

Megan Kelley

“I ♥ Mountains”: The Movement Against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining in Central Appalachia

This paper examines the movement against mountaintop removal coal mining in central Appalachia. Specifically, the paper achieves three objectives: it provides a thorough context for the movement; it examines membership mobilization within the movement; and it details the way in which the movement manifests on the ground. The research for this project was conducted between March-October, 2012. I used two major research strategies: (1) secondary research in the areas of social movement theory, Appalachian history, the process of mountaintop removal, and regional politics, and (2) 9+ weeks of participant observation field research conducted in West Virginia during the summer of 2012, including thirteen hour-length interviews. The results of this paper show that the Appalachian setting is of great importance for the controversy, as coal mining is ingrained in the culture of Appalachia. Furthermore, this paper discusses the importance of moral shocks as an impetus for individual mobilization in the movement, complemented by social ties as motivation for escalation of activist involvement. Lastly, I explain that the movement is comprised of many small social movement organizations and a variety of tactics, and can be considered a high-risk movement when faced with the pro-coal countermovement.