t get you, man, / the hot lead will.” These words, articulated directly on the beat, reveal the perceived bravery, idealism, and fatalism of the miners who fought at Blair Mountain. Most of the troop movements took place at night as union miners, identifying themselves by wearing red bandanas around their necks to signify their union membership, seized coal and passenger trains, marched through shanty towns where evicted miners and their families lived, and dragged those miners who were unwilling to participate in the marches and battles into the fight. In this retelling, however, the men will kill and be killed, because, after all, if “black lung”—a respiratory disease caused by exposure to coal dust—“don’t get you, man, / the hot lead will.” As such, one can either die bravely on the battlefield or waste away as a consequence of complicity with the coal industry.

By framing this call to arms against mountaintop removal and the destruction of Blair Mountain within a punk musical aesthetic, Captain Catfeesh introduces yet another layer of political ideology into the mix. In “Blair Mountain Battle March,” Captain Catfeesh espouses a clearly defined leftist punk ideology that draws upon notions of personal integrity and responsibility to call upon citizens to devise a solution, rise against industry, and seize control over their economy and land. Such an ideology meshes quite well with some of the basic tenets of unionism, which also address personal responsibility and question the motivations of capitalism, especially when the safety and well-being of workers are at stake. Moreover, the politics of the musical style are further reinforced by Captain Catfeesh’s participation in punk’s do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos, controlling all aspects of the composition, production, and dissemination of his music and in the process allowing for an exchange of ideas that—at least without considering the capitalist intervention of YouTube as an exponent of the global media industry—is unmediated by capitalism. As such, his compositions and performances represent a contemporary form of grassroots musical protest that draws extensively upon the rich history of Blair Mountain and the coalfields of southern West Virginia to reframe the contemporary struggle to halt mountaintop removal mining practices as yet another chapter in a century-long fight.<sup>83</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In some form or another, much of the music that has been composed about or brought into the ongoing debate about the use of MTR in central Appalachia draws upon a sense of nostalgia that is rooted in competing understandings of local history, identity, and landscape. As ethnomusicologist Bode Omojola has observed, the “strategic deployment of nostalgia [in song] is particularly common among marginalized societies whose task of interpreting the past often becomes more challenging as a result of the social and political developments arising from foreign domination.”<sup>84</sup> As represented in songs such as Hall’s “I’m a Coal Mining Man” or Taylor Made’s “West Virginia Underground,” this nostalgia for the working-class coal miner might be viewed, as Rebecca R. Scott has observed in her study of coal-heritage tourism in central Appalachia, as an effort to read “the environmental and social damage caused by mining . . . through a nostalgic lens of sacrifice for the nation, [transforming] Appalachia’s marginal status as a natural resource colony . . . [into] a way to claim a core national identity.”<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, songs such as Burns’s “Leave Those Mountains Down,” Price and Treadway’s “The Mountains of Home,” and Captain Catfeesh’s “Blair Mountain Battle March” deploy nostalgia to read local coal history as one characterized by the exploitation of workers and the land, suggesting through imagery and sounds that evoke pre- and post-coal Appalachia that coal has been a central cause of most environmental, economic, and public health issues in central Appalachia. Moreover, by drawing from a wealth of religious imagery based in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mountain religious practice, these songs invoke a nostalgia for the Garden of Eden, a land and time before the sins of coal came to the region.

Yet, as Tuan has posited, “the cult of the past calls for illusion rather than authenticity.”<sup>86</sup> That is, people who seek the past commonly map their own preoccupations and views upon historical landscapes. Grimley has taken this up in his study of landscape and identity in the music of Edvard Grieg, noting that

landscape is . . . something both collectively and personally defined: it relies on a series of generically defined conventions or traditions, but is constructed and perceived individually. Hence, in musical representations of landscape . . . it becomes unclear whose voice speaks, whether it is the voice of the composer, a narrative character, or a more collective identity (history, nature or tradition).<sup>87</sup>

Such is certainly the case in the ongoing musicalization of the MTR debate. Some of the musicians discussed in this study have been directly involved in efforts to advocate for both pro-coal and anti-MTR causes, acts that can have the effect of collapsing distinctions between the voices

of the speaker, the songwriter, and the performer. Yet, to varying degrees, these musicians also use musical styles (balladry, Old Regular Baptist singing, bluegrass) and lyrical imagery that evoke white Appalachian identity specifically or rural and small-town purity, more generally. As Thomas Solomon has observed in his study of place-making in Chayantaka Carnival songs, “landscapes become central as sites for imagining collective identities. Sense of self and sense of place are intimately connected—perhaps better described as a ‘sense of place-self’—and individuals’ shared sense of place-based identity becomes the basis of a sense of community.”<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the substantive economic, environmental, and public health issues that have been foregrounded in the broader MTR debate are replaced in MTR-related songs by a place-based rhetoric that interrogates the essence of Appalachian identity and raises important questions about who has the right to speak on behalf of past, present, and future coalfield residents.

## NOTES

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38. Loyal Jones, “Mountain Religion: An Overview,” in *Christianity in Appalachia: Profiles in Regional Pluralism*, ed. Bill J. Leonard (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 91.

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finds the towns of Gilboa and Mt. Nebo as well as Mt. Horeb United Methodist Church and Mt. Pisgah Church. At the same time, towns are also frequently named after coal (Coal City, WV), timber (Richwood, WV), and chemical (Nitro, WV) companies. See also Howard Dorgan, *Worship Practices of Six Baptist Subdenominations* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 1–2; Alan Jabbour and Karen Singer Jabbour, *Decoration Day in the Mountains: Traditions of Cemetery Decoration in the Southern Appalachians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 58.

Osha notes that the relocation of family cemeteries as a consequence of MTR often results in local “concern that their Home-place . . . will be destroyed by MTR” (Osha, “The Power-Knowledge to Move Mountains,” 137). Similarly, Bob White, WV, resident Maria Gunnoe notes of her family cemetery in the film *Look What They’ve Done* (2006) that “my ancestors is buried up there [on a mountain near an MTR site] since the 1700s, and that’s a part of who I am, and I’m not going to walk off and leave my family cemetery to the merciless coal companies.”

41. Richard J. Callahan Jr., *Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields: Subject to Dust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 45; Jeff Todd Titon, *Powerhouse for God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 75.

42. See, for example, Kyle T. Kramer, “Appalachia’s Wounds: The Biblical Injustice of Mountaintop Removal,” *America* 203, no. 8 (Oct. 4, 2010): 10–14. For more discussion of the theological background of stewardship, see, for instance, Ken Gnanakan, “Creation, Christians and Environmental Stewardship,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 30, no. 2 (April 2006): 110–20.

43. Denise Giardina, “Afterword: Desecration,” in *Plundering Appalachia*, ed. Butler and Wuertthner, 203.

44. Jen Gilomen and Sally Rubin, dir., *Deep Down: A Story from the Heart of Coal Country* (Forward Films, 2010). Quoted in Jonathan Merritt, “More Than a Mountain: ‘Deep Down’ Plumbs Theological Divide on Coal Mining,” *Christianity Today: A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction* (Nov. 23, 2010), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/movies/commentaries/2010/moremountain.html> (accessed Aug. 8, 2011).

Maggard’s statement stands in stark contrast to those of Bob White, WV, resident Maria Gunnoe, who lives near several MTR sites. She remarked in the 2006 anti-MTR film *Look What They’ve Done* that “God put the coal there because it was so nasty [that] He knew it needed to be buried.”

45. The theological roots of this outlook are traced in Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203–7. See also Paul Maltby, “Fundamentalist Dominion, Postmodern Ecology,” *Ethics and the Environment* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 119–41.

46. “What Would Moses Climb?—by Todd Burge,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cdzez6WR8bQ> (accessed Aug. 31, 2010).

47. McNeil, *Combating Mountaintop Removal*, 56–61.

48. Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, *Moving Mountains: Voices of Appalachia Rise Up against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining* (Falling Mountain Music FM-1040, 2004); Allen Johnston, dir., *Mountain Mourning* (Patchwork Films, 2004).

49. This idea has circulated regularly since the release of John Denver’s 1971 AM-pop hit “Take Me Home, Country Roads,” which posits that the ridges and valleys of West Virginia are “almost heaven.” The phrase has appeared on license plates and in tourism brochures in West Virginia for several decades. Furthermore, Denver’s composition, which is also sung sentimentally at West Virginia University sporting events, has also been parodied in anti-MTR protests: “Almost level, West Virginia. / Scalped off mountains dumped into our rivers” (Hufford, “Carnival Time in the Kingdom of Coal,” 563). This parody is also heard in Johnston, dir., *Mountain Mourning*.

Similar sentiments can be found in John Prine’s “Paradise” (1971). Although the song discusses the devastating effects of surface mining in western Kentucky more than fifty

years ago, the song has been covered by several artists espousing an anti-MTR stance and was anthologized in the 2009 *Coal Country Music* album.

50. Christians for the Mountains, *Mountain Mourning* (2004).

51. B. J. Gudmundsson, dir., *Keeper of the Mountains* (Patchwork Films, 2006). Kate Larkin, in her song "Can't Put It Back (Wrecklamation Song)" (1995), makes the argument that, no matter how hard they might try, the coal companies will fall short in their reclamation efforts (*Coal Country Music* [Heartwood, 2009]).

52. Silas House and Jason Howard, *Something's Rising: Appalachians Fighting Mountaintop Removal* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 31, 33. For a sample of "Now Is the Cool of the Day," see Kathy Mattea's March 2, 2009, performance at a climate rally in Washington, DC (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTW7cOCTBc8> [accessed Aug. 12, 2011]).

53. House and Howard, *Something's Rising*, 34–35

54. An example of this can be found in her performance at the 2008 Appalachian Studies Association meeting, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCUSRIXobdE> (accessed Jan. 8, 2012).

55. Shirley Stewart Burns, "Musical Journey of the Coalfields," [http://www.shirleystewartburns.com/recent\\_news](http://www.shirleystewartburns.com/recent_news) (accessed Aug. 31, 2010).

56. *Ibid.*

57. McNeil, *Combating Mountaintop Removal*, 3.

58. See, for instance, Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 41–45.

59. Watkins, "Musical Ecologies of Place and Placelessness," 406, 405.

60. "Who We Are," <http://www.wvcoal.com/who-we-are.html> (accessed Jan. 3, 2011); "Coal Is West Virginia Ringtones," <http://www.wvcoal.com/coal-is-west-virginia-ringtones.html> (accessed Jan. 3, 2011).

61. West Virginia Coal Association, "West Virginia Coal—American Strength," <http://www.friendsofcoal.org/radio-spots.html> (accessed Nov. 20, 2010).

62. Ken Ward Jr., "Rahall-Maynard Debate Who Is More Pro-Coal," Coal Tattoo blog, *Charleston Gazette*, Sept. 8, 2010, <http://blogs.wvgazette.com/coalattoo/2010/09/08/rahall-maynard-debate-who-is-more-pro-coal/> (accessed Aug. 8, 2011).

63. John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity (1630)*, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd ser., vol. 7 (Boston, 1838), 31–48, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html> (accessed Aug. 8, 2011).

64. Halfway to Hazard, "I Know Where Heaven Is," dir. Cory Kelley, Picnic Hill Records, 2009, [http://www.halfwaytohazard.com/video/new\\_h2h\\_videos/i-know-where-heaven-is\\_10](http://www.halfwaytohazard.com/video/new_h2h_videos/i-know-where-heaven-is_10) (accessed Aug. 11, 2011).

65. Taylor Made, "West Virginia Underground," *One Voice* (Taylor Made, 2010), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g24tpXtJ540> (accessed Aug. 12, 2011).

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