


1-1-2012

Silence and Self-Making: Black Lung Rhetoric and the Ken Hechler Letters

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De Pompei, Jennifer, "Silence and Self-Making: Black Lung Rhetoric and the Ken Hechler Letters" (2012). *Theses, Dissertations and Capstones*. Paper 337.

SILENCE AND SELF-MAKING:
BLACK LUNG RHETORIC AND THE KEN HECHLER LETTERS

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts

English

by

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August 2012

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee Dr. Chris Green, Dr. Kelli Prejean, and Dr. Roxanne Kirkwood for their continued encouragement and support throughout the years to help bring this thesis to its full potential. Special thanks go to Ken Hechler for his donation of the letters to the college library for further research and the James A. Morrow Special Collections for allowing me access to the letters. Finally, thank you to my family and friends for standing beside me even when things got tough.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Appalachian Coal Miner: A Self-Made Man	5
Chapter 2: The Rhetoric of Black Lung.....	23
Chapter 3: The Black Lung Letters	40
Afterward: A Note From the Author	62
Works Cited.....	69
Curriculum Vitae.....	75

List of Figures

Figure 1: Initial Application Process Pattern.....	42
Figure 2: Box Containment.....	44
Figure 3: Application of Assistance Hechler.....	45
Figure 4: Appeal Pattern.....	47
Figure 5: Letter to Miner 1.....	49
Figure 6: Hechler Response.....	51
Figure 7: Hechler Letter to the Director.....	52
Figure 8: Daniels Letter pg. 1.....	55
Figure 9 Daniels Letter pg. 2.....	56
Figure 10: Kessley Letter.....	58
Figure 11: Oswald Letter.....	59
Figure 12: Roger Letter.....	60

Introduction

Our understanding of the rhetorical scholar continues to change and transform with various new theoretical approaches within the field. Today's rhetorician does not limit him or herself to the confines of the university; instead, he or she often serves as an agent of change for those beyond the academic boundaries by incorporating multi-disciplinary fields and encouraging different and new methodologies (community-oriented, learner-centered, user-centered, and service-oriented) in composition and rhetorical studies (Cushman 328-336; Pratt 1-6). This movement of transformation in rhetorical studies is rooted in feminist and cultural specializations, which focus on providing voices to those silenced or often ignored by the mainstream culture. These writers' topics often discuss issues of power and silence in history, conversation, and everyday interactions; furthermore, the writers encourage understanding and appreciation for cultures once misrepresented by those in power and encourage reclamation of these identities through new interpretations. These new areas of rhetorical studies have helped project the field into a driven machine of change.

The field of rhetorical studies has not stood alone in this movement of change. The interdisciplinary field of Appalachian studies has also pushed for community-oriented research since its inception in 1978. In "Appalachian Studies, Resistance, and Postmodernism," author Alan Banks explains the main goal of Appalachian studies has been to provide a voice to those both outside of the sphere of academia and within its walls: "In Appalachian Studies, research and action have always had an important connection. This is not to say all perspectives on Appalachia contribute equally to an effort to understand or abolish social inequalities in the region. But ameliorative impulses

have predominated, rather than scholarly attachment” (284). As Banks notes, at the heart of much of Appalachian studies resides the desire to share the interests of the people as a voice for change. Appalachian studies opens its doors to those wishing to be included into the field, whether they are from a community action group or a professor emeritus in a major university classroom. As long as the intent is clearly to provide and serve the good of Appalachia, all voices are welcome and encouraged to share their stories. With two such driven fields of scholarly- and community-oriented change, it is no surprise that rhetorical and Appalachian studies have developed many types of interdisciplinary research on topics such as literacy, pedagogy, and ethnographic exploration.¹

One continuing pattern in the field of Appalachian rhetorical studies is the focus upon accounts of Appalachia identity.² The studies typically center around the previous assumptions by both Outsiders and those created within their own communities, which bears a striking resemblance to the movement in both cultural and feminist rhetorical studies that focuses on identity rhetoric and silence. John Inscoe discusses this trend in Appalachian scholarship in his 2004 article “The Discovery of Appalachia: Regional Revisionism in the Scholarly South.” Inscoe notes a rising interest in the minority experience in the coalfields. African Americans, women, immigrants, and others are rewriting their own tales of Appalachia and correcting long-held beliefs and assumptions about the experience known as the “Appalachian” mining experience. The awakening of

¹ See Anita Puckett’s “‘Let the Girls do the Spelling, and Dan will do the Shooting’: Literacy and Identity in a Rural Appalachian Community” and Kathryn Kelleher Sehn’s *Whistlin and Crowin’ Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College*.

² See Dwight B. Billings, Katherine Ledford, and Gurney Norman’s *Confronting Stereotypes in Appalachia: Back Talk from an American Region* and Emily Satterwhite’s *Dear Appalachia: Readers, Identity, and Popular Fiction Since 1878*.

this type of re-discovery in the field brings about new voices and experiences before the Appalachian community.

The following thesis draws upon interdisciplinary scholarship, and it combines feminist and gender rhetorical theory with Appalachian studies to explore issues of identity surrounding black lung disease (coal worker's pneumoconiosis) in the Central Appalachia areas of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky from the 1880s to the late 1970s. The thesis's first chapter incorporates feminist, gender, and silence rhetoric to explore the dominant and popular historical accounts surrounding coal miners in southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. The chapter provides an overview of the identity of the mountaineer and coal miner through the writings of historians (both early and contemporary) and the local-color authors. The chapter draws upon the theory used in Joe Catano's *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and Rhetoric of the Self-Made Man* by exploring the numerous characteristics of the "self-made" persona in the representations of coal miners and reasons for the usage and continual appearance of this identity over other representations in historical scholarship. In addition, while exploring this pattern of self-making, the reader will begin to notice the absence of a key issue present: black lung.

The second chapter explores implications that the absence of pneumoconiosis holds not only for the identity of the self-made persona but for the coal mining industry as a whole. The beginning of the chapter provides an overview of the history surrounding black lung and analyzes historical records with feminist rhetorical theory to investigate instances in which the disease was shown to be present but was ignored by many in the dominant community. The chapter concludes by discussing the efforts of the Black Lung Association's increase in presence during the 1960s civil rights movement to go against

such masculine strongholds as the United States Government and in some cases the United Mine Workers of America.

The third chapter of this thesis applies the interdisciplinary techniques of ethnography, rhetoric, and Appalachian studies to a case study of the Ken Hechler black-lung appellate epistolary collection. The chapter discusses the visual presentation of the letters, comparing those written by the miners to the letters written by Ken Hechler as a way to identify power present through correspondence; it especially focuses on the issue of the relationship between literacy, silence, voice, and power. The second half of the chapter explores the discourse of the miners' dialogue with Hechler to display how they used their voice to establish their own self-made persona and attempt to provide voice in a system that has silenced them.

Chapter 1

The Appalachian Coal Miner: A Self-Made Man

Our history books help create our heroes. In the case of Appalachian history, some historians represented explorers into the area as heroes, and others focused on politicians and soldiers. For labor historians, heroes held no place in political office (although they rattled a few political cages); they did not discover unchartered lands (for they knew the lands beneath their own feet were valuable enough). Labor historians see their historical heroes in the individual who resided in the coalfields on a daily basis, often with no recognition, but who defined a hero in every sense of the word: the central Appalachian coal miner. Some authors chose to write about labor conflicts while others chose to write about miners' everyday lives. Many discussed the dangerous atmosphere of the trade and exposed the various inequalities within the Appalachian communities. Told for over a century, these stories about coal miners identities have been passed down from generation to generation.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault explains that history is created by the dominant ideological and economic power structures that control information through discourse (media, verbal, academic, etc.). As a result, these structures regulate what interpretations and representations pass as accurate and acceptable views of history. These views influence scholars as they conduct their own research and perpetuate the more "credentialed" opinions as basis for their research and scholarly interests. As time progresses, these ideas change and develop into what Foucault refers to as an "evolution of mentalities" (121), which presents itself as historic

discourse. This evolution of mentalities does not limit or determine what is important in history; it simply reveals a pattern of thought or persistent ideas that remains before the public for years, decades, even centuries. As a result, the ideas help establish myths and accepted histories leaving those excluded to remain lost in silence. In Appalachian history, the mythology of the central Appalachian coal miners serves as one example of Foucault's "evolution of mentalities," as scholars continually borrow themes and characterizations used by previous scholars as basis for motifs for their own work, in particular, the self-made man theme.

James Catano's *Ragged Dicks: Masculinity, Steel, and Rhetoric of the Self Made Man* describes the mythical doxa associated with defining the self-made man. Catano explains the stories are "present in various fields of literature and history in which the reader observes 'morally uplifting stories' that enact a successful struggle to overcome less than spectacular origins and reap justly deserved economic and personal rewards" (1). Catano emphasizes how this identity, once associated with figureheads like Andrew Carnegie and Lee Iacocca, fits just as easily onto the identity of laborers in the steel and ironworking industries—only in a more subversive form—because of their similar masculine themes such as independent agency of self, "anti-institutionalism," organization through unionism, patriarchal structure, and dangerous acceptance of one's profession (1-15). These attributes help define the laborers' masculinity, representations of which have become firmly ingrained in the consciousness of American readers. This identity of self-making is present throughout the discourse of coal. Through a brief examination of the labor history, which enacts those established techniques, this chapter focuses on the understanding of the mythology of the self-made identity attributed to the

southern- and central-Appalachian mountaineer and coal miner and its presence in the discourse of coal history.

Saying “Haloo”

To understand the beginnings of the self-made identity associated with the Appalachian mountaineer-coal miner, all one needs to do is look to the early writings that helped develop the nation’s mindsets about Appalachian men during the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries. These tales, known as local-color stories, written by Outsiders and featured in popular magazines of the time period, painted romantic stories contrary to the bustling metropolis cities of that period (Shapiro). These stories help establish the basis for the evolution of mentalities that would become associated with the doxic identity of Appalachian men and carried over as a common staple to much of Appalachian coal literature.

One example of these writings is present in David Hunter Strother’s 1872 narrative of his time spent in West Virginia titled “The Mountains³.” Strother describes the Appalachian countryside and wildlife as almost Edenistic in nature:

Here the arrowy trout flashes through transparent waters leaping for his morning and evening meal and sleeps at noonday in deep shadowy pools, unvexed by hooks or nets. The wild turkey displays his green and gold plumage, strutting and gobbling in conceited majesty, unadmired except by silly hens, unscared except by the subtle fox. The red doe, with tender

³ Strother took the pseudonym “Porte Crayon” during his time exploring the Allegheny Valley in 1853. His writings, which were mostly submitted to *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, described his travels and provided drawing of the inhabitants of the land (*West Virginia History Online*).

wildness leads her speckled fawns through forests whose echoes have never been startled by the woodsman's axe. From unshorn thickets the brindled wolf glares and watches, still preferring starvation to servitude. (802)

In this paradise, the fish swim through the water unafraid of death at the hands of the man (hooks or nets); the doe is not disturbed by the progress of the timber industry (the woodsman's axe); and the wild turkey experiences no judgment or fear. The depictions bring about an idea of Appalachia before the intrusion of Outsiders as utopian: Appalachia as the Garden of Eden and the mountaineer as Adam.

The portrayal of West Virginia by Strother reveals an almost mythical land, making those who inhabit it even more mysterious. Strother's narrative displays the relationship between the Appalachians and his surroundings when discussing the inhabitants: "Rugged paths harden his baby-feet: the chase of rabbits and ground squirrels toughens his boyish sinews Simple but strong, uncouth but sincere, the man of the mountains knows nothing of the luxury and refinements of the cities and is equally protected from most of their ambition; with nothing he is rich in the independence arising from few simple wants" (802). The mountaineer is portrayed as Adam in a new Eden, a comparison that Malcom Ross uses later in *Machine Age in the Hills* [43]. Furthermore, Strother's work mirrors the similarities between the mountaineer and the creatures in his surroundings. Much like the fish and the deer, he knows no trouble from the outside world; in addition, his demeanor and appearance mimic that of the turkey and the wolf whose appearance is of no concern and whose independence ("starvation or servitude") rivals the naturalistic tone of his character.

The inclusion of these romantic and mythological depictions of the mountaineer serves two purposes: to establish the myth of self-made identity for the mountaineer and to serve as a counterpoint to the civilization that would develop around him through the ever-impending industrialization of the Appalachian countryside. The reflection of the self-making mythos in the Appalachian man and his surroundings primarily relies on his ability to maintain personal freedom in every aspect of his lifestyle. Authors and historians portray a free individual not controlled by the influences or ideologies of the outside culture. The only paternal (mental or literal) figure that he answers to is his own father from whom he eventually inherits the land and assumes ownership to continue its prosperity. He is literally fulfilling the role of his father and possibly usurping him if blessed with prosperity upon reaching manhood or after the father's departure. In addition to this vision of the early Appalachian culture, the mountaineer demonstrates self-making along the lines of a Jeffersonian yeoman. In this vision, the authors emphasized the Agrarian brotherhood from landowner to landowner in an isolated society that was able to maintain its own sense of prosperity without interruption. These archetypal images lay the foundation for further development of the self-making identity because authors discuss this attribute as part of his core nature, despite whatever obstacles or changes in his future lifestyle occur through industrialization of his homeland.

After writers established the romantic notion of the old Appalachian experience, many of them contrast this vision with a slow industrial expansion into the area and the changes both good and bad which this scenario brought to the area. In these depictions, the self-making identity continues in several forms. It first appears in the tales of the

displacement from the land as a result of Outsiders buying mineral rights through broad-form deeds and the stereotypes it helped generate about the people in the area. Often authors discussing this issue portrayed the mountaineer as individuals tricked by Outsiders to selling their land, which in turn showed the Appalachian as hostile and defensive of his property forbidding the intrusion of any man to what was rightfully his. Eller makes use of this image in his *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* when he explains, “land agents were just as likely to be greeted with a shotgun as a ‘halloo’” (57). Modeling this image, the authors in numerous accounts discuss the impact this change had on the vision of the Appalachian. As Katherine Ledford notes in "A Landscape and A People Set Apart," the characterizing varied upon the authors' motives and industrial interests for the area. Ledford explains,

When members of contentious social groups met on a landscape considered a barrier to desirable westward expansion, explorers characterized the mountains as dangerous. But when that landscape turned into a valuable commodity and settlers were a potential barrier between the explorers and exploitation of natural resources, the mountains became beautiful and the inhabitants became adversarial, unnatural, and out of control. (41)

Many of these contrasting images, as Ledford notes, owe themselves to the industrialization of the area, which in turn develops the motifs associated with the mountaineer: a defiant, proud individual who wished to keep his land despite the changing conditions.

An alternative identity to the defiant mountaineer still fits within the perimeters of the myth of self-making; instead of fighting for their land, others chose to sell their land and move (Shiftlett 11-26). This alternative view develops a level of self-making associated with a separation of the paternal figurehead as mountaineers wish to profit from their father's success and make their own way in an industrial society as timber workers, railroad workers, or coal miners. During this time, the identity of the miner starts as historians and authors begin to narrate the transformation of agrarian lifestyles to the mountaineer-miners' life in the early coal camps. The writers describe the living conditions, everyday life, and fatalistic (almost sadomasochistic) nature of the mountaineer-miner and his work— all of which perpetuate and maintain the self-made identity.

“Adam in a New Garden of Eden”

The depiction of the Appalachian male as strong, independent, and resilient does not leave him once he becomes an occupant of industrialization. His new identity in the Appalachian countryside after industrialization continued despite his poor living conditions—another self-making theme that dominates much of the background associated with the area over the past century from the coal-towns era to the “War on Poverty” to his current conditions in modern day Appalachian culture.

The accounts of the early-twentieth-century coal towns that miners lived in maintain a distinct motif that many authors carried over from writer to writer. As with any account, many of the depictions varied based upon the motives of the author (labor activist, historian, fiction writer, etc.), but in each case, they usually made one fact clear:

ultimate control of the coal camps resided with those who owned it. Everything in the miners' lives revolved around the company. The education they received. The money they exchanged. The place they lived. The news they heard. All revolved around those in power with the company. Authors describe a hegemonic structure put into place causing a strict division of labor and few lifestyle options. In addition, stories focusing around these coal towns often narrated how the companies exerted control (similar to a father figure punishing his son for disobeying him) by ejecting, blacklisting, or even killing miners should they exert efforts control their own lives through unionizing or other forms of organizing.⁴ Labor activists, writers, historians, and scholars told tales of deplorable conditions in comparison to those of the main-stream urban culture. In his 1922 account, Winthrop Lane discussed the conditions of the area he came to visit:

The result of this general mode of life is that mining towns are unsightly, unhealthful, and poorly looked after [. . .] Today four hundred thousand men, women, and children in West Virginia are living in subservient existence. They are caught up in a civilization within a civilization [. . .] There is no escape from it for them. Its paternalism touches their lives at every point. (qtd in Corbin 8)

The civilization within a civilization and paternalism that Lane describes displays itself in the surroundings that help create the coal camps. Writers and historians alike describe isolated towns where individuals were placed in housing controlled by the company. Miners no longer had land, stripping them of their agrarian identity. Despite the

⁴See David Allen Corbin's *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Mine Wars 1880-1922* and Ronald Eller's *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South 1880-1930*.

description of this hegemonic structure, miners still found a way to promote the self-making identity through other outlets such as personal values, family life, and daily activities.

By emphasizing the control the company had over the miners, it actually helps formulate the self-making identity further by providing a strong “paternal” figurehead for the miners to rebel against and achieve their own personal prosperity. Other writers tell tales of community groups rising up in the towns through churches or sports leagues, while others describe miners able to find ways to maintain their own autonomy through growing their own food and raising their own livestock within the towns (Eller 182-193; Shiflett 162-173). In each case, the authors make it clear that despite the nature of the world surrounding the miners, a sense of freedom is still possible should they take the initiative.

Over the next few decades, this depiction of the Appalachian countryside increased as individuals continued to come in from the Outside and describe the living conditions they found in Appalachia. Journalist Malcom Ross traveled the area of the Blue Ridge Mountains in 1931 and 1932 to describe the current state of the area. He explained, “As all observers who went there, I was appalled by misery, entertained by the mountain character, and made uncomfortable by the air of suspicion hanging over the region” (6). He goes on to note the “sensationalism” that surrounds the area as labor reporters go looking for stories in the area about the current conflicts. Although his time of travel was during the Great Depression, he emphasized that this region of the United States was even more roughly effected by the economy and driving even those who once flourished to complete poverty. During his travel writing, he describes his interaction

with the people of the area and clarifies the identity of the male “mountaineer-miner.” Ross’s usage of the mountaineer character as the root of his definition (in comparison to those of the rest of the American population) is apparent because he, like the writers of the past, describes a mountaineer stuck in a miner’s body: “Whatever the new route, we need the constant reminder that this thing we call a machine age civilization is merely old Adam in a new suit. Coal miners are ‘surplus workmen’ in a declining industry. They are also hill-billies, who have by no means shaken off habits bred through generations of farm life” (33). He explains that while some miners were defiant, other were just as eager to get back to being farmers. Ross saw what he believed to be a fatalistic group longing for the days of yesterday (94).

As mechanization and strip-mining started in the 1940s, many Appalachian miners found themselves out of work and needed to either leave the area or adjust to the changes by moving up the ladder within the coal industry. These periods saw the eventual dispersal of the Appalachian population from the coal towns and the reintroduction of Appalachian coal miner through the War on Poverty. Accounting events such as the Buffalo Creek disaster authors like Bill Peterson (*Coal Town Revisited*, 1972), Kai T. Erickson (*Everything in Its Path*, 1976), and Harry Caudill (*Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, 1962) described a land similar to the one described by Ross in their depictions. In each case they display a mountaineer trapped by his surroundings that the coal company has helped create. To this day the appearance of the Appalachian and his surroundings resonates with these early interpretations. As an editorial in the *New York Times* noted in 2011, “There are two classic American folktales about coal. The first tells of greedy rednecks who blow virgin mountains to smithereens. The second tells of greedy

corporations that exploit and endanger stout-hearted workers, making sure their souls are owed to the company store” (Hefferenan).

The Miner and His Profession

Despite the outward control of the corporate structure, the miner keeps his masculine self-made identity through the paternalistic nature of the work performed. The depiction of the miner is one of mythic proportions. Individuals applaud him for performing a dangerous and necessary job but paint his character as something of a “wild-man.” In each case, they portray him as a self-made individual, almost fatalistic in nature, living in a paternalistic society. The best example of the classification of the miner as filling the position of the self-making myth is present in the work David Allen Corbin’s *Life, Work, and Rebellion* (1982). He defines the miner as an individual who, despite the patriarchal system surrounding him, is able to maintain his own sense of “individualistic independence which is the most important component in the miners’ freedom” (38). They may have had an operator or supervisor to whom they answered, but they were often left on their own to develop their own mining method. Not only were they the ones to determine how they worked but for how long. Corbin then explains those who left the industry often had trouble coping with the nature of the working world and supervision in plants and factories (38-39).

The most common motif found in the recounting of the daily activities of the miner are the long work hours, positions held within the mine by the individuals, and the typical lifestyle that would go with their individual responsibilities. In each case, the author describes the hierarchy of the mining workforce and the skill level necessary to

obtain each position.⁵ This description of the system allows the author to explain the advancement process for miners and therefore the scale of masculinity. The writers begin to classify the coal miners at the bottom rungs starting with the young boys and older men (see “Twice a Boy,” a concept discussed in the next chapter). The further up the rung miners were, the more work they were able to perform, the more skills they had, the greater their worthiness to those around them.

Because many of the miners relied both on themselves and their families to help earn money, father and son often worked side by side in the coalfields. In Tam’s *Smokeless Coal Fields of West Virginia*, he explains that in many instances, it was common for the young boy to help the father out, should the family need the money (34). This example helps perpetuate the myth of self making by the authors as fathers prepare their sons to eventually take their places: “The son acknowledges the authority of the father and thereby earns the right to participate in and eventually inherit the father’s authority”(Catano 92). The son has moved from inheriting the land his father once owned and operated to inheriting his trade to one day provide for his own family should he choose to stay in the coal fields. A classic example of this depiction is found in the book *Black Days, Black Dust*. In this oral account, an African American miner (Bob Armstead) describes his rise through the coalfields as the son of a mule driver to eventually surpass his father and find himself in a more successful position.

Along with understanding the patriarchal nature of the work and brotherly dependence with other workers, a sense of danger is often associated with the trade. The

⁵See David Allen Corbin’s *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Mine Wars 1880-1922*; Ronald Eller’s *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South 1880-1930*; W.C. Tams’s *The Smokeless Coalfields of West Virginia*; and Kai T. Erickson’s *Everything in Its Path*.

work takes a toll on the miner's body, and he risks his life daily going underground. As Priscilla Long notes in *Where the Sun Never Shines*, the idea of death hung over many of the workers and their families: "From 1839 through 1914 more than 61,000 men died in the coal mines of the United States"(44). Resulting from roof collapses, "haulage accidents," slate and rock fall, and explosions, these accidents and help create the daily dangerous atmosphere surrounding the miner. Stories about the various mine explosions and collapses dominate many of the visions of the work. Authors describe the miners' daily activities and mention the miners are aware of the risks. Just as much as authors in the 1970s and 1980s were describing the working conditions surrounding the mines, people such as Jeff Goodell (*Big Coal*) addressed safety concerns and the nature of the current industry practices.

Fighting the Institution

Although the Appalachian coal-miner and mountaineer maintained a sense of independence despite his conditions, there remained a sense of control over them by the company. Regardless of being subject to the company rules, the Appalachian miners once again model the self-made mythos by choosing to stand up to the corporate control through organization and anti-institutionalism. Many of the mines remained unorganized in the central Appalachians for much of the early twentieth century and only organized due to the threat to their personal freedoms by the corporate structure.

In *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields*, Corbin discusses the reason for this: many of the traditional backgrounds such as farming and agriculture helped the miner sustain himself. Corbin explains that it was not until the introduction of the

Baldwin-Felts guard system that many of the miners even considered unionization. The guards were often an extension of brute force and control by those of the company and robbed the individuals of what few rights they may have had such as the right to free speech and organization (26; 201-2). In many cases, the Baldwin Felts were immune to the laws of the state, providing a second level of servitude and emasculation for the miners. The Baldwin Felts guards were essentially the breaking point for many coal miners. This defiance leads up into our third and final identity, that of the organized miner and his rebellious tendencies.

Despite the association of the defiant unionized coal worker that dominates the historical motifs and representations, many of the central coalfields remained nonunion until the early 1930s. During this period, writers tend to focus on the first of two major labor struggles that take place in the coalfields: the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912-13. During this time, the workers walked out of the mines in protest. The reasons for the strike were numerous but included the demand for a nine-hour workday, the elimination of the Baldwin Felts agents from the fields, and the recognition of the union. The miners showed a spirit of solidarity and separation from those in control of the coalfields.

Because of the strike, the Baldwin Felts Agency threw miners out of their company homes denying the miners essential material possessions. However, through this elimination of the housing, miners displayed their masculinity and an identity closer to that of the original free mountaineer. Many of the miners were isolated in tent colonies where they spent months surviving through their own endeavors. Even though they did receive aid from outside sources upon occasion, their reliance upon one another as “a

brotherhood” of individuals helped them break free from the control of the company. During this time, the company chose to extend their power over the coalfields through various attacks upon those living in the colonies.

The Bull Moose special is one of the ultimate displays of violence and aggression by the company. In a display of masculine aggression, the company chose to attack the miners living within the tent colonies by using multiple forms of symbolic male phallic violence. The Baldwin Felts used machine guns—also a phallic symbolic element mounted on the train—upon the families inhabiting the tent colonies. To top all of the phallic symbolism, the name of the event itself best describes the masculine nature of the event. The miners began to retaliate through the same form of masculine aggression, not only by striking but by beginning to become militant as well.

The incident that occurred with the Paint-Creek-Cabin Creek Strike helps perpetuate the myth of self-making through the collective actions, which took place by the rank and file miners in the field. They were able to stand on their own as organized men and women in the fields against multiple paternal power figures such as the owners, the operators, the state militia, and even their own union. The miners were subject to much of the control by the company, but as conditions of the strike grew worse. The miners began to find other alternatives besides strikes: violence. As Corbin notes, the miners’ own union had begun to become weary of their support for the miners. Their support for the strikers in West Virginia was beginning to wane and they were just as quick to want to settle the strike as the operators. The miners began to seek alternatives, and they enlisted the help of both the Socialist Party and the National Rifle Association. Miners eventually began to attack the guards much as they were attacking the miners.

Violence became a factor as both women and men alike began to defend themselves and help end the strike (88-93). Eventually the strike was resolved through bargaining and several of the demands were met, but it was not long before events would unfold to lead to another strike that would define West Virginia in the eyes of historians to come.

During the years of 1919 to 1921, the southern West Virginia coalfields saw enormous unrest despite the events that occurred during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike, leading to the largest civil uprising that has occurred in labor history. World War I saw an eruption for the need for coal, and the operators and owners saw it as a chance to not only psychologically control the individuals living in their coal towns, but to promote and restrict the opportunities for future labor unrest and union organization. During this time the company town continued to flourish, and many of the operators used this opportunity to promote their ideologies through creating town schools, recreational facilities, and community churches. In addition, many of the company owners saw the rise in need for coal by the government as an opportunity to keep wages low and profits high as opposed to sharing the wealth with their workers. Any union organizers brought into the field (especially in the counties of southern West Virginia) were in danger along with those that supported them. Wildcat strikes began to erupt, and once again bloodshed became common amongst miners and the mine guards.

The Battle of Blair Mountain was a culmination of anger towards the guard system and failed government action. On May 19, 1920, an event later known as the "Matewan Massacre" occurred resulting in the death of several Baldwin Felts agents (who had ejected miners from company houses), the mayor, and townspeople. Events continued to escalate in the field as organizing and striking became part of the daily life

among the people in the county. Individuals appealed to authorities for help and assistance, but they soon became aware of either inaction by the politician and the political figures' ability to look the other way. The voices of the miners were still not heard despite support from the UMWA and their political leaders. They planned to allow union activity in Mingo County regardless of what obstacles stood in their way. As word spread through the fields and violence began to break out, the miners began to find solidarity with other rank and file miners and supporters. A march of some 10,000 miners was organized by unionize organizers, leaving southern Kanawha County, heading toward Mingo, and they encountered company forces at Blair Mountain in Logan County.

The methods used to help support themselves during the march on Blair Mountain show defiant self-making solidarity between the miners. As they marched through the fields, they found ways to get ammunition through fellow miners and suppliers who supported their cause and raided company stores that once held so much control over their daily interactions and economic exchange. As Corbin notes, they left non-company owned shops alone. They even used their training as former soldiers to help prepare other miners for battle. They built their own army and were prepared to get their rights back at any cost. The march and battle only lasted one week and ended through the intervention of federal troops (the ultimate form of paternalistic control). These miners' actions help define a generation of coal miners in the eyes of the historians and continue to be explored to this day ⁶(Corbin 195-224).

⁶ See George S. Twain's *The Blair Mountain War*; William C. Blizzard's *When Miners March*; and Robert Shogun's *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of Americas Largest Labor Uprising*.

Conclusion

These common motifs show a sense of resilience in the face of hard times. They paint the Appalachian coal miner as a figure of self-made capabilities. The central Appalachian coal miner is able to overcome hard living conditions, to work in a high-risk profession, and to organize battles between the coal bosses and unions. They forwarded a fairytale of the miner's mythological persona that the miner and his community can overcome everything so long as they work hard enough and continue to battle those who challenge them.

While scholars may differ in their politics or the overall interpretation of the coal towns, they all portray coal miners as self-made men.. However, one thing is missing--the presence of the miner with black lung. This next section will discuss the absence of black lung from scholarship, its silent history, and how the bit of scholarship that is present from previous scholars about black lung, still fits into this identity of self-making.

Chapter II

The Rhetoric of Black Lung

“For it is coal that has brought about this state of affairs.”

—James A. Cain, 1923

Cheryl Glenn notes in her work *Unspoken: The Rhetoric of Silence* that “all silence has meaning” (11). Glenn explains that in many instances silence is used as a tool of power by those of the controlling group to manipulate or control perceptions and opinions of the subordinate groups in contemporary culture. This manipulation of perceptions and opinions can prove immensely fruitful to the dominant class because controlling what information to share with those underneath them might prevent monetary loss or embarrassment. Black lung disease falls into this subcategory of the controlling of silences because public conversation and acknowledgement of the disease can expose the multiple silences built up around perceptions of the coal industry and the myth of the Appalachian coal miner.

Our history books paint many pictures of the men in Appalachia as strong, resilient, self-made individuals; however, as this chapter will explain, there is still a topic that is often left out of the narrative of the Appalachian coal miner: black lung. This story is often overlooked for one reason or another. In many cases, the identity of the disease was not discussed in books because the disease itself was still unknown to mainstream culture. This explains much of the literature up through the 1960s, but black lung’s absence from more modern texts has other implications. By not mentioning or

discussing the nondominatory discourse, the authors are able to adhere to the self-made mythology without offering a contradictory image. However, scholars should consider combining the identity of the coal miner with black lung along with current images of self-making mythology because its historical narrative coincides with the same self-making qualities.

A History of Silence

The silence surrounding the disease revolves around a long history of manipulation of information and understanding. Individuals such as doctors, owners, and operators working side by side controlled the information about the disease, often leaving it invisible to the culture for the better half of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Our current understanding of Coal Worker's Pneumoconiosis (CWP), or "black lung" as it is more commonly referred, is that it is a lung disease that develops from years working alongside or inside of the coal mines. The outward signs of the disease (shortness of breath, coughing fits, spitting of black sputum, etc.) are often not noticeable until the disease has progressed within the miner's body. Eventually the disease attacks the fibrosis tissues of the lung and turns them a black color only noticeable through x-rays or death (Smith 1-30; Derickson 1-21). Although the disease was studied in various countries such as England, Scotland, and Italy as early as the nineteenth century, not much attention was paid to the disease until the miners and their unions took it upon themselves to spread the word about the disease to the public. In doing so, the miners eventually broke through the silence and fulfilled the identity of self-making by

combating the patriarchal system, which subjected them to silence through denial of knowledge about their conditions.

The first problem with identifying the disease and breaking the silence around issues of compensation is acknowledging its existence. As Foucault notes in *The Birth of the Clinic*, a disease is only acknowledgeable if seen (108). Because the disease is not visible until it has progressed into severe late stages, its existence hidden until death is immanent or found during an individual's autopsy. This is where the physician comes into play. His or her responsibility as a doctor is to prevent and diagnose conditions they believe to be harmful to individuals. Their "clinical gaze" can create or disprove the existence of an illness simply by acknowledging it. By recognizing a disease's existence, the doctor can then begin the proper procedures to have it treated, explored, or in the case of labor-caused illnesses, approved for compensation.

In the first address to the American Association for Labor Legislation during the First National Conference on Industrial Diseases in 1910, Dr. Henry W. Farnam best classified the power that organization had upon the discovery and treatment of diseases: "Our present situation of our Association is like that of a watchman on a high tower. He does not know exactly how the attack is to be made but he knows enough to justify him in giving the alarm and in advising that scouts be sent to ascertain more precisely the strength and position of the foe" (Farnam 6). The metaphor that Farnell uses is strong and accurate: the doctors are the ones who are "the watchmen" for issues and medical discoveries. Farnell acknowledges the power they have as watchmen, by placing them above other "scouts." Their information does not just have an overall effect, but it trickles down to other individuals to alert them of dangers, similar to doctors meeting at a

conference to discuss lung diseases and spreading their discoveries to other doctors to treat patients of their own.

The first medically recorded case of black lung disease was in Scotland in 1831. It was discovered while Doctor James Gregory of Edinburgh was performing an autopsy upon the corpse of a former soldier and coal miner, John Hogg. During the exam, he noticed the presence of the “black carbonous color” on the lungs of the individual (qtd. in Smith 3). A further examination by that doctor led to study on cadavers of future miners. Studies conducted in other countries regarding the disease and its presence occurred, but many remained out of the discussion and out of academic and medical awareness including in the United States.

During the Colorado Medical Society’s first meeting in 1881, Dr. H.A. Lemon introduced the American community to the condition. He first noticed the disease predominantly in coal miners he treated, and similar to Scottish doctor, he saw the black expectoration. Lemon decided to address the academic community about the disease and did so in a unique way. At the end of his presentation, he startled his audience by revealing, “The sentence that I am reading was written with this fluid. The pen used has never been in ink” (1). The visualization helped emphasize the problem’s existence to the doctors and allowed them to understand the severity of the disease.

Whereas some physicians in surrounding countries and within the United States were beginning to talk about the disease at the turn of the century, those running the coal industry were slowly building ways to control the conversation and prevent discussion of the disease by miners and the American industrial and medical communities. Contrary to the position of “the watchmen,” many doctors in the coal fields silenced their concerns

rather than voicing them. Because many coal companies hired physicians, their judgment and examinations were influenced by their status of employment. In *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coalfields* David Corbin describes the power the doctors had over the knowledge of the people in their area: “The miners appreciated the doctor’s services, but they did not appreciate the doctor who worked for the company official Company doctors often served as spies for the company The company doctors sided with the coal company in most affairs” (135). The mere process of examination by the physicians allowed for those in control to maintain silence. Because the miner wasn’t as educated or informed as the company doctor about health, miners found themselves dependent upon the doctor despite trickery on the doctor’s part.

One reason for the delay or lack of interest in identification and compensation of coal workers pneumoconiosis by both the medical and industrial communities was the perception of the problem as threatening the economy of the coal mining industry. The continued discussion of the disease would bring about further acknowledgment of it as a condition associated with the coal mining industry and create a discourse that would eventually lead to its compensation by the company. James Paul Gee establishes in “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics” that bringing discourse into the mainstream can produce power:

Dominant discourses are secondary discourses, the mastery of which at a particular place and time bring with it the potential acquisition of social “goods” (money, prestige, status, etc). Nondominatory discourses are secondary discourses, the mastery of which often brings solidarity with a

particular social network, but not a wider status and social goods in society at large. (527-8)

Acknowledging black lung could only hurt the power structure of the mining companies and would bring with it the loss of material goods through lack of employees, disability compensations, and a lack of interest in the industry as a whole. By denying, silencing, or ignoring it, the disease would remain part of a nondominatory discourse rarely heard outside of the coalfields.

Other factors that resulted in coal workers pneumoconiosis remaining unknown for many years include the misdiagnosis or mislabeling of the disease because of its similarities to other lung diseases such as silicosis. Richard Mulachy mentions this confusion in *A Social Contract for the Coal Fields: The Rise and Fall of the United Mine Workers of America Welfare and Retirement Fund*. Mulachy explains that while both the diseases were similar since they were lung diseases, they were both “distinct and different varieties of the same general condition afflicting people in industries that exposed them to high levels of dust in the work environment” (144). Silicosis is the inhalation of carbon silica dioxide settling in the lungs of miners, and pneumoconiosis is caused by coal dust in the lungs of the individuals (Mulachy 144-5). Because the two diseases were so similar, misdiagnosis occurred and misclassification often prevented further correct discussion. The early classifications of the disease ranged in names from “miner’s cough,” to silicosis, and miner’s asthma.

Despite the fact that Coal Workers Pneumoconiosis was recognized as a compensable disease in Europe as early as the 1930s (Mulachy 145), it would be decades before it would be so recognized in the states. After the mechanization of the mines in the

early 1940s and 1950s increased the amount of dust in the air for the miners, interest began to grow in the disease. Mulachy writes about the interest the union and doctors associated with the Welfare and Retirement Fund took in bringing about renewed attention to Coal Workers Pneumoconiosis (CWP) still plaguing the coal fields:

The fact that CWP received any recognition in the United States at all was due mostly to the efforts of Dr. Kerr and the Fund, which focused on a dual program of education and treatment. Under education, a broad-line strategy was used. To begin, Kerr went through the available literature and wrote one of the first scholarly articles on the disease published in an American medical journal in modern times. Appearing in the August 1956 edition of *Industrial Medicine and Surgery* under the title “Coal Workers Pneumoconiosis,” the article described the disease, its effects and how it was recognized. This and other publications were reprinted and distributed to participating physicians throughout the coal fields. At the same time the Fund assisted in governmental surveys on dust disease among miners. It also held conferences on CWP by internationally known experts on the disease and sponsored an international X-ray classification for black lung to facilitate diagnosis. (145)

The coal-mining community in the U.S. was beginning to take notice of the disease through the efforts of the doctors, union leaders, and outspoken individuals. No longer just a concern for the individual worker, it was now becoming a focus for the political and industrial communities as well.

In the 1960s, with both federal funding and nonfederal funding, studies began to emerge in the medical field that focused on understanding Coal Worker's Pneumoconiosis and its presence in miners. The non-federally funded investigation conducted by Dr. Jan Leiban of Pennsylvania and published in 1961 found as many as 125,000 coal workers were afflicted (Fox 464). The federal study that was conducted over a period of several years and was published in 1962 revealing the following: "Over a two and a half years, investigators examined 2,550 active and 1,200 inactive bituminous coal miners. They found 10 percent of active miners and 20 percent of inactive afflicted with CWP" (Fox 463). The federal study performed by several leading physicians from West Virginia's Beckley Memorial Hospital also revealed a pattern associated with the progressive severity of the disease based upon the time spent working in the mine.

Efforts to achieve compensation and recognition of black lung continued throughout the decade as various initiatives and conversations occurred in the coal mining community and the medical community. In *United We Stand*, Maier Fox notes the increasing attention paid to the disease: "Pennsylvania added CWP to the list of diseases for which compensation was available in 1965—a few months after a conference on black lung at which four UMWA (United Mine Workers of America) representatives presented papers" (464). The initiatives and voices of the miners and medical community were now beginning to coincide and break into the public forum. The silence around the disease was finally beginning to end, bringing it into a dominant discourse and furthering the probability for its recognition as a compensable disease.

As the decade progressed, more attention focused on acknowledgement of the disease through individuals in government, the medical community, and even through the

UMWA; however, some individuals felt their voices were still ignored, so they formed their own groups to push the issue further. Two grass root groups, the West Virginia Black Lung Association (BLA) and the Association of Disabled Miners and Widows, continued efforts in the field to give voice to those who felt they had been misled by their own unions. Both organizations participated in demonstrations and pushed for initiatives in the political forum to increase their rights to compensation. The BLA in particular was so well known in the field that they were able to draw support from well-known and respected doctors (Dr. Donald Rasmussen and Dr. I. E. Buff), and Representative Ken Hechler of West Virginia (Fox 464-66).

Voices continued to be heard in the field and rang up through the political ladder. While the union was beginning to feel pressure from activist groups such as the BLA, a few in politics began to turn up the heat by introducing multiple bills in the House and Senate. Among those active in the political circle was Representative Hechler. Hechler pushed for efforts while campaigning and worked side by side with Dr. Rasmussen and Dr. I.E. Buff to fight for miners black lung compensation. He showed support for miners who were striking to obtain benefits, and he participated in rallies voicing his opinion on the issue.

The turning point regarding the dangers of mining and levels of dust in the mines occurred in 1968 after an explosion killing 78 miners in Farmington, West Virginia, drew national attention to the conditions of the mines in the United States:

The Farmington disaster provided an imperative for federal intervention in miner's safety that spilled over into adjacent areas. On December 9, 1968, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare proposed a limit of

three milligrams of respirable mine dust per cubic air . . . Ken Hechler, for one, took the announcement of the three-milligram limit as an authoritative endorsement of this level of protection. (Derickson 169)

The accident at Farmington did more than just bring attention to the dangers of the job. It solidified the need for a complete reformation of safety procedures and dust levels in the coal mining industry.

Congressman Hechler continued to press for the recognition of the disease. On February 9, 1969, Hechler introduced a bill to the House arguing for the recognition of coal worker's pneumoconiosis as a type of compensable disease. On February 27, 1969, West Virginia's *Charleston Gazette* reported on action taken by miners to rally in Washington: "The miners marched on the Capitol after a rally attended by about 2,000 in municipal auditorium, where more than half a dozen speakers discussed proposed legislation to cover black lung disease under worker's compensation" (Peeks 2). Many prominent members of the community—such as Congressman Hechler, Dr. I.E. Buff, and Dr. Donald Rassmussen of Beckley along with other officials championing black-lung compensation—attended the rally. Hechler spoke at the meeting stating, "The greatest heroes are you coal miners who have taken your future in your hands and said: 'No longer are we going to live and work and die like animals'" (Peeks 12). Hechler promised to continue to help represent them and create stronger laws for years to come. The Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 passed in the winter and many miners were informed of their eligibility to apply for compensation for black lung. The passage of the act provided a breakthrough, ending the silence and allowing acknowledgment and compensation. In particular, the fourth section of the act drew the first official guidelines

for compensation for miners who were in various stages of the disease, their widows, and dependents of the deceased miners.

Silence and Self Making

The passage of the 1969 Mine Health and Safety Act helped spread the word about black lung disease; however, a silence still surrounds the literature of coal in regards to the disease. Part of the reason for this under mention of the disease is the time of various books' publications—one cannot discuss what one does not understand or know. Regarding more recent works, two other possible reasons may be the reflection black lung has on the industry as a whole, and that the identity counters the myth of self making which is so closely connected to identity of coal miners created by previous scholars and historians.

In the Appalachian studies community, recent research surrounding the coal industry focuses on topics that affect the industry and community on a long-term basis. Issues such as mountaintop removal and continuing safety practices address the industry from an outward perspective and rely more on the vision of the industry as a whole than the individual. Pneumoconiosis is not like accidents or mountaintop removal. The disease is something the individual suffers through silently away from the public eye. If a major explosion or accident occurs, the various government agencies and citizen activists would step in to address the safety of the work site as well as the miners working on it. For instance, the disasters that rocked the areas of Sago, West Virginia and the Upper Big Branch in the past decade both brought national attention to the coal mining community. The miners who died in instant are memorialized in the conscious of the public spectrum;

the miner who suffered quietly over a period of years from black lung will remain nameless, unknown, and—if lucky—may receive compensation.

Why the silence surrounding the disease as opposed to the other issues such as mountaintop removal and environmental issues? The first answer is simple: black lung reflects upon the industry and its product in the long term. With the current need for coal rising in the United States and abroad, coal is cheap and accessible. Profit always predominates over individual health in large-scale companies. If a miner becomes sick, the industry would not be affected. One able body is just as good as another. The product will continue to be there. The accidents are immediately present to the public eye, whereas a single death of one miner in silence barely goes noticed. The miners go in understanding the risk of physical injury and immediate death; however, the issue of black lung is a slow process that occurs through prolonged exposure.

The second answer to the question of the silence around black lung is that it (at first glance) establishes an image contrary to the self-made mountaineer. As noted in the previous section, miners are surrounded by mythology of self-made rhetoric, and miners are defined by their careers. They have gradually been built up as these strong figures descended from the Scotch-Irish who thrived in an untamable land and battled with the coal companies through various hard conditions and survived. They lived through the War on Poverty and managed to continue to survive in a land about which the government forgot. This mythological figure seems capable of withstanding anything short of physical elimination by explosions or roof collapse. Black lung is the Achilles heel of this myth. The thought of a once-strong coal miner who tunneled underground

digging “16 tons” of coal but who is now unable to walk five feet without gasping for breath, opposes the mythology.

One classic example of the vision of contrary myth of the self-made miner and his loss of masculinity is in Allen Derickson’s *Black Lung: Anatomy of a Public Health Disaster*. He uses the old adage associated with the aging coal miner, “Twice a Boy.” This phrase indicates a double standard of worth derived from the progression of many of the mineworkers who climbed the ladder of employment only to end where they eventually started. First, the individual started out as a “breaker boy” sorting out coal from the other materials in the mine, then gradually the boy worked his way up to perform manly responsibilities deep in the mine. His worth continues to grow as he progresses up the chain of command, but, upon becoming sick with black lung, he is placed back with the boys because he is only able to perform the task of a boy due to his disability (27-9). In a sense, his worth as a commodity has decreased. Because he is no longer able to perform the techniques necessary to prove his worth as a skilled employee—also demonstrating strong masculinity characteristic of the typical miner work—the miner has lost worth and been reduced to a boy’s work.

Despite the negative images of black lung, there is still a presence of self-making with those afflicted by the disease that fits with the self-making mythology of the coal miner. The action taken by many of the coal miners and activists during the period of the late fifties and early sixties proves that although they were suffering from legal obstacles and the suffering of their own bodies, they were still able to band together through unionization and go against those in their own unions they believed were treating them unfairly or misrepresenting them. In the mid to late 1960s, the solidarity between miners,

doctors, and activists shows a strong sense and desire to be heard as a voice within the system. Through protests and demonstrations held by the UMWA and the Black Lung Association to have pneumoconiosis recognized as a compensable disease, they helped change and construct new laws that would bring about change in the coal industry to help other fellow coal miners for future generations.

The last attribute to complete association with self-making is a deep and profound level of sadomasochism in the performance of miners with black lung to help provide for their families. Each has made the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of his profession. The black-lung coal miner continues to work despite his ill health and realizes that he is doing it not only to provide for his family but to maintain his position in a profession that has helped define who he is. With each year that the miner chooses to stay and perform his tasks both above and underground, he is inhaling a poisonous substance that is slowly taking hold of his body. The miner may be aware of this through coughing fits, lack of breath, or just through the everyday conversations, he has with other miners. Still, despite all of the possible health risks, he still maintains his profession because it is something he loves and defines him. At that point, his profession no longer metaphorically defines him; due to the inhalation of dust, he has become physically filled with the product.

For these reasons (unionization, sadomasochism) one should consider including the identity and subject of black lung within the story of the self-made Appalachian coal miner. Through the actions of the individuals, changes were able to be made within the industry. With the continued inclusion of these new voices and with the help of fellow scholars and writers, the discussion of the disease will not remain silent.

Conclusion

Author Toni Morrison discusses language's dualistic nature as both an agency of silence and voice in her 1993 address to the Nobel Prize committee. She sets the mood for the lecture by beginning with a tale involving two children and an elderly blind woman. The woman was known for her powers throughout the community, but not everyone believed. Two young children from the village decided to challenge the woman. They approached and presented her with a challenge of identifying if the bird they held in their hands was alive or dead. The blind woman provided no reply. The children continued to press her for a decision, but she remained silent. Finally, after many requests from the children, she answered the children by saying she could not provide them with an answer "because it was in their hands" (418). Morrison goes on to share symbolic possibilities that the story holds. She explains to the audience that to her "the bird always represented language and the woman as a practiced writer"; furthermore, the children represent the filter through which the message could be passed from one individual to the other (418-9). Beginning her introduction and acceptance with a narrative served as a proper rhetorical stepping-stone to address the means by which language and endings are manipulated.

Morrison explains that language, through freedom of expression, has the ability to serve as material to challenge previous beliefs and reveal a history and truth that is not fathomable by those of other cultures—everyone has his or her own tale. Morrison is not the only author who advocates awareness and end to oppression. In fact, many scholars from interdisciplinary fields of rhetorical studies devote their research to educating the community (both academic and nonacademic) to forms of silences such as myth building,

historical misrepresentation, and hegemonic control. These scholars provide awareness and corrections of the silence through methodological techniques such as historiographical and ethnographic research to supply a voice to the marginalized group. This work has a place in Appalachian studies regarding black lung.

The historical myth tells a story of the wild, feudalistic Appalachian man turned coal miner in the hills of Appalachia. His high levels of rebellion help define him to those who encounter popular stories. The coal miner is strong and able to stand up to any obstacle or living conditions; he moves his way up the ranks and maintains his position forming brotherhoods and camaraderie along the way. The West Virginia coal miner is the epitome of manliness: he stands up for his property, his rights, and never wavers despite the obstacles around him. The history around black lung and the many ways in which it has been kept from the public are striking and help perpetuate the myth that miners do not get sick.

By scholars and writers focusing more of their attention on the visible aspects of the mining industry and the valiant deaths of coal miners that result from mine crashes or revolts and uprisings in the hills, they have forgotten those who have died quietly, gasping for breath. These stories need to be shared. With new forms of Appalachian histories beginning to emerge in the field of Appalachian studies, new countermyths to the core identity of the Appalachian coal mining experience in Appalachia are beginning to emerge as well. As scholars and rhetoricians, it is our responsibility to offer alternatives to the widely held myths associated with the coal fields and develop and discuss the new ones: black lung should be at the forefront of the stories shared. Similar to what Morrison said, "It is in our hands" to tell the story and provide a voice for those

who cannot voice themselves. In the case of miners with black lung, many *literally* cannot.

Chapter 3

The Black Lung Letters

We all have a story to tell. For the miners, widows, and dependants in the black lung case files of the Hechler Collection, their stories are frozen at Marshall University's Special Collections. These stories are told through letters, telegraphs, hospital records, congressional correspondence, and through the silence in each file. They reflect a time of chaos in the claims system shortly after the passage of Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969 and reveal a group of individuals who despite all odds wished to be heard. In particular, they provide new voices to the discourse surrounding black lung disease in Appalachia Studies: the voices of miners still fighting the system even after the Acts passage, the voice of a strong ally that helped support their cause, and the bureaucracy of system they were up against. The letters exhibit identities of miner's suffering from black lung disease who are not simply laying down and allowing succumbing to the disease

The Hechler Letters

The passage of the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, which recognized coal worker's pneumoconiosis and the disease's compensability, saw a victory for the miners throughout the United States and especially those living in central Appalachia. The Act marked a long end to an arduous process towards recognition of the disease. The actions taken before and during this time establish the coal miners within a mythology of self-making as they stood up to such paternal figures as their unions and their

government. However, that was not the end of the story for the individual who would now have to wade through the system created to obtain his or her black lung benefits.

On June 8, 1971, “The First Annual Report to Congress on the Administration of Part B of Title IV of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969” was published addressing the allotment for compensation of Coal Worker’s Pneumoconiosis. The document outlined the requirements for meeting compensation, the number of claims filed, and the success and failure of the program’s administration . The report displayed the guidelines put into place through the Act to ensure the safety of miners in the coalfields and included statistics before and after the passage of the Act. Most strikingly in Chapter 8, the report provided insight into knowledge of possible hard times ahead for both the administration and those filing their claims :

As of April 30, 1971, 125,000 claims were denied and over 50,000 requests for reconsideration were received. Allowing for a reasonable lag between the denial notice and the request for reconsideration, the current rate of request for reconsideration is estimated at over 50 percent [. . .] Projecting further into the future , it appears not likely that the workload of requests for hearing will be very large and will severely tax the resources of an already heavily burdened cadre of social security hearing examiners. Plans are already being made and implemented however to gear up the hearing process and take whatever special measures will be required to handle the large influx of new hearings. (20)

Because of the “large influx,” those in the claims system were now subject to longer response times that left the individual wondering for weeks, months, even years if their claim would be denied.

In its basic form, the filing for black lung compensation involved an exchange of letters between the claimant (miner, widow, or dependant) and the governmental administration that was in charge of approval or denial of the claims (see fig. 1).⁷

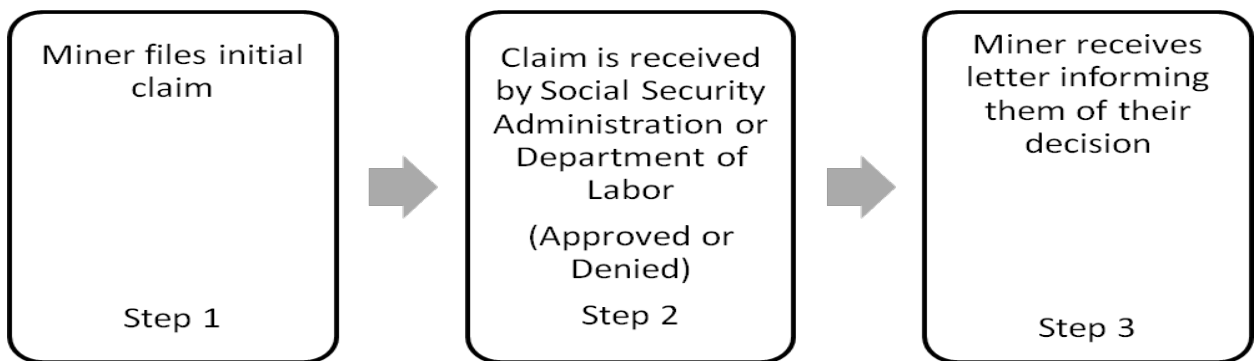


Fig 1. Initial Application Process Pattern

During this process, the miners’ letters had to furnish their a social security number, years worked in the mine, and any documentation (medical or third party testimony) that they possessed verifying and assisting with diagnosis of the disease. In the initial stages of this process miners needed to prove they had the disease by meeting one of the following criteria: total disability as a result from pneumoconiosis established through X-rays and at least 10 years of working in the mines⁸ (Social Security Administration 8-9). In the

⁷ After revision in the Act in 1972 most claims were deferred to the Department of Labor.

⁸ The report listed “causality” acknowledgement that those applying who had worked in the mine for that period of time were exposed to the strong dust levels. However, the

report the administration admits there were some complication in diagnosis of the disease that could prolong or complicate the claim either due to lack of evidence showing that total disability occurred as a result of pneumoconiosis or because multiple diseases and conditions showed similar symptoms such as emphysema or silicosis (10-11). Knowing this process may take longer than expected, the administration stated they were taking necessary measures to help improve the system, but delays still left the miners in a complicated place. The influx of appeals, the multiple applications, lack of efficiency, and demanding criteria all impacted the response time. In addition, the system was now more difficult for those who fail to produce documentation in the first initial application, which caused the process to start all again.

Although some individuals lost hope during this time and dropped their claim, others chose to follow a different route. For many West Virginians, this route was through correspondence with Congressional Representative Ken Hechler. At the time of the passage of the 1969 Act, Hechler was known for his past in the political ring—especially for his part in the passage of the 1969 Act—along with multiple scholarly accomplishments. Hechler’s early accomplishments include serving as a speech writer for President Franklin Roosevelt, being a political aide for president Truman, and composing a successful novel (*The Bridge at Remagen*) detailing his experience in World War II. Ken Hechler came to Huntington and the Marshall University community as an associate professor of political science. After teaching for several semesters at Marshall University and through the encouragement of his students, he decided to run for public office. He

miner needed to show medical proof of complicated pneumoconiosis and no other types of diseases.

successfully achieved the position as a congressional representative from 1958 through 1976 and became West Virginia Secretary of State in 1984 (“In Pursuit of Justice”).

He pushed hard for issues he knew were important to his community, and in many cases, he acted as an interlocutor in between the individual and whatever branch of government they wished to communicate, especially those filing for black lung claims. Hechler donated the correspondence he maintained with individuals filing for social security, disability, and black lung to Marshall University after his final term as Secretary of State. The letters, currently housed in the Special Collection at Marshall University, contain years of correspondence between Hechler and various individuals from West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky.

In the spring of 2008, I was allowed access to the letters even though they were then still restricted from the public. They were in a small side room stacked side by side and organized according to category (disability, social security, and black lung). The boxes were each labeled further according to year and last initials (see Fig. 2).

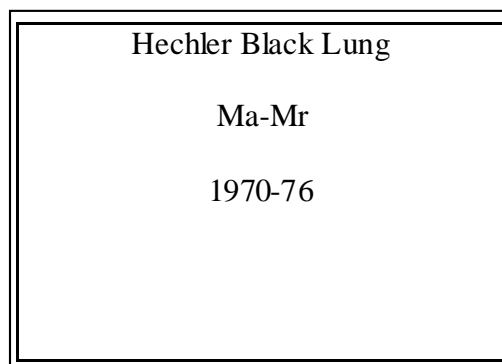


Fig. 2. Box Containment

When I first encountered the files, the outside label of the box deeply affected me. Each of the boxes had an almost a tombstone like appearance; however, inside each box were letters written by miners, their dependents, doctors, government officials, and Hechler. It seemed as if there were thousands of voices simply stilled in time and space.

Upon opening each file, the hierarchal structure in the black lungs claims system became clear. I was able to see dates and time lapses in communication. In this stage the miner is left wondering on the specific judgment from the administration (Social Security Administration or later the Department of Labor) on whether or not he or she may receive compensation. This decision could take days, weeks, or months. In many cases, West Virginian coal miners and their families felt the waiting period had taken too long and they wrote to Hechler asking for assistance with their claim (See Fig. 3).

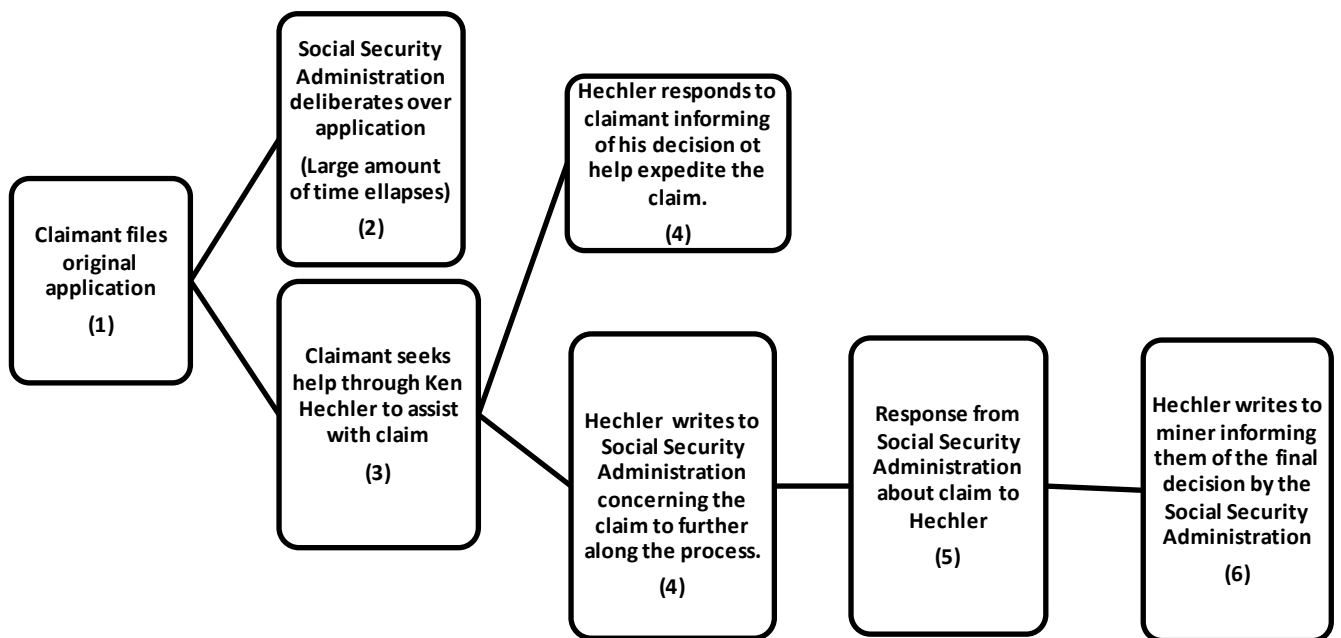


Fig. 3. Application Assistance Hechler

If the individual had chosen not to use Hechler as a possible interlocutor for his or her own assistance with the claims process, the claimant could be left with no response for a long time. By having Hechler intervene, the claim received a response due to the association and status of the individual requesting further information. Hechler received the response from the social security administration before sending it to the miner, which permitted time for him to formulate his own response (to the miner) before sending on the decision.

In Figures 1 and 3, the miner's benefits were either approved or denied. If they were approved through the help of Hechler, often times the miner would respond with a thank you letter; however, in the case of denial (in both patterns) the claimant often appealed creating a cyclical pattern that would continue for weeks, months, or even years. In many of the cases, the miners turned to Hechler to once again help with their claim, resulting in the third and continuing pattern that many of the letters followed (see Fig. 4).

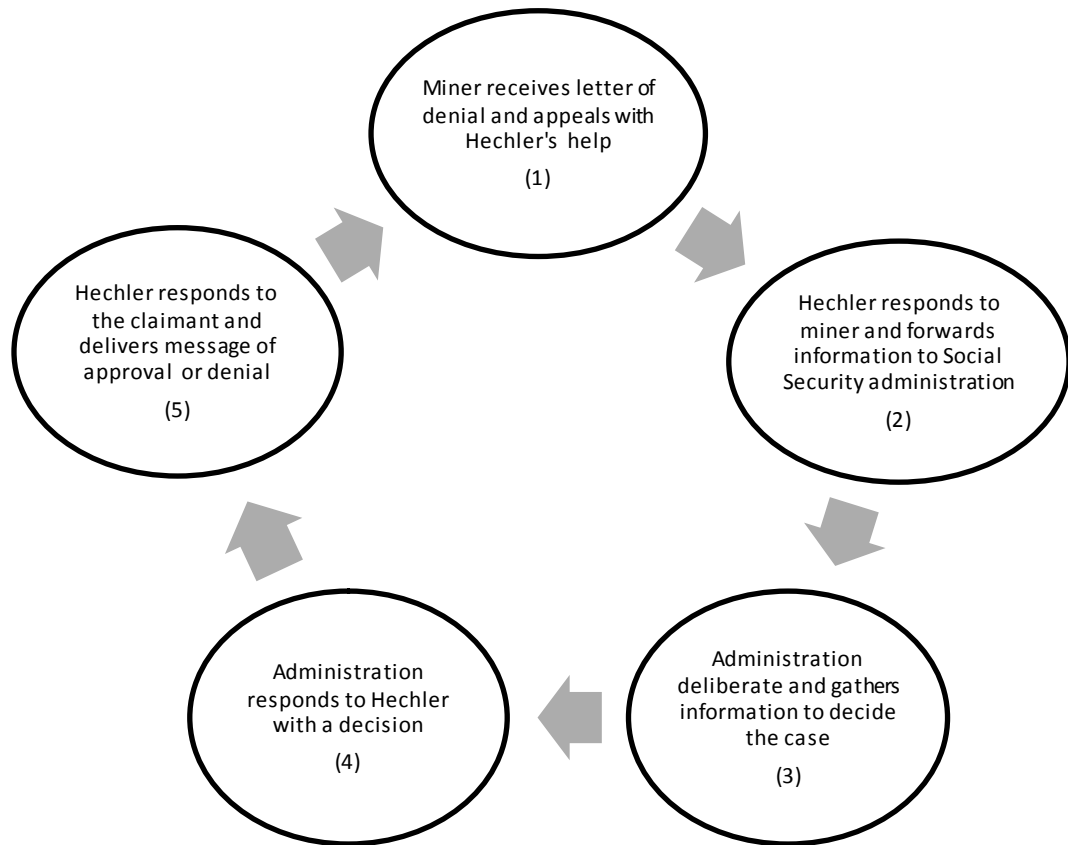


Fig. 4. Appeal Pattern

At this stage, I saw an array of reactions to the process. Some applicants were upset, some were confused, and others were downright crying out for attention. Many felt they had been let down by a system that they had once trusted. Unfortunately, while Hechler may have heard their words, they were one of thousands applying for assistance for the same thing.

Symbolic Exchanges

The more I examined the letters, the more I began to see exceptional voices worth sharing. The letters reflected emotions, showed literacy levels, and identified each level of the claims system. Although a seeming polyglossia of voices with diverse stories, a

discursive pattern became evident. The letters reflected the identity of the miners, the hierarchal structures (doctors, lawyers, Administrative officials in S.S.A./Department of Labor, and Hechler), and—most importantly—a choice to act instead of remaining silent. In doing so, these letters reflect the self-making qualities of the mythology surrounding the Appalachian coal miner.

The miners' letters show an aspect of voice and individuality within the appellate system that reminded this reader that someone's life is at stake. Most of the miners' letters were handwritten on notepads, stationery, on the back of postcards, and even on previous letters. They vary in literacy levels and composition (See Fig. 5). In addition, because many of the letters were handwritten, they expose a level of personality instead of the monotone structure of formalized documentation. Emotions are seen as writers compose, underline, punctuate, enlarge, and scribble their thoughts down on paper. The handwriting reveals the level of education of the composer—cursive would be seen as a higher level of education and formalized training compared to printing.⁹ In addition, the usage of writing as opposed to typing exposes a lack of access to the technology of the time either through lack of monetary funds or geographic location.¹⁰ Despite the handwriting, the miners still maintained a formal sense. They got their point across to Hechler that they were knowledgeable of the system and the disease, and they maintained a sense of identity as strong resilient individuals.

⁹ This factor may vary depending on who was truly doing the composition. Many miners had third party individuals writing for them.

¹⁰ I did come across multiple cases in which the letters were composed via typewriter. I encourage study to determine if one method of communication was more effective than the other in terms of success with filing the claim.

DEAR SIR,
 I AM WRITE TO YOU TODAY BECAUSE I
 BELIEVEING YOU AND I CAN RELY ON YOU
 YOU SAY #1 I THINK YOU ARE VERY WISE
 AND RUNNING FOR CONGRESS AND SENATOR
 AND YOU ARE NOT AFRAID AND SAY WHAT
 YOU THINK I THINK YOU AND SENATOR
 SAY WHAT ~~WANT~~ YOU THINK AND KNOW
 WHAT IT IS TO BE POOR. AND WAS NEVER
 AFRAID TO WORK ME MY SELF I AM
 WHITE BORN AND RAISE IN " E. W. VA
 WORK HARD ALL MY LIFE NO BODY NEVER
 HAD TO STAKE THE WORK I LOVE IT
 I TRUST GOD THAT YOU CAN READ
 AND UNDERSTAND THIS AS I ONLY GOT
 TO 5TH GRADE IN SCHOOL WENT TO
 WORK EARLY IN LIFE I FIRST WHILE I WAS IN
 SCHOOL CLEAN MY DAD STAKE UP EVERY MORNING
 AT 5:30 OR 6:30 BEFORE COME TO SCHOOL
 BEFORE THAT I PUT COAL IN PAPERES BASEMENT
 FOR 50¢ A TON. BEFORE THAT I SOLD ^{THEY} PAPER
 AND I QUITE SCHOOL WENT TO WORK IN DAD
 STORE NEXT I GOT JOB TRUCKING COAL
 FROM A COAL COMPANY BUT DID NOT HAVE NO
 \$\$\$ FROM DAY I WAS ONLY 14 OR 15 YEAR OLD

Fig. 5. Letter from Miner 1

In the case of the letter from Miner 1, multiple issues of literacy and illiteracy are present. The miner had basic grammatical issues such as spelling, double negatives, capitalization issues, and sentence formulation, his message is clear: he believes that he is entitled to benefits and has worked hard to obtain them. Miner 1 (much like other applicants) emphasizes the nature of who he is and how hard he has worked all his life despite the odds of his surroundings. Even though he states that he “only got to 5th grade in school,” he does not want his lack of literacy to define him. When he says, “work hard

all my life no body never have to make me work I love it” Miner 1 wants to express that he is not some lazy individual waiting around for a check. He has worked hard and deserves to be rewarded—a pattern in much of the letters. Through the remainder of the letter, he continues to list how hard he has worked to get where he is today. He begins with his time as a young boy in his father’s shop—which displays his closeness to his family and possible want to become a man like his father—and lists every job he had related to coal and the mines even from an early age. He builds himself up as a self-made individual and appeals to another man (Hechler) who the miner trusts is also as hard working as him. Miner 1’s letter, much like others, reminds the readers that they are not just a case number but a human being.

As seen in “Fig 3. Application Assistance Hechler” in Section 1 of this chapter, the lowest form of communication was at the beginning of the claims application. In this position the miner is left wondering for days, months, even years, and this elapsed time is reflected in the case files correspondence is possibly going back and forth between the various forms of government and other third party participants (doctors, lawyers, etc.). The applicant is essentially isolated from any form of knowledge and conversations that may be occurring on their behalf. Their claim could be delayed, overlooked, or excluded by a claim from another miner, or simply lost in transportation. They are subject to their position in the system, which is reflected in their writings various letters.

Hechler’s diction in the letters to the miners was one of understanding. Personal at times, Hechler would recall times that he may have met the individual or expressed that he was taking a personal interest. He would try to ease the miner’s concerns that he would do the best to try to help them. Hechler would remind them of materials that they

may need such as forwarding their Social Security number, their medical records, or information from third party participants. His writings reveal he had a closer connection to the miners as opposed to the distant nature of the administration. He was aware of their individual voices and treated each letter as such to the best of his ability.

Hechler's writings, however, present a two-sided positioning in hierarchal structure. Hechler is a privileged individual and a confidant to the people. His identity takes on a consubstantial nature in that he must both identify with and represent both when writing to the application or the government. The letters displayed a formulaic composition different from the administration, but there was difference in his voice. Hechler's writing was personal enough with the coal miners as to gain their trust and acceptance—not only as a representative in Congress but as one of their own hoping to serve and honor their cause.

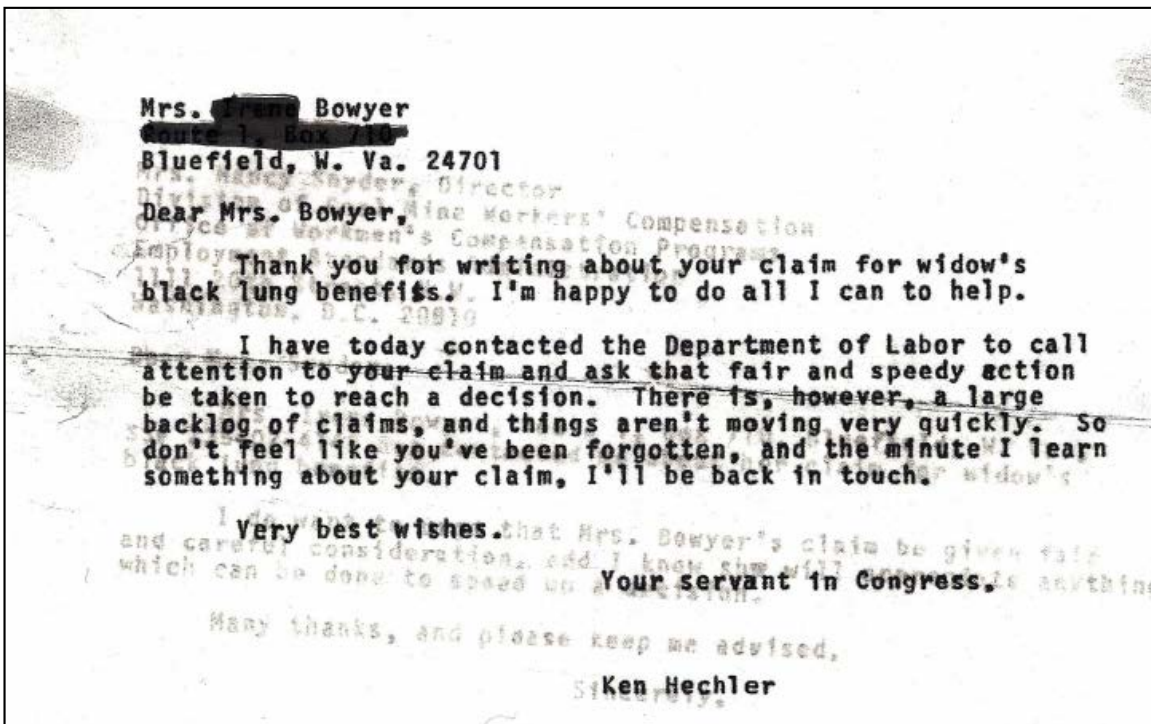


Fig. 6. Hechler Response

In a letter to Mrs. Boyer (See Fig. 6), Hechler maintains a sense of professionalism and a personal touch. His simple response of, "I am happy to do all I can help," and "don't feel like you have been forgotten... I will be back in touch," help to reassure the claimant that he is working hard on her behalf and that she is still a priority. By including the signature, "Your servant in Congress," Hechler not only applies a motto that he campaign with, but a metaphorical image the claimant can reassure herself by knowing he is working for her (Bowyer). This letter is much different in format to a letter sent out simultaneously to the Department of Labor.

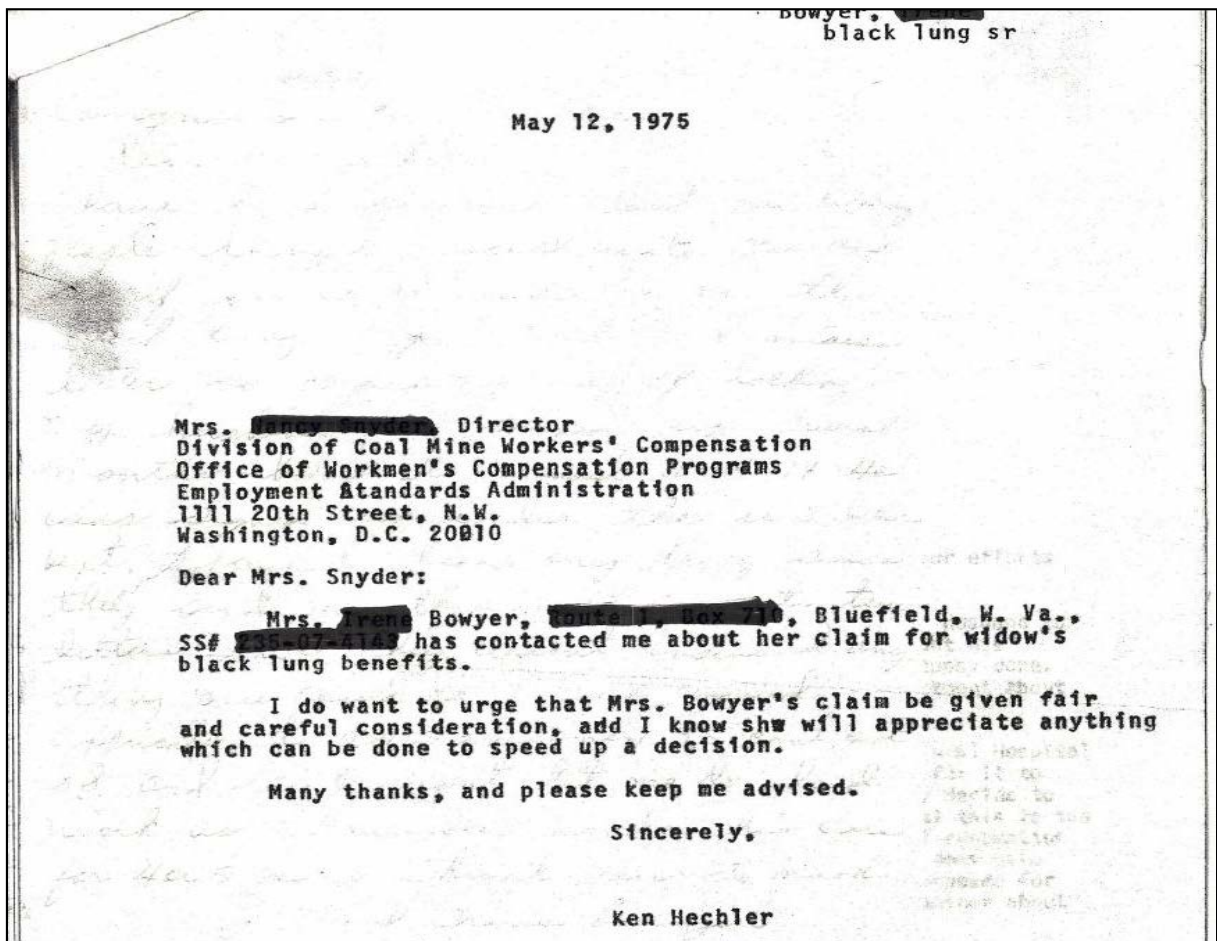


Fig. 7. Hechler Letter to Director

The communication between Hechler and the director of the Division of Coal Mine Workers' Compensation (See Fig. 7) proves a stark contrast his tone with the claimant. His vocabulary is clear and almost forcible. He also maintains a sense of formality by leaving the message short and to the point by supplying the claimant's social security number. Hechler does not attach any message for claimant but states that she "will appreciate anything which can be done to speed up the process." His closing signature of "Sincerely," as opposed to "Your Servant in Congress," shows a relationship of equals as instead of subordination (Bowyer).

The last form of communication often resided with the final letter from the Department of Labor or Social Security Administration. This high echelon of power used a distinct formula in each of the letters. They were always addressed the individual in business form. They typically show little or no emotion (other than in conversation with Hechler). Due to the number of appeals at the time, personalization would be almost impossible, and the response needed to be a report. Each applicant becomes a case and social security number rather than a person whose voice is trying to be heard. The administration handled their answers the same way they handled their judgments. In the case of denial, they state the exact reason as to why the individual was denied benefits by citing the part of the Act that the applicant failed to meet.

Each branch of the hierarchal structure of the letters carries some identifiable feature that helps tell the story of the claims system at that time, a structure that involved multiple entities and factors. The system was by no means perfect; however, by understanding the individuals and their placement, we can further identify the ability of claimants (miners, widows, dependents) to continue through the cycle. Even though the

miners knew that they would need to combat many bureaucratic obstacles to obtain their benefits, they still continued. Identifying the position of interlocutors helped in better understanding the various levels of government involved, and the words of the claimants reflect an important aspect of the self-making mythology: the ability to stand up and persevere despite obstacles put in front of them. While not every applicant was able to do so, and many died, their voices were not lost in the process.

Self-Making Appalachians: “Transforming Silence into Action”

The poet and author Audre Lorde wrote, “We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the wait of silence will choke us” (304). In the case of the miners and their families in the Hechler letters, they preferred to speak rather than remain silent. They saw their outlet through Hechler and turned to him to honor his promise both as a representative for government and a champion for black lung rights. The miners refused to remain silent in the face of stress, obstacles, and did not let fear of placement or position in the hierarchical structure of the government claims system choke them. They voiced their opinions and desire to have the rights they believed they deserved, and their letters describe the impact the disease was having upon them, their families, and the surrounding community.

Some of the miners chose to speak out against the problems of confusion and chaos in which they found themselves on a monthly and weekly basis. In one letter, the writer (Mr. Daniels of West Virginia) not only discusses the state of affairs with the

government, but with his claim and others'. Mr. Daniels proves to be knowledgeable and educated. His letter is both heartfelt and heartbreaking at the same time. It is clear that Mr. Daniels has lost much faith in a government that he once trusted and that both he and his family (his daughters) now completely resent. He invokes sadness and anger when he emphasizes the fact that his brother in law had to die in order for his children to receive their benefits. The emotional usage of death and emphasis on the length of time between correspondences allows for the reader (Hechler) to empathize with the situation he and many others like him must be worrying about on a daily basis. Death—the final silence. (see figs. 8 and 9).¹¹

Honorable Men Hechler
 Washington, D.C.
 Dear Mr. Hechler,
 Before I completely lose all my respect for this Bureaucracy we call Government, I want to Express my Sincere Thanks to You for your Concern in my behalf on the Block Lung Case. It begins to look like to me at least that regardless of how many laws are passed they are to benefit only a favored few, as always has been the trouble in this Country. Now I have been waiting 12 months since this Law went in to Effect, and naturally getting worse & it is that what the S. Board of the Congress was hoping for. Are the time that we would die before they could decide how to pay "Denied". My Brother in Law had to die to prove he had Block Lung. His Boys had an Autopsy done, so that what the S. Board were waiting for. I was turned down for the Mines by X-ray & Pulmonary Studies on Jan. 1962 of 4 Hospitals his condition is the same. Now what I want to know, is why cant they deny me my claim "Now" sure

Fig. 8. Daniels Letter, page 1

¹¹ Note: Two pages of the letter are not included. Although the miner does go on to thank Hechler for his help, for the purpose of this study I felt it was important to showcase his frustration with the system and emphasize his knowledge of his current situation and limited my analysis to these two pages.

while there is still a life in me,
 So, that I can produce my Evidence
 & get started with my Claim.
 I have Lawyer's waiting & ready to
 start my case & I think I have waited
 long enough of the S.S. Board and
 the W.D. Rehabilitation out but don't know
 what they done with the files that put
 me on Disability S.S. in 1962, I can tell
 them where they are find them.
 I hope Mr. Beckler the Congress
 can soon recognize what turns
 our people against our flag & our
 Gov. The above letter is just 1 instance
 in this country. I have 3 daughters in
 the Washington Area now that had
 good paying jobs but 2 yrs. spend their
 eyes enough till they quit the Gov.
 Entirely for Private Enterprise. One of
 them worked on Capital Hill for a Congressman.
 This is very sickening for me & I am
 only trying in my dumb way to let
 you know this S.S. business about my
 Black Lung makes me sick to my
 Stomach.
 To My Opinion this is a disgrace
 to the Human Race. It don't take 12
 months for this Beauracy to collect

Fig. 9, Daniels Letter, page 2

Daniels' literacy shows on two levels: in penmanship and composition, and in his knowledge of his current condition. His composition of words through the cursive handwriting shows a level of high education. His quotation marking, capitalizing, and underlining of certain words (“Denied” “my Claim Now,” “Evidence,” “To My Opinion,” “Beauracy” [sic], “Social Security Board,” etc.) show places he wished the

congressman to note. His use of multisyllabic words, as opposed to basic vocabulary, reflects upon his literacy skill.

Mr. Daniels' letter provides just one of the many angry voices I encountered during my excursion into the various files. Many writers emphasized their distrust for the government and its failed pledges to fulfill the promises of prompt compensation. In the earlier stages before the Department of Labor began to process the claims, many miners and their families would criticize the catastrophe that was the old appeals process and slow response. Anger toward what they believed were people who did not understand their situation or were ignoring or were unaware of the problems in the process was often common place.

The symbolic action of silence permeates the space between each letter letters. At times it seemed that silence was more powerful tool than any word on the page. As I researched, I saw a time of non-responsiveness for weeks, months, and even years. Those in the Social Security department, Department of Labor, or even Hechler himself, left applicants waiting and wanting a reply as they struggled toward the a final decision (Daniels). In the case of Mr. Daniels, there was a period of three years before approval was given.

Many of the individuals who chose to write to Hechler were often referred to Hechler through people within the community or people within the system who told the claimant to write their congressional representative to expedite the handling of their account. About three of the four letters I observed praised or acknowledged Hechler's help. Referring back to a previous letter, Miner land Daniels share a pattern proved the most prevalent in claimants' letters to Hechler: an appeal to authority through flattery and

acknowledgment of power placement. This type of rhetorical maneuver has been discussed by Anita Puckett in *Seldom Ask, Never Tell*, an ethnographic study of an Appalachian community she called Ash Creek. In her study, she discussed the type of ethnographic conversations involving labor discourse in the community. The book discussed issues such as identity communities, linguistic issues such as Imperatives, Requests and other forms of community exchanges. She noted that many of the conversations took place over different types of socioeconomic reasons and were usually done within the same groups or “kinship” and “belonging groups.” In the case of the Hechler letters, many of the miners found kinship with Hechler through political party and through association with other individuals whom they know and whom Hechler had helped.

Congressman
Ken Hechler
Washington, DC

Dear Sir,
I would appreciate any help you
can do for me.
On August 21-22, I had a heart
attack. Dr. Shortness of breath,
The Dr's have told me I do have
Pneumoconiosis for the past six
years, also it shows on the X-rays
I filed my claim for this
they turned me down, be-
cause it was not totally
disable, yet my Dr said I
can no longer work with this
Pneumoconiosis and Heart
Condition, I can not walk
fast because my breathing became
hard to do, if you can help me
please do so my Social Security No
is 236-16-0803

Yours Truly
KESSELY [REDACTED]
LYBURN, W. VA
26632

see other side

Along with attempts at flattery and emotional appeals, many of the miners wished to shared their frustration with their claims by listing their symptoms, expressing that they already went through diagnosis, and placing blame on the various individuals running the medical systems. Kessley's letter (see Fig. 10) reveals much of the

Fig. 10 Kessley Letter

frustration and confusion that many of the miners felt. It was now no longer a case of “What is wrong?”; it was a case of “Why isn't anyone helping?” Kessley claims that his

doctor has given him the diagnosis of the disease, and now because of both the heart condition and the pneumoconiosis, he is incapable of understanding how he can be turned down and why his claim was taking so long. He was not alone in his frustration of the diagnosis procedures and the appellate process.

Sadly, many other miners also harbored a strange suspicion. Oswald's letter to Hechler reveals anger and distrust at the government and those who are closer to him: his own doctors (see Fig. 11). His distrust in the doctors is not alone. Unfortunately, it seems

that history has begun to repeat itself with the doctor's role as a credible witness to the discovery of the disease. Much like past issues of determining compensation, once again the compensation was determined by the company, not the doctors.

In addition, since much of the diagnosis and settling of the claim is done by individuals outside the visible eye of the people

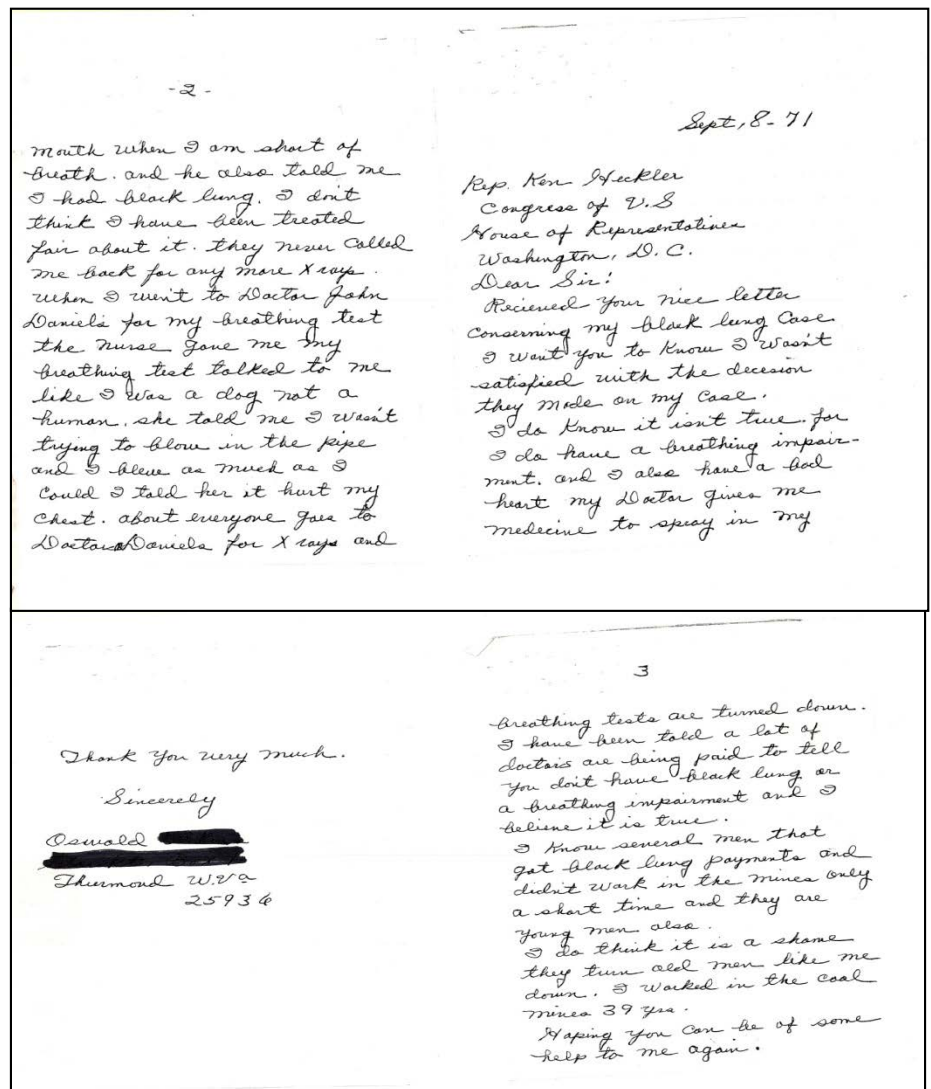


Fig. 11. Oswald Letter

determining who is compensated, they would not witness or experience the severity of the disease.

In the end, death inevitably shows itself as the final silence in the letters. This vision of death is present in the stories of relatives as they try to apply for dependant benefits. One of the touching exchanges that occurs is between a father, son, and Ken Hechler. It begins when a man applies for benefits for his father who has worked in the mines for more than the required time. The son appeals by stating that his father was a good, hard-working man and provides Hechler with the appropriate information. The son continues conversation with Hechler for numerous correspondences on his father's behalf. Finally, a letter finally arrives in which he states that he is now applying for his mother's widow benefits (see Fig. 12).

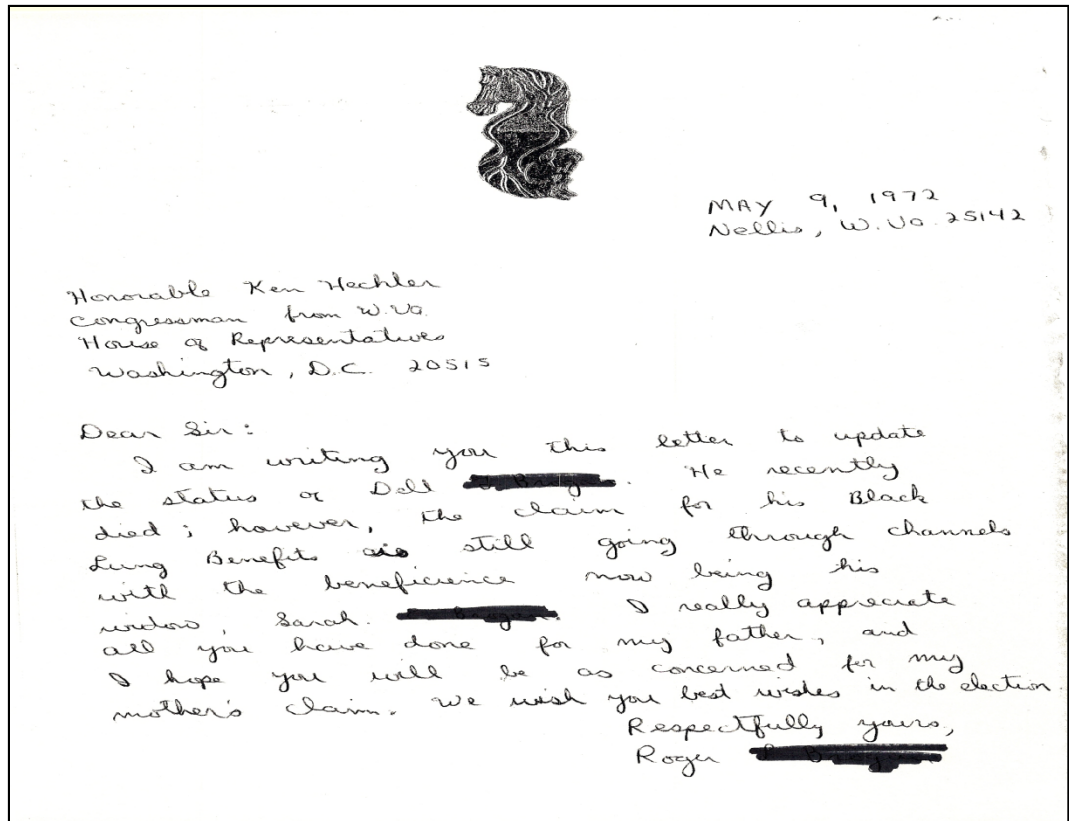


Fig. 12. Roger Letter

Conclusion

The black lung letters reveal a voice long forgotten in the Appalachian community even though it is present to this day. With the new concern given to issues such as hydrolic fractioning of the land, mountaintop removal, and other safety concerns such as explosions in the fields, the voice of the individual has been lost in the shuffle. Just because a law has been passed does not mean that it should be ignored. The story still goes on despite the silence from the dominant community. There still is no cure for black lung disease, only prevention and cautions can be taken by those working around it. Further study that these voices along with other voices left in silence in the black lung community still have an important story to be told. Even though their lives may be silenced, their words that fight for self-making and dignity can be shared with other generations of coal miners and Americans from all walks of life. The disease is no longer a secret and should not be treated as such.

In one of her last statements in *Digging Our Own Graves*, Barbara Ellen Smith explains, “Black lung now awaits the younger generation of coal miners who are now underground” (217). Although the events discussed in this thesis reference times and decades ago, we need to remember that black lung, and the coal miners that suffer through it, still exist amongst us today. The miner is not just a self-made mythical figure in the minds of historians working tirelessly for his family in harsh conditons. He is not just a part of a larger machine of industrialization; he is a man. Our miners are our fathers, sons, nephews, and grandchildren. We must allow them to tell their story and encourage it to be heard.

Afterward: A Note from the Author

“A writer is essentially a spy

Dear love, I am that girl”

—Anne Sexton, “The Black Art,” ll. 7-8

The voice of the subject should remain the utmost priority for any scholar who performs studies involving testimonials. Those who choose to focus on the past words of others have an even more important responsibility because they are the ones who rediscover documents and voices, and share them with the community. They typically do so on the assumption that what they are presenting will benefit future researchers and lead them to further undiscovered voices. The purpose of this case study is simply that: to share with the academic community voices long silenced and forgotten. I share these voices and stories with the hopes that future scholars will continue to see the value in persevering and pushing forward whatever obstacles one may face and do so using whatever methods are possible, much like the individuals in this thesis. My journey over the past four years in composing this piece of work was a battle with my own form of silence, which while not as severe, left me with my own form of cognitive disability.

My journey began much like any other student of graduate study, with earnestness and excitement. As any young graduate student who believed her thesis was going to change the world, I was determined to try to follow all guidelines and theories taught to me to produce the best possible research and come out with material to benefit society. However, after years of research and wrestling with my own paradoxes and

personal issues, I realized that the best research I could do would simply spark further research in the field of black lung voice and identity studies. I hope sharing my own story will help encourage future writers caught in the same position as me (perpetually locked in the status of ABT) to finish their work and not lose faith in themselves.

Through this experience, I learned to wrestle not only with the identity and voices of the Appalachian miners in the letters but with the different issues I encountered from my own cultural position, as a writer and educator.

I came from outside Appalachia when I was 18 to go to college. During my time as a student, I always enjoyed vacationing and hiking in the mountains when I could. I treasured being able to get outside of the Huntington and travel around West Virginia. As I drove back and forth from school, I marveled at the scenery surrounding me. I would look forward to trips home to Cincinnati driving on the AA highway between the Grayson and Alexandria, passing the rolling hills. I would drive on hot summer nights with the windows down just so I could smell the fresh air, and when I chose to drive nights, I would occasionally look up at the stars and just wonder in awe at the bright stars viewable before the muffling of the city lights hit them. For many reasons, these experiences with the area brought me closer to realizing how close I felt to the area and its people. To this day, when I do have the rare chance to go back through the area, I feel a sense of calm and peacefulness. Much like Ann Pancake's character Lace in *Strange as this Weather Has Been*, I was able to understand the meaning of the phrase, "I understood how when I left, I lost a part of myself, but when I stayed I could stretch myself full" (10).

I enjoyed the town I resided in (Huntington) more than the city (Cincinnati) in which I had originally lived. I found the town I inhabited a mixture of cultures and backgrounds I had never been exposed to before. Always regarded with kindness, the only difference I was ever aware of was accents and occasionally religion: I was raised in a heavily Catholic city as opposed to the dominant Protestant nature of the area—the occasional comment on Ash Wednesday about the ashes on my forehead had become the norm by my second year at school. Overall, I was surrounded with nothing but positive opinions and covered in a veil of naivety regarding my position as an Outsider in the area.

It was not until my introduction to Appalachian theory and literature in a master's program at Marshall University, the same school where I did my undergraduate degree, that I began to understand what being an Outsider meant. The day I walked into my first Appalachian theory class and listened to the conversations, it became clear to me how sheltered and blinded I had been to the issues of the area and how Appalachians viewed those who came to the area from other places. I began to read various types of theory involving the interpretation of the Appalachian by people from outside the area. I understood that while I was living in Appalachia for a third of my life at that point, I still would most likely never receive the same credibility from those inside the Appalachian community as regards my understanding of the area as those from the area. I tackled this new identity to which I had been introduced, and I asked friends of mine from the area if I had ever been guilty of "Othering" those of the community, and many said to a certain extent yes. Even my fiancé at the time could list several circumstances when I had Othered people. This attitude was never my intention and was likely subconscious.

Shortly after this introduction, my perception began to change in regards to how I saw the area and how I related to my research. Much like other students who are introduced to new theoretical approaches, I began to see things differently. No longer were the rides home as enjoyable as they once had been. I slowly began to notice each trip that parts of the land were disappearing or being demolished. A part of me was more careful when conducting research, and I even discussed my position as an Outsider with my friends from the area and their perception of my work.

I settled on the topic of black lung disease and voice studies after both examining various coal literature and doing archival research. I researching, I noticed the literature that most of the books rarely included the topic of coal worker's pneumoconiosis. At most, many of the books would simply include footnotes, maybe a few pages at best, and in other cases they would focus on the efforts made during the 1960s but would taper off shortly after the discussion of the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. A trip to the state archives in Charleston, West Virginia turned up little information and in fact focused more on major accidents as opposed to the concern of the individual miner afflicted with the disease. The good thing that resulted from this exploration was that many individuals (both inside and outside of Appalachia) encouraged the scholarship. Many from the region said they had a relative or family member who had died from the disease.

I then discovered that the exploration that I had been doing outside of the college was not needed because pivotal materials were within reach the whole time. My first meeting with the Hechler collection sparked mixed emotions. I saw it as material that could contribute to my thesis, but had no idea it would eventually be the main focus of my empirical research. After spending hours in the archives reading letters and exploring

the Congressman's background, I decided to focus on the letters as a unique case study for sharing and inspiring possible future exploration by others.

As I began my analysis, I kept the position of myself as an Outsider in the back of my mind and continued to wrestle with paradoxes regarding identity and power. I knew I was speaking for people who were from a different culture and time than mine own, and I wanted to make sure that I took every possible measure to respect for the individuals in the letters and to promote a fair interpretation of them. Unfortunately, I believe this may have helped push the direction of my research sideways as I grappled with how to go about writing the project. Much like David Bartholomae mentions in "Inventing the University," I was still afraid of my own voice (40-41). I also ran into issues performing this type of ethnographic research and representing the voices in the letters from a distance. I was facing issues such as time, since the documents were written decades before I was born; I also felt I was viewing or spying on the intimate conversations of people who wrote in confidence to a congressman.

The basic analysis of the artifacts took place in the library, but composition occurred over years, letting my ideas to fluctuate and change. I did not want to interpret the letter from a wrong perspective or act as if I was speaking for the miners themselves. During this time, I examined works such as *Ethics and Representation* by Peter Mortensen and Gesa Kirsch, and Omar Swartz's *Conducting Social Responsible Research* to keep my mind aware of the many issues and techniques used to represent the individuals in the study with care. As I wrestled with understanding or theory and interpretation, my time in graduate school came to a close, and I soon found myself grappling with the hardest part of my composition: my own self doubt.

As I left Appalachia to continue my research from afar, I found myself in a different and troubling mindset. I was outside the walls of the university and now faced with “the real world.” It was no longer about continuing research and going to classes; it was about attempting to find a job to provide for myself. Unfortunately, my personal trials that led me to remain in ABT status for many years. This led to feelings of sadness, shame, writer’s block, and as some suggested, a fear of completion. I found myself repeating the phrase, “Once I am finished with my thesis...” ad nauseum. First with hope and pride, then eventually with shame. Nervousness consumed me and eventually led to a long stand of procrastination. I would have spurts of writing, only to slack off again once the rush had worn off. I was stuck in a perpetual shell of a pipedream. I had silenced myself.

I continually attempted to write during my years away from the college, but I did not find complete courage to finish until a recent teaching job. I had found myself in the second year of my ABT status working at a for-profit college teaching basic English. I met students who gave new meaning to the words having courage and faith. Most of these adults were nontraditional students seeking out a second chance (or in some cases a third or fourth) at obtaining their education. I heard stories about students rehabbing from prison, going back to school for the first time in 15 or 20 years, and in some cases being recovering addicts looking for a chance to prove to themselves that they were capable of achieving their goals despite the obstacles thrown at them. I realized that if I could watch my students succeed with their goals, that I should be capable and not feel ashamed of achieving my own.

I began to reexamine the artifacts and scholarship in the fall of 2011. I applied to present at the Appalachian Studies Conference for spring of 2012 and once again built myself a strong support system inside the walls of academia to push me forward toward completion. I also rediscovered my own heart back in Appalachia, and I noticed during this time of “Re-Visioning” of my work the importance of the project I had taken on.

I wish for two things through this case study: I hope that future scholars choose to continue discussing the subject of black lung, and I hope that they will learn to push on despite whatever obstacles they face. The issues addressed in these letters are still happening 40 years later. While safety precautions have been changed and are currently being examined by the Obama administration as are issues rules about mountaintop removal, clean water, and air issues for surrounding communities, we must not forget that those working in and around the mines on a daily basis who may experience the illness from their occupations years down the road.

Finally, much like each of these individuals in the letters, you as a scholar should not give up. There is a way; there is always a way. Whether it is through a third party participant, relentless persistence, or through rediscovery, no voice should be silenced—especially your own.

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