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# The Devil Was the First Scab : Working-Class Spirituality and Union Organization in Marion County, West Virginia 1918-1927

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“THE DEVIL WAS THE FIRST SCAB”:  
WORKING-CLASS SPIRITUALITY AND UNION ORGANIZATION  
IN MARION COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA 1918-1927

A Thesis submitted to  
the Graduate College of  
Marshall University

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

Department of History

by  
Chelsie C. Fitzwater

Approved by

Dr. Kevin Barksdale, Committee Chairperson  
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Marshall University  
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## Abstract

A community-focused study of Marion County, West Virginia provides a unique opportunity to explore unionization efforts in central Appalachia. This thesis examines the interplay between working-class spirituality, unionism, and capitalism at the height of organized labor campaigns in the Fairmont Field between 1918 and 1927. The region reflects national and local trends in trade unionism as well as shifts in religious attitudes between conservative Fundamentalist evangelists and progressive Social Gospel ministers. Marion County differs from other Appalachian coalfields because local industrialists rather than absentee developers spearheaded the region's economic development while labor leaders from outside of the state led unionization drives. Religion became one way both coal operators and union organizers communicated their political, economic, and social beliefs. This thesis examines mine workers in Marion County to understand the distinctive ways industrialists, trade unionists, and religious leaders adapted to the effects of rapid industrialization on the region.

## Introduction:

“Progress is more than natural. It is Divine.”  
 --Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*<sup>1</sup>

This thesis examines the interplay of religion with unionism and capitalism through a community study focused on events in Marion County, West Virginia between 1918 and 1927. The region reflects national and state trends in labor organization as well as shifts in religious attitudes. Yet it differs from other areas of central Appalachia in that many of the mine owners were indigenous, and representatives from outside the state sponsored union activity rather than local labor leaders. During labor-management disputes, both coal operators and union organizers used religious imagery to promote their respective political, economic, and social ideologies to the mine workers. Examining the miners of Marion County demonstrates the unique ways coal operators, labor representatives, and spiritual leaders adapted to rapid industrialization in a rural region.

Historical works concerning mine workers neglect to identify the importance of Christianity in working-class culture and instead view religious sentiment as insignificant or as a tool of oppression wielded by the middle and upper classes to pacify the miners.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Charles H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 324.

<sup>2</sup> The full context of Karl Marx's writing that is often synthesized to "opiate of the masses": "Man is the world of man—state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form ... its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions." Cited in T.B. Bottomore and M. Rubel, eds., *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 26-27. Rather than making religion an

Historians also argue that religion hindered a unified workforce because laborers allied with others of the same faith rather than similar socioeconomic circumstances.<sup>3</sup> These historiographical models fail to explore the complicated relationship between organized religion and trade unionism. Challenging these assertions provides a more nuanced view of working-class spirituality and the labor movement. The coalfields in Marion County offer an opportunity to investigate industrial development in central Appalachia, the expansion of trade unionism, and the relationship between working-class religiosity and labor organization. The first part of this study explores the growth of industry in the region beginning with the creation of Marion County in 1842. Second, this study recounts the organizational campaigns led by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) to establish local unions in the region. Finally, this thesis examines coping mechanisms used by the coal operators, religious leaders, union organizers, and the native and ethnic miners to respond to the demands of the transforming rural industrial landscape.

The Virginia General Assembly incorporated the city of Fairmont in 1820. As Fairmont's population grew, the Assembly created Marion County from Monongalia and Harrison counties. Fairmont's early economy began just as many similar towns and cities across the region. Early settlers cleared the rugged mountain land and began commercial farming. As large-scale farming and the cattle industry developed, wealthy landowners,

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excuse for people to ignore self-responsibility, religion could function as a means to create a fraternity of mankind to protest against social injustice. Church leaders, such as Reverend J. C. Broomfield in Fairmont, West Virginia, used the pulpit to protest against the tactics employed by industrialists. For more analysis about Marx's view on religion's social function, see David Kowalewski and Arthur L. Greil, "Religion as Opiate: Church and Revolution in Comparative Structural Perspective," *Journal of Church and State* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 511.

<sup>3</sup> Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), xiii-xv.

including the Watsons, an enterprising family who dominated the local coal industry by the 1880s, diversified their capital and expanded into other industries including natural gas, oil, timber, glass, and manufacturing.<sup>4</sup>

The region where the Watsons lived and worked became known as the Fairmont Field, the largest among the three recognized coalfields in northern West Virginia.<sup>5</sup> The field, named for the city where many of the prominent coal developers lived and ran their operations, includes six counties of north-central West Virginia: Monongalia, Marion, Harrison, Preston, Taylor, and Barbour. This coalfield contains the Monongahela and Allegheny series of coal seams, including the Pittsburgh, Redstone, Sewickley, Uniontown, and Waynesburg seams.<sup>6</sup> The most abundant and longest is the Pittsburgh seam, known for its rich pockets of low-sulfur bituminous coal. The metallurgical coal mined in this region is known for its high volatility and is widely used in industrial heating and coking use, rather than domestic purposes. As the coal industry boomed, these seams transformed Fairmont into a blossoming industrial center.

Fairmont grew rapidly as public works projects sprouted up and industrialists invested in Marion County's infrastructure. Regional business leaders purchased stock in the local bank and invested capital in the glass and mining equipment plants. The

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about the formation of Marion County and the region's early economy, see Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930s* in the Working Class in American History series (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 148-9; Michael Workman, "Political Culture and the Coal Economy in the Upper Monongahela Region: 1776-1933," (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1995), 1-40.

<sup>5</sup> For a map of the five counties in West Virginia located within the Fairmont Field see Appendix 1.1.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Workman, Paul Salstrom, and Philip W. Ross, "Northern West Virginia Coal Fields: Historical Context" *Technology Report* 10 (Morgantown, WV: Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archeology, West Virginia University, Eberly College of Arts and Sciences, 1994), 3. Hereafter cited as Workman, et al., "Coal Context."



Fairmont coal operators also invested in an interurban trolley system that connected Fairmont and Clarksburg to smaller communities in Marion and Harrison Counties. These infrastructure improvements allowed coal companies to open new mines. As mine operations expanded, the region faced increased labor shortages. In order to fill their need for workers, coal operators recruited workers from Eastern and Southern Europe.

Marion County expanded as a result of rapid urbanization, industrialization, and an influx of immigrant labor. Despite Americanization and welfare paternalism programs offered by coal operators and religious organization, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe faced difficulty assimilating to their new surroundings.<sup>7</sup> Other members of the Marion County community also struggled to adjust to these changes and religious leaders adapted their messages to reflect the tone of their congregants. Many pastors and evangelists either remained steadfast to the Fundamentalist doctrine or gravitated toward the more progressive message of the Social Gospel.<sup>8</sup> Trade unions, such as the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), as well as radical groups (e.g. the Black Hand and the Ku Klux Klan) attracted new members struggling to adjust to their changing

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<sup>7</sup> Americanization refers to the programs offered by middle class organizations to encourage immigrant assimilation to American customs and values. This study also includes the definition of *industrial Americanization* as explained by historian John Hennen. In his monograph, *The Americanization of West Virginia*, Hennen argues *industrial Americanization* implied more than the “sweeping objectives” of prewar Americanization goals of “universal hygiene, thrift, and English training,” and included “‘habits of industry,’ obedience to authority, and worship of law and order.” John C. Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Social Christianity emerged around the mid-1860s in response to the wealth and power industrialists amassed during the Gilded Age. Preachers across the country believed that wealth distribution in America was uneven, leaving many destitute. The Social Gospel offered a solution to problems that ailed the country. Shailer Matthews, an early leader of the movement, defined the Social Gospel as: “the application of the teachings of Jesus and the total message of the Christian salvation to society, the economic life, and social institutions ... as well as to individuals.” For more information about the Social Gospel see Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, 12.

surroundings.<sup>9</sup> The choices each group made in reaction to the challenges of a modern industrial society created fissures along economic, political, and social lines.

Responding to the new pressures of rapid industrialization, trade workers joined unions in opposition to the great wealth and power industrialists amassed and wielded over workers during the Gilded Age (1877-1917). After its formation in 1890 in Columbus, Ohio, the UMWA directed organization campaigns in West Virginia.<sup>10</sup> Prior to World War I, labor leaders had little success forming local unions in the Fairmont Field. Coal operators extended various forms of welfare capitalism and used their regional ties to discourage mine workers organizing until 1918.<sup>11</sup> During World War I, President Woodrow Wilson's administration created the National War Labor Board (NWLB) to ensure industrialists and organized labor cooperated to meet America's wartime demands.<sup>12</sup> To secure the union foothold in north-central West Virginia, the UMWA signed the Jacksonville Agreement in 1924 with local coal operators.<sup>13</sup> The newer coal companies that opened during World War I chose to abrogate the agreement and operate under an open-shop basis. Moreover, many of the mines introduced new

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<sup>9</sup> The Klan, the Black Hand, and their role during the labor-management dispute will be further discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

<sup>10</sup> The UMWA created District 17 in the Kanawha Valley in 1897 due to the efforts of black miners in the southern West Virginia coalfields. This district and District 29 represented the state until 1926 when UMWA officials formed District 31. This represented an important development in the region during the mine war period. See Maier B. Fox, *United We Stand: The United Mine Workers of America, 1890-1990* (Washington, DC: United Mine Workers of America, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> "Welfare capitalism" is a term used to describe the various methods to maintain control over their operations. Sometimes local coal operators used welfare capitalism to reward their workers and other times they used forms of repression to control the workforce.

<sup>12</sup> Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to stabilize the coal industry, coal operators and union representatives met in Jacksonville, Florida to formalize a contract. The agreement extended the 1922 wage scale.

technologies, such as cutting machines, electric drills, and loading machines, which decreased the number of skilled craftsmen and replaced them with more unskilled miners.<sup>14</sup> The new equipment did not require the skilled craftsmanship of older mining techniques so coal companies hired more unskilled Eastern and Southern European workers and black workers from the South.<sup>15</sup> The entrance of new workers stirred ethnic tensions among the native white miners and foreign-born and black coal miners. In order to unify the diverse working class, the union stressed the similarities between the multi-ethnic mine workers. The UMWA portrayed coal operators as oppressors seeking to strip mine workers of their economic, social, and political entitlements.

In addition to the union, religious expression offered mine workers an emotional escape. Working-class faith was not dictated by church attendance or volunteerism but articulated itself differently from middle-and upper-class religiosity. Many working-class Christians did not have the extra time or money to participate in church activities. Instead their spirituality developed separately from the church hierarchy established by the upper and middle classes. Laborers expressed their religious beliefs through prayer, obedience, and Bible study, which often did not take place in a church building. In his study of industrial workers in Philadelphia, historian Ken Fones-Wolf argues, “Christianity was not merely the possession of one social group, but was rather a dynamic social force capable of complementing a wide spectrum of political and class

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<sup>14</sup> Keith Dix notes that by 1920, nearly 61 percent of underground coal mined operated undercutting machines. Keith Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to Do?: The Mechanization of Coal Mining* in the Pittsburgh Series in Social and Labor History (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1988), 28-78.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields 1908-1921*, Working Class in American History (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 201.

positions.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the spirituality of the mine workers in Marion County did not follow traditional church doctrines, which helps explain the draw of mine workers to the Fundamentalist revivals of evangelist Billy Sunday as well as the Social Gospel teachings of Reverend J.C. Broomfield.<sup>17</sup>

Although mine workers defined their own spirituality, both conservative and progressive ministers affiliated with organized religion worked to bring the coal miners into their fold.<sup>18</sup> The Social Gospel movement, encouraged by progressive ministers nationwide, used the pulpit and spiritual events to uplift the working class. Church leaders in Marion County worked in tandem with UMWA leaders: Reverend Eugene Neubauer led prayers during union meetings, Dr. Broomfield delivered speeches

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<sup>16</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, xix-xx.

<sup>17</sup> William Ashley “Billy” Sunday was born in Ames, Iowa on November 19, 1862. In 1883, Sunday began his baseball career with the Chicago White Stockings as an outfielder. Sunday converted to Christianity and in the 1890s, he retired from baseball to join the ministry. Sunday became an important evangelical at the turn of the century. He vehemently supported Prohibition, an issue that played a central role in his sermon. Sunday also opposed unionism, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, playing cards, and dancing. By the 1920s, Sunday’s popularity dwindled, and he only held campaigns in smaller cities, such as Fairmont, where he could draw sizable crowds. Sunday died in Chicago, Illinois on November 6, 1936. Reverend John C. Broomfield served as minister for the Methodist Protestant Temple, also known as the “People’s Temple” in Fairmont for nineteen years. After receiving a promotion in 1925 to the position of president of the Pittsburgh Conference, Broomfield left Fairmont. He continued to stay abreast of the mine war events, and the Fairmont Ministerial Association asked him to present a guest lectureship about industrial problems plaguing the region. Margaret Bendroth, “Why Women Loved Billy Sunday: Urban Revivalism and Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century American Culture” *Religion and American Culture* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 251-271; Workman, “Political Culture,” 199; William G. McLoughlin Jr., *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday: The Life and Work of Rev. William Ashley Sunday, D.D. The Baseball Evangelist*, (New York, Chicago, Toronto, London, and Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914); Thomas C. Miller, *Sketches and Reminiscences of the Methodist Protestant Church of Fairmont, West Virginia: Locally Known As the People’s Temple* (Baltimore, MD: Stockton Press, 1927), 124-128.

<sup>18</sup> The term “progressive” is used in this thesis to mean a religious leader who incorporated sociological approaches to his or her teachings. These pastors preached about social rather than individual salvation and incorporated literary and historical criticisms in Bible study. By focusing on this-world’s concerns, progressive religious leaders sought to create a heaven on earth. Conservative pastors preached traditional Fundamentalist beliefs, such as individual deliverance, the infallible nature of the Bible, and focused on other-worldly rewards waiting in a literal Heaven.

concerning the industrial problems in the Fairmont Field, and Pastor George Bevans along with his congregation donated clothes and other items to the striking miners and their families.<sup>19</sup> Their support strengthened the union's resolve to organize the region and provided religious justification for the coal miner's actions during times of labor strife.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, some conservative religious leaders remained loyal to the coal operators due to the financial support provided to their churches and their congregations. Many churches located in coal towns received a majority of their funding from the coal companies, and in order to continue receiving these funds, pastors formulated sermons that toed the company line. Industrialists also sponsored revivals conducted by conservative ministers such as Billy Sunday that stressed obedience to the coal companies and contentment from the workers.<sup>21</sup>

Coal operators and union organizers recognized the importance of faith in the miners' lives and each used religious expression to gain support for the positions. Labor leaders in the region used biblical stories to encourage mine workers to rally behind the union banner. UMWA International Representative Van A. Bittner professed his belief

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<sup>19</sup> The local papers do not provide as much information about Reverends Neubauer and Bevans, yet their involvement with the miners and the organization drives express the pro-labor sentiment in Marion County during the mine war. "Stadium," *Fairmont Times*, April 2, 1925; "Dr. Broomfield Assails Law and Coal Operators," *West Virginian*, January 12, 1925; "In One Day's News" *Labor Age*, December 1925.

<sup>20</sup> The relationship between union representatives and spiritual leaders in Marion County is unclear; however, the contributions the pastors made to the organization efforts provided religious justification. As labor historian E. P. Thompson noted, "...Behind every form of popular direct action some legitimising notion of right is to be found." Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 68.

<sup>21</sup> For the purposes of this study, the definition of religious role will be used as defined by Kowalewski and Greil: (1) "utilization of religious ideas and symbols by church membership to critique the existing regime and society, justify rebellion, and envision the new order; (2) use of religious gathering sites as organizational foci and sanctuaries for rebels; (3) provisions of intelligence, supplies, and funding for rebels by religious bodies; (4) density of interpersonal and organizational ties between religious body and movement, and (5) direct participation in demonstrations, armed operations, and other rebel activities by church members." David Kowalewski and Arthur L. Greil, "Religion as Opiate: Church and Revolution in Comparative Structural Perspective," *Journal of Church and State* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 511-526.

in the “trade union gospel.” This ideology combined “democratic idealism” and “Protestant moral and social perfectionism.”<sup>22</sup> These labor leaders used religious imagery and rhetoric to emotionally connect with their audiences.<sup>23</sup> The connection between spirituality and unionization played an important role in the events of the mine wars in the Fairmont Field. This study reveals the complex and fluid nature of this relationship and its effects on the lives of Marion County’s working class.

For many years Appalachian scholars have questioned what caused a region containing so many natural resources to lag behind the rest of the nation’s economic development. Early “local color” writers and historians argued that Appalachia’s economic backwardness stemmed from a culture of poverty, which asserted the region’s social and cultural traits, such as fatalism and fierce independence, did not foster enterprise.<sup>24</sup> In opposition to the culture of poverty model some historians, such as Harry Caudill and David Alan Corbin, employed the internal colony model, which accused absentee landowners of devastating Appalachia’s landscape with extreme excavation measures that left the land ravaged.<sup>25</sup> These outside capitalists quickly fled the region

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<sup>22</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 343; “Who is Van Bittner?,” *Fairmont Times*, June 12, 1925.

<sup>23</sup> Betty Snyder Hall, “The Role of Rhetoric in the Northern West Virginia Activities of the United Mine Workers, 1897-1927” (Master’s thesis, West Virginia University, 1955).

<sup>24</sup> Anthropologist Oscar Lewis theorized in his monograph *Five Families* that the impoverished form a value system separate from other socio-economic classes, which contributes to their cycle of poverty. Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*, introduction by Margaret Mead (New York: Basic Books, 1975). For an example of the application of the “culture of poverty” model in Appalachia, see Jack Weller, *Yesterday’s People: Life in Contemporary Appalachia* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> The internal colony model describes the uneven economic and political development of a region within a nation state. For example, see Harry Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1964); David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coalfields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1930* (Knoxville, TN: the University of Tennessee Press, 1981). For more information about historians and sociologists combating Appalachian stereotypes, see Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford, eds. *Back Talk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999).

with great wealth and without reinvesting their profits into the local infrastructure or establishing a self-sustaining economy.<sup>26</sup> This theory of exploitation is shortsighted and denies the miners' role in Marion County's economic development by placing the blame for the demise solely on the industrialists. This thesis builds on the more recent scholarly works of historians, such as Price Fishback and Michael Workman, who reexamine to the role of coal operators in the lives of miners. Fishback challenges Corbin's assertion that the company store was a monopolistic force in the lives of mine workers, explaining that coal miners viewed company stores as part of their employment package and had the option to shop at other markets.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, regional historian Michael Workman discusses the political culture centered on various industries in northern West Virginia with a particular focus on coal companies in the Fairmont Field. Workman identifies the quiescent political power the miners possessed and how trade unionists encouraged coal miners to express their collective rights against the mine operators' oppressive tactics.<sup>28</sup> Expanding on their research concerning West Virginia's political and economic realms, this research includes the social and cultural impact of the mine war on communities in Marion County.

In addition to Appalachian scholarship, this research also utilizes "new labor" history models. Early labor historians utilized Marxist theory to understand the struggle of the working class.<sup>29</sup> These historians identified Christianity as a tool of the

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<sup>26</sup> For more information about use of the Internal Colony Model to describe Appalachia's economic development, see Kenneth Noe, "Appalachia before Mr. Peabody: Some Recent Literature on the southern Mountain Region," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 110, no. 1 (2002): 5-34.

<sup>27</sup> Price Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s" *Journal of Economic History* 46 (December 1986): 1011-29.

<sup>28</sup> Workman, et al., "Coal Context," 34-36.

management used to justify the status quo. In doing so, they failed to recognize any positive ways Christianity benefited the workers.<sup>30</sup> Herbert Gutman and E. P. Thompson challenged institutional labor historians' theories and paved the way for current "new labor" historians to investigate religious influence in working-class radicalism. Gutman introduced the idea of "religious radicalism" and identified various expressions of working-class spirituality.<sup>31</sup> In his study of Protestantism and the American labor movement, Gutman demonstrated how trade unionists used biblical passages to comment on the plight of the workers. He recognized that working-class spirituality acted autonomously from mainstream religion, and workers defined their spirituality uniquely from middle- and upper-class Christians. Thompson surveyed the rise of Britain's labor force and formulated the concept of the "legitimised notion of right [sic]" with regard to strikes.<sup>32</sup> The theory of the "legitimised notion of right"—introduced in *The Making of the English Working Class*—explains that groups construct ideas about just actions and beliefs and defend these beliefs adamantly. This theory does not necessarily suggest religious ideologies; however, the groups examined in this study (e.g. coal operators, local ministers, union organizers, and miners) did use the Bible as well as religious rhetoric and imagery to justify their positions.

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<sup>29</sup> Some historians continue to utilize Marxist models to research the lives of the working class. Bruce Nelson's work, *Beyond the Martyrs* examined unionization efforts from labor leaders that employed Socialist principles. He explained that religion only hindered that success of unionization. Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: a Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

<sup>30</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, xiii-xx.

<sup>31</sup> Herbert Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age" *American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (October 1966): 74-101.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 68.



More recently, historian Ken Fones-Wolf explored the roles of theology and unionization in the United States. In *Trade Union Gospel*, Fones-Wolf recounted the impact of the Labor Forward Movement, a joint venture between religious and union organization, on the workers' pursuit of better living and working conditions for laborers in Philadelphia.<sup>33</sup> Fones-Wolf challenged conventions held by institutional labor historians that religion favored capitalism, that workers' loyalties to specific denominations caused social fissures, and that socialists and anarchists were irreligious. Fones-Wolf contested this historiographical tradition and argued instead that Christians supported both progressive policies as well as conservative values, that the church supported the working class forming independent spiritual beliefs, that religious doctrine did not remain fixed but adapted to local needs, and that the working, middle, and upper classes created various types of religious expressions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>34</sup>

Historians of religion have long embraced the emerging "new labor" historiographical methods that consider religion and religious radicalism. Using a blend of economic analysis and religious history, Liston Pope examined the growth of churches near a textile plant in Gastonia, North Carolina.<sup>35</sup> He noted the reciprocal relationship between the

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<sup>33</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*.

<sup>34</sup> In addition to Ken Fones-Wolf's monograph, Carletta Bush wrote an article concerning religious expression in the Fairmont Field. She portrayed the rise and fall of evangelical Protestantism and the emergence of Social Gospel ministry during the 1910s and 1920s. Bush suggested this shift in the religious climate arose from conditions of social upheaval brought by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and immigration. Although she emphasized these important elements, Bush failed to mention the role of religion with regard to the mine wars that inundated the region between 1924 and 1929. Bush, "Religious Fervor in the Fairmont Field: Calls for Revival and Reform in the 'Coal City,' 1908-1929" *American Religious Experience* [online journal] <http://are.wvu.edu/cbush.htm> (accessed 10 October 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: a Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1965).

funding coal companies provided to the churches and the “collective symbols” (e.g. sobriety, hard work, and obedience) ministers preached to maintain order and keep the workers in the mill.<sup>36</sup> Even though Pope made connections between working-class church attendance and their obedience at work, he ignored the presence of social Christianity in the South. He instead argued that outside atheist, Communist influences inspired the millhands to strike. In a more recent study, Clifford Grammich, Jr. investigated the ways clergy and their parishioners manipulate Scripture to serve the needs of the congregation. He examined doctrinal shifts by Southern Baptists, who call themselves “Biblical Literalists,” and demonstrates how different congregations used to interpret biblical passages to sustain their positions on social issues.<sup>37</sup>

Using models articulated by labor historians Herbert Gutman and Ken Fones-Wolf, this thesis examines working-class faith and its influence during periods of labor strife in the northern West Virginia coalfields. The miners’ religious expression functioned outside of the institutions dictated by the upper and middle classes. Moreover, middle-class religious groups, such as the Social Gospel and the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU), worked cooperatively with working-class organizations, including unions. Understanding the nature of working-class spirituality provides a new way to investigate the actions of the region’s miners. Ultimately, this thesis shows that working-class spirituality in connection with middle and upper class Christianity aided in the formation of labor solidarity in Marion County.

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<sup>36</sup> According to sociologist Dwight Billings, in his comparative studies of religion’s role in Southern labor-management disputes, “Pope found that in ‘normal’ times, religion in the mill villages around Gastonia 1) legitimated capitalistic virtues . . . 2) contributed to community integration, and 3) offered workers outlets for emotional escape. In times of crisis, religion was called upon to sanction and preserve the traditional order.” Billings, “Religion as Opposition,” 12.

<sup>37</sup> Clifford A. Grammich, Jr., *Local Baptists, Local Politics: Churches and Communities in the Middle and Uplands South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

This research revises two historiographical trends that characterize labor and Appalachian scholarship. First, this thesis argues that past historians have not adequately addressed the importance of the relationship between working-class religiosity and trade unionism. Historical monographs concerning Christianity in the lives of the labor force often relegate it to a peripheral role or argue that religion, especially Christianity, hindered the rise of a unified working-class consciousness. This thesis challenges these assertions and provides a more nuanced view of the relationship between working-class spirituality and the labor movement. Second, by assigning blame to outside capitalists, Appalachian scholars deny the working class agency in shaping the region's economic development. For years, mine workers accepted coal operators' welfare capitalism programs as the industry expanded. As the days of operation became more inconsistent coal miners joined the UMWA with hopes that organization would decrease inactive days and increase their standards of living. As the union's influence waned and the mine war continued, miners returned to work at nonunion mines under the open-shop policy, the so-called "American Plan." Understanding how coal miners in Marion County used the union to vocalize their political and economic power demonstrates the numerous ways that the working class participated in the development of the region.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One, "Industrial Development and the Conquest of Marion County," presents background information about the development of the coal industry in West Virginia. The coal industry developed rapidly between 1880 and World War I. Indigenous mine operators accumulated great wealth and political influence, which they exercised over the coal miners and other members of the community. To suppress unionization efforts, coal companies instituted many forms

of welfare capitalism. Following the wartime coal boom, miners demanded union representation, collective bargaining, and improved standards in living and working. The region's coal miners joined the UMWA, dissenting against the significant economic, political, and social control local coal operators had over Marion County.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter Two, "Better the Devil You Know than the Devil You Don't: Trade Unionism in the Fairmont Field," captures the religious influence of union leaders in Marion County. Many UMWA officers had background in the ministry, such as R.M. Williams and H. E. Peters. Other union organizers employed religious rhetoric and imagery in their speeches. Van A. Bittner, Eugene V. Debs, Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, and Samuel Gompers utilized the "trade union gospel" to inspire the miners to join the union. The use of spiritual language during organization drives provided the miners with an emotional outlet as well as a support system. The union welcomed the support of the churches and saw them as important allies against the coal operators' tactics including, the "American Plan," "yellow dog" contracts, and force.

Chapter Three, "'The Devil Was the First Scab': Ministerial Dilemmas and Working-Class Spirituality," outlines the religious environment in Marion County. This section describes the ways local ministers assisted the miners during their struggle as well as those that hindered unionization efforts. This chapter discusses the work of local minister, Reverend John Calvin Broomfield, and his support for the labor movement. During his long tenure, 1905-1924, he showed great enthusiasm for progressive elements

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<sup>38</sup> For more information about unionization drives and the obstacles imposed by welfare capitalism in West Virginia, see Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 2-3, 69 and 99-118; Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, 117-118; Workman, "Political Culture," 205-259; Glenn Frank Massay, "Coal Consolidation: Profile of the Fairmont Field of Northern West Virginia, 1852-1903" (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1955), 247-258.

in the city. During the 1910s, Broomfield hosted campaign events for candidates of the Socialist Party. In contrast, Billy Sunday, the renowned national evangelist, made several appearances in Fairmont rallying for Prohibition and against the union. His conservative message suited the town, the coal operators, and many of the miners as well. Local men formed Billy Sunday Clubs to continue the work and spread the message of the evangelist. The resulting religious involvement aggravated ethnic tensions between native white Protestants and foreign-born Catholics. The mine war provides a model for understanding how religious organizations developed pro-labor and anti-union positions.

The conclusion, "Get Thee Behind Me, Satan," describes the conditions of the union and coal mines by 1927. The events of the mine war left an indelible mark on Marion County and the mining industry in north-central West Virginia. This concluding chapter will discuss the efforts used by coal operators to diffuse the UMWA's organization campaigns. Rural industrialists instituted several forms of welfare capitalism to quell organized labor efforts. As absentee coal firms moved into Marion County, the coal companies moved away from welfare capitalism and struck against the union with extreme tactics, including injunctions, evictions, "yellow dog" contracts, and violence. Reacting to the efforts of the coal operators, union representatives used spiritual language to provide miners with both an emotional outlet and a support system based on inter-ethnic cooperation. The region's churches became a rallying point for coal operators and labor leaders to express their positions to the miners. UMWA officials viewed spiritual leaders as important allies against coal operators. Mine operators also utilized the churches to maintain order and dissuade miners from joining the union. Religious involvement also had a negative impact on the community. Ethnic tensions

during the mine war entered the region's spiritual environment and augmented the already fragile relationship between native white, middle- and working-class Protestants and the foreign-born working class Catholics. Last, the conclusion discusses the ways in which Marion County offers a model for understanding how religious organizations developed pro-labor and anti-union positions and its importance to the study of industry in Appalachian history.

Chapter I: Industrial Development and the Conquest of Marion County  
1850s-1910s

There is no romance in coal digging/ Let a man go down and try it and  
he will soon pray heaven to throw him a handful of stars/  
We honor you who dig the priceless gem, the diamond black; deposit of the sun  
Did Moses strike the rock? / Did water run to quench the savage thirst of dying men?  
You strike and flood gates open/ Your pick as magic rod you yield/ Three cheers for you  
coal miner, working mate of God.<sup>1</sup>

Following the Civil War, Marion County, West Virginia experienced a rapid transformation from an agrarian-based economy to a rural industrial economy. At the center of the county's rise to political and economic prominence were several rural industrialists, including patriarch James Otis (J. O.) Watson, his son Clarence Wayland (C. W.) Watson, and his son-in-law Aretas Brooks (A. B.) Fleming. This group spearheaded economic and industrial development in north-central West Virginia and influenced state and local political legislation and legal decisions to secure their dominance. These captains of industry amassed great wealth and power which they wielded over the coal miners and other community members.<sup>2</sup> Once the coal companies exhausted the native labor pool, operators imported immigrant workers to meet labor demands. The influx of ethnic miners created tensions within the workforce and anger toward management from both immigrant and native coal miners. In order to maintain an acquiescent working class, coal operators supported social programs that encouraged local miners to act according to the industrialists' vision of progress and Americanism. These social activities included Prohibition campaigns, spiritual revivals, and other forms of welfare capitalism. Coal operators considered obedience from the mine workers

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<sup>1</sup> Poem written by Dan D. Tullis, a Presbyterian minister from Newark, Ohio published in *United Mine Workers Journal* 37, no. 8 (April 15, 1926): 7. From here on cited as the *UMWJ*.

<sup>2</sup> The term "captains of industry" comes from John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1976).

essential to protect their profits and keep labor costs down. Although the industrials' efforts suppressed organized labor initially, following the World War I coal boom, miners demanded higher wages, improved standards of living, and union representation. In response to the significant economic, political, and social control that the Watsons and other rural industrialists accrued, the region's coal miners joined the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

The coal industry in north-central West Virginia developed much later than those in other Appalachian coal producing regions, which was due, in part, to the inadequate transportation and trade arteries caused by the delay of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to complete a rail through Fairmont until the mid-nineteenth century. The introduction of the railroad allowed local industrialists to begin large-scale coal operations in Marion County. In 1852, the "Father of the Statehood Movement," Francis Pierpont (1814-1899), and his partner, James Otis Watson, (1815-1902)—dubbed the "Father of the West Virginia Coal Industry"—formed the American Coal Company in Palatine on the east bank of the Monongahela River across from Fairmont. Their company began shipping coal to Baltimore, Detroit, and the Great Lakes region on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, but the Civil War disrupted the regularity of the shipments. Later, the panic of 1873 ended the business and personal relationship between Watson and Pierpont and soon after Watson established the Fairmont Coal Company.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Not much is known about the exact causes of the split between Pierpont and Watson. They never spoke to each other after their business associations soured. After their deaths, members of the Pierpont and Watson families made amends with one another, according to Michael Workman who conducted an oral interview with Bart Watson—relative of James O. Watson. Workman, "Political Culture," 137-204; Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns*, 146-174.



The Watson family and other local operators faced overwhelming disadvantages in the competitive coal market. During the early years of the coal industry, the mountains and rivers hindered the growth of transportation routes to distant markets located in Baltimore and the Great Lakes region. At the turn of the twentieth century, the growing national economy coupled with rail lines supplied by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad allowed Marion County's coal companies to ship larger quantities of coal. Local industry had no home market for the coal mined in the region, which caused indigenous coal operators to accrue large shipping costs.<sup>4</sup>

As coal operations in Marion County expanded, the mines required more laborers. Early coal miners in the Fairmont Field viewed mining as a part-time occupation. Local farmers dug coal as a seasonal job to supplement their income between harvests. Once coal operators exhausted the local labor pool, the coal companies ventured into neighboring states, such as Pennsylvania and Ohio, to find workers.<sup>5</sup> As the mines continued to grow, coal companies imported workers from Eastern and Southern Europe. Ethnic miners worked for less pay, which aggravated native white workers and created tension between the workers. Utilizing immigrant miners allowed mine operations to keep labor costs down and thus compete better in the aggressive coal industry.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Workman, et al., "Coal Context," 3, 8. Historian Michael Workman explained that industries statewide relied on natural gas to fuel industry rather than coal.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> Initially, companies only employed foreign-born mine workers to operate the mines, but the management later realized that the cultural differences between indigenous and ethnic miners impeded unionization. After World War I, coal operators brought African American coal miners to the region as strikebreakers, creating a "judicious mixture" in the mines to halt the UMWA's advances. Kenneth R. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917" *West Virginia History* 34, no. 2 (January 1973): 141-161.

Around the same time immigrant workers came to the region coal companies introduced new technologies to the mines. Initially, mine workers used hand loading techniques to mine coal. Miners opened tunnels through the coal face using the room-and-pillar method. At the entrance, mine workers bore into the coal seam “at intervals of approximately 400 feet,” creating side entries “that ranged from 1,200 to 1,500 feet long.” Starting at the side entries and at right angles, coal miners excavated the “rooms,” leaving large pillars of coal to support the roof. Coal miners conducted much of their work in the rooms.<sup>7</sup> Trained mine workers used timber to stabilize the roof; then, with hand-augers, coal miners drilled holes in the coal wall. Next, mine workers carefully placed dynamite into the drilled hole and exploded the wall surface; finally, miners hand loaded carts with coal, leaving dirt and slate behind. After the miners extracted the coal from the rooms, work began on the pillar, a method known as “pillar drawing.” Coal miners dug into the pillars, working from the back wall toward the entrance until the roof collapsed. Due to the risk involved in room-and-pillar system, skilled mine workers took great pride in their craft. Miners during the hand-loading era were very independent. Mine workers purchased their own tools and supplies needed in the mines (e.g. picks, blasting powder, oil or carbide lamps, and shovels). Coal miners even paid the company blacksmith to maintain their equipment. Miners worked without much supervision. Additionally, rather than an hourly or salaried wage, the coal companies paid mine workers based on the tonnage mined.<sup>8</sup> New mining technologies transformed the way hand-loaders performed their job.

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<sup>7</sup> Keith Dix, *What's a Miner to Do?, The Mechanization of Coal Mining* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988), 2-3.

Mine operators introduced new equipment to the mines by the early 1900s. Initially air compressed or electrically driven drills replaced hand augers to prepare the coal wall for dynamite. By the mid- to late 1910s, coal companies installed cutting and loading machines that revolutionized the mining industry. Some operators claimed mine workers exerted too much control over the production speed, and with loading machines, such as the Joy loading machine, the companies could mine more efficiently.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, coal companies hired more unskilled workers as these new machines required less expertise than the hand loading techniques. In contrast, miners viewed their profession as a craft, requiring great deftness and knowledge, and objected to the threat posed by new technology and the unskilled workers hired to operate the machines.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Fairmont Field employed these technologies in the mines, the region lagged behind other industrial cities because mine operators in Marion County competed for markets with earlier established coal companies in neighboring states. In response to the growing coal industry, operators in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania formed an organization known as the Central Competitive Field (CCF). This group became the “pace setter of the entire industry” because the CCF controlled coal prices and exerted influence over the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).<sup>11</sup> The union typically negotiated collective bargaining agreements with the CCF, and then made similar

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<sup>8</sup> Dix, *What's a Miner to Do?*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Francis Joy (1883-1957) invented the Joy Loading Machine, also known as the “Joy Loader,” and patented the equipment in the mid-1910s. The machine consisted of two swinging arms that grabbed coal from the mine floor and loaded it to a conveyor belt that loaded mine cars with coal. For a more extensive discussion of the Joy loader, see *Ibid.*, 61-76.

<sup>10</sup> Dix, *What's a Coal Miner to Do*, 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Edmond M. Beame, “The Jacksonville Agreement: Quest for Stability in Coal” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 8, no. 2 (1955): 195-204.

contracts with coal operators outside of the CCF's control, such as those in West Virginia. Coal operators in West Virginia suspected that the CCF conspired with the UMWA to organize the region because Fairmont Field operators and CCF operators competed for the same markets.<sup>12</sup> To compensate for this competitive limitation, the region's coal companies often undersold their coal and suppressed union organization efforts to keep labor costs down.

As coal boomed, the Watson-Fleming family expanded their political influence. C.W. Watson, his brothers, and his brother-in-law formed the "Fairmont Ring" in order to maintain their business and political interests in Marion County and throughout the state.<sup>13</sup> Watson's rise to political prominence came through his connections to leading Democrats, such as former West Virginia Senator Henry G. Davis. In 1911, political leaders chose Watson to take the U.S. Senate seat vacated by the departed Stephen Elkins, another leading industrialist in the state and son-in-law of Senator Davis. He lost in the first direct election for the U.S. Senate in 1913.<sup>14</sup> Later, Watson served as lieutenant colonel in the Ordnance Department of the U.S. Army.<sup>15</sup> He kept abreast of the situation in state and local political activities but not as actively as his brother-in-

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<sup>12</sup> Workman, "Political Culture," 212-3.

<sup>13</sup> The "Fairmont Ring" was a political machine that exerted power in the state and local politics. The ring's influence also stretched into Eastern Kentucky when the Consolidation Coal Company (Consol), headed by C. W. Watson, opened mines there. Once Consol directed their attention to Kentucky they allowed absentee coal operators to open mines in north-central West Virginia, which later undermined their authority in the region. For more information, see Harry M. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 67-84.

<sup>14</sup> Otis K. Rice and Stephen W. Brown, *West Virginia: A History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 214.

<sup>15</sup> *Fairmont Times*, March 12, 1918; March 15, 1918; *West Virginian* May 10, 1918; Workman, "Political Culture," 253.

law, A. B. Fleming.<sup>16</sup> Fleming ushered in an era of cooperation between the state's industrial and political leaders during his governorship. He later used his influence as former governor to persuade political leaders to vote for legislation that favored industry. As legal counsel and lobbyist for the Fairmont Coal Company and Standard Oil, Fleming petitioned the state legislature to defeat "vicious legislation" concerning severance taxes in the early 1900s.<sup>17</sup> If tax reform legislation passed, Fleming feared a united front between labor organizations and farmers—a potentially powerful political combination. Fleming also communicated with Secretary of State Charles W. Swisher and other state leaders to halt the Peonage Act, a bill that held coal companies responsible for the actions of the special mine guards they hired.<sup>18</sup> Fleming's enterprising nature secured the economic and political standings of coal operators and other regional industrialists.<sup>19</sup>

Regional coal operators also used the legal system to keep their costs low. Although the state abounded with natural resources, early extractive industries found it difficult to attract capital. In order to secure outside investments, the Mountain State restructured its legal and political organizations. Between 1860 and 1930, the courts

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<sup>16</sup> The northern industrial sector boosted several political leaders. Stephen Elkins, Henry G. Davis, Francis Pierpont, J. N. Camden, and Nathan Goff also represented the region as leaders in the state government and/or state representatives for the U. S. Senate. This illustrates the power that these rural industrialists had in molding the state's evolving legal system and inciting a political revolution.

<sup>17</sup> Clyde Johnson to Randolph Stalnaker, copy to A.B. Fleming, May 28, 1903; Copy of a telegram sent from W.P. Hubbard to A.B. White, August 21, 1903; William A. Ohey to A.B. Fleming, October 7, 1903; F. P. Moats to A.B. Fleming, March 1, 1904; J. St. Clair to A.B. Fleming, October 15, 1906; A.B. Fleming to C.W. Swisher, January 25, 1907; Telegram from Z.T. Vinson to A.B. Fleming, February 23, 1907; Fleming Papers, Boxes 82 and 86, West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia (Hereafter, WVRHC). "Vicious legislation" is a term used by Fleming and others in correspondences concerning various bills that challenged the autonomy of West Virginia's industrial interest.

<sup>18</sup> A.B. Fleming to C.W. Swisher, January 25, 1907; C.W. Swisher to A.B. Fleming, January 29, 1907, Fleming Papers, Box 86, WVRHC.

<sup>19</sup> For more information about the legislation Fleming found "objectionable," see Workman, "Political Culture," 173-6.

experienced radical shifts in determining legal decisions. The early court (1860-1889), modeled after the legal system in eastern Virginia, typically ruled in favor of the “natural rights” of agrarian landowners over the desires of industrialists.<sup>20</sup> If the railroads damaged property owned by a farmer (e.g. livestock or farm land), the courts held the rail companies liable for the farmer’s loss.<sup>21</sup> The courts’ rulings followed the desires of wealthy agrarians who dominated the political and legal landscape of eastern Virginia. The “New Court” (1890-1930), a term coined by historian Ronald L. Lewis, shifted from the legal standards of Virginia and instead adopted a philosophy of “legal positivism,” which meant that land carried an economic value for both industry and agriculture.<sup>22</sup> If a farmer sued a railroad company because a train damaged his property, judges seated on the “New Court” usually acquitted the rail line and accused the farmer of negligence.<sup>23</sup> The judicial system claimed reorganization was necessary because “nearly everyone in West Virginia wanted internal improvements,” yet the state’s political leaders appointed members of the court to secure their own business interests.<sup>24</sup> West Virginia’s legal policies secured tax incentives and separated mineral rights from rights to property for coal companies, making land with natural resources less expensive. Moreover, in times of labor strife, mine owners looked to the courts to suppress the activities of the UMWA. Coal companies secured injunctions against labor representatives and petitioned judges to evict striking miners living in company housing. As labor-management disputes

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside*, 110-112.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 117, 118, and 127.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-177.

escalated during the 1920s, the courts became a battleground for the UMWA and the coal operators.

During the apex of the coal boom in the region (1880-1920), the Watson-Fleming interests gained power within the industry, locally and nationwide. The Watsons succeeded in Marion County and West Virginia politics through legal and political maneuvers that allowed the coal operators to consolidate their companies with other competitors. Many local operators allied with the Watson-Fleming family because they shared similar business philosophies. Several mine owners consolidated their operations with the Watson-Fleming interests and started new mines elsewhere. For example, the Hutchinson family sold their mines in the Fairmont Field to the Watsons in the early 1910s and opened other mines in the northern and southern coalfields of West Virginia.<sup>25</sup>

After J. O. Watson's death in 1902, the first major consolidation began between coal operators in Marion County and those outside the region. Watson's sons entered the family enterprise and merged their individual mining operations. In 1903, the Watson sons along with their brother-in-law, A.B. Fleming, purchased large portions of stock in the Consolidation Coal Company (Consol) of Maryland, a company familiar to the Watson-Fleming family due to its presence in southern West Virginia.<sup>26</sup> While the two companies merged, the mines owned by Consol in Marion County continued to operate under the name the Fairmont Coal Company. C.W. Watson served as both president and chairman of the board for Consol from 1903 until 1928; he stepped down briefly between

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<sup>25</sup> Workman, "Political Culture," 168. No evidence points to any strikes or labor-management disputes due to consolidation; this could be because the Watson-Fleming interests and other local operators owned many of the mines. The coal companies consolidated their mines in order to control local prices and reduce competition for similar markets.

<sup>26</sup> Workman, et al., "Coal Context," 8-11.

1911 and 1913 when Democrats appointed him to represent West Virginia in the U.S. Senate. A. B. Fleming served as primary legal representative for the company and held a position on the board of directors. The other Watson brothers, Sylvanus Lamb and James Edwin, were active members of the board of directors. George T. Watson, Sylvanus's son, was spokesman for Consol and also served as a member of the board. Brooks Fleming, Jr., A. B. Fleming's son, worked as the assistant to the president of Consol and served as president of the Fairmont Coal Club, an organization of the region's coal operators who meet weekly to discuss issues and problems associated with the industry in the region.<sup>27</sup> Even though the Fairmont Coal Company merged with Consol, a much larger corporation that became internationally known by 1927 under the leadership of C.W. Watson, the Watson-Fleming family preserved their connections with Marion County. The company remained a family-run operation with several of C.W.'s nephews in top leadership positions in the Fairmont Field. By keeping the appearances of indigenous operators who cared about the well-being of their employees, the Watson-Fleming interests remained in great favor with local mine workers and the community until the 1920s.

Coal operators' wealth spread to the community as they invested money in Marion County's local economy and infrastructure. In the 1910s, the county's business leaders hosted an industrial diversification campaign to entice outside capital and industry to invest in the region. These industrialists wanted not only to create a home

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Beachley, *The History of the Consolidation Coal Company* (New York: The Consolidation Coal Company, 1934). The *Fairmont Times* published the events of the Fairmont Coal Club's weekly meetings. Often announcements of their meetings coincided with articles concerning the mine war. C. E. "Ned" Smith, the newspaper's editor, also owned stock in Consol and other industrial companies in the region. Smith and C.W. Watson were very good friends who often vacationed, hunted, and fished together.



market for the region's coal but also to establish a more independent local economy. Local coal operators purchased stock in the local bank and invested in glass and mining equipment manufacturing plants. The Watson-Fleming interests also bought shares in the local newspaper, the *Fairmont Times*, which quickly became a mouthpiece for the industry.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the coal companies purchased part of the Baltimore and Ohio rail line that passed through Morgantown and Fairmont.<sup>29</sup> A large infrastructure program that local coal operators invested in was an interurban trolley system that connected Fairmont and Clarksburg. Rail cars traveled between the two cities and satellite communities along the route, such as Farmington, Fairview, Monongah, and Shinnston. The miners and other members of the community rode the trolley to various markets and stores and spread their earnings across the region.

In addition to investing financially in Marion County's local economy, coal operators devoted capital to the workers' spiritual and social well-being. During the 1900s and 1910s, Prohibition campaigns throughout the state became a way for coal companies to team up with local ministers to rid West Virginia of the "demon rum." Local employers saw these events as a way to produce a cooperative and docile workforce, whereas preachers in Fairmont sought a larger and more committed congregation. Additionally, native white Protestants in Marion County viewed

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<sup>28</sup> Clarence Edwin "Ned" Smith (1885-1959) wrote an editorial column, "Good Morning!," for the *Fairmont Times*, which chronicled his childhood reminiscences, local politics, and other regional topics, including the mine war. In addition to his responsibilities at the paper, Smith also served as a U. S. Marshall from 1914 to 1924. He used his position to spy on labor activities. Smith had a personal relationship with the Watsons and other rural industrialists, which often impacted the stories the paper ran and colored his editorials. In opposition to the *Fairmont Times* perspective, the *West Virginian*, the Republican-leaning paper, took a somewhat more sympathetic approach toward the mine workers during the mine war period. For further information about Ned Smith, see Hoffman, *Marion County Centennial Yearbook*, 75; and Workman, "Political Culture," 329.

<sup>29</sup> For more information about the political and economic intrigue surround the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Marion County, see Workman, "Political Culture," 132-5 and 161-6.

immigrants, especially those from Eastern and Southern Europe, as prone to violence and criminal activity and believed that alcohol contributed to these behaviors. Dr. John Calvin (J. C.) Broomfield hosted a month-long service against liquor, beginning on February 15, 1909, coinciding with laws passed in Fairview and Farmington banning the sale of alcohol.<sup>30</sup> To continue these prohibition campaigns, prominent community members brought nationally recognized evangelist William Ashley “Billy” Sunday to Fairmont to conduct sermons against liquor.<sup>31</sup> His services began in November 1912 and ended with stiffer legislation against the sale of alcohol.<sup>32</sup> Later, the state passed the Yost Law in 1914, which outlawed the manufacturing and sale of liquor.<sup>33</sup> Ethnic miners viewed actions like the Yost Law and prohibition campaigns as an attack on their native customs. Some foreign-born workers even traveled to Point Marion, Pennsylvania, located six-miles outside of Morgantown, to buy alcohol. Broomfield continued to campaign for prohibition policies well into 1915. By funding these social programs the region’s coal operators and members of the middle class hoped to create a sober,

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<sup>30</sup> “Farmington and Fairview Dry,” *Fairmont Times*, January 8, 1909; *Fairmont Times*, February 15, 1909; “Great Crowds at Temple Revival,” *Fairmont Times*, March 1, 1909. For more about Dr. Broomfield, Thomas C. Miller, *Sketches and Reminiscences of the Methodist Protestant Church of Fairmont, West Virginia: Locally Known As the People's Temple* (Baltimore, MD: Stockton Press, 1927), 124-128.

<sup>31</sup> For more about Billy Sunday, see Margaret Bendroth, “Why Women Loved Billy Sunday: Urban Revivalism and Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century American Culture” *Religion and American Culture* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 251-271; William G. McLoughlin Jr., *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955); Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday: The Life and Work of Rev. William Ashley Sunday, D.D. The Baseball Evangelist*, (New York, Chicago, Toronto, London, and Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914).

<sup>32</sup> Charles H. McCormick, “The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era,” *West Virginia History* 52 (1993): 36; *Fairmont Times*, November 2, 1912.

<sup>33</sup> For more information about the Yost Law, see McCormick, “The Death of Constable Riggs,” 33-58.

dependable working class and make strong connections with the community and Marion County's spiritual leaders.

Along with sponsoring religious revivals, indigenous industrialists established particular social values, such as a "common purpose, work ethic, and progress" to secure an "economic and political hegemony."<sup>34</sup> In his study of coal miners in the Cumberland Gap, sociologist John Gaventa described dimensions of political power to understand the relationships between employers and employees.<sup>35</sup> Gaventa explained that insight into "social myths, language, and symbols and how they are shaped or manipulated in power processes" can teach historians and sociologists about how coal operators persuaded miners to behave in a manner that did not benefit the coal miner but did benefit the coal company.<sup>36</sup> Local operators advocated their faith in industrial and economic development to the community, and the community in turn relied on industry for housing and employment. Mine workers in the Fairmont Field often acted as "reluctant strikebreakers" when unionized mines in surrounding states, such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, and other members of the CCF, walked out of work.<sup>37</sup> The Marion County strikebreaking miners experienced high wages and the most stable working conditions, a rarity in the industry until World War I. Because of a shared interest in Marion County and its people, local miners continued to support indigenous operators. During periods of labor

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<sup>34</sup> John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Urbana and Chicago: University of University Press, 1980), 61-2.

<sup>35</sup> The Cumberland Gap is a valley region of the Appalachian Mountains where the Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee state borders meet.

<sup>36</sup> Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Glenn Frank Massay, "Coal Consolidation: Profile of the Fairmont Field of Northern West Virginia, 1852-1903" (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 1955): 234.

unrest, local coal operators campaigned against the union by emphasizing their benevolent acts of welfare capitalism and claimed that they could be trusted over the union “outsiders” who threatened the coal industry.<sup>38</sup> By creating and shaping a positive image of local industry and a negative depiction of labor organizations, local coal operators gained loyalty from local mine workers and community members which protected the industrialists’ political, economic, and social dominance in both Marion County and the state.<sup>39</sup>

As the coal industry in the Fairmont Field developed differently from the rest of the country, so too did the company housing for the mine workers. Historian Michael Workman describes three distinct coal town structures that characterized those in the region. First, was the single-owned company town, typical of small, rural communities in Marion County, such as Montana Mines. The company constructed and owned the houses where the miners lived and also owned and operated a company store. The coal camps were unincorporated and no political representation was available to the coal miners. Due to the remote nature of these towns, the miners needed the economic and social support from the company. These camps mirrored those in southern West Virginia.<sup>40</sup> Second, there were independent towns, such as Flemington in neighboring Taylor County, where a coal mine existed, but the coal company had little control over

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<sup>38</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 334. John Gaventa also explained that coal operators utilized “symbolic resources” (or pejorative terms), such as “Catholic,” “socialists,” “outsider,” or “troublemaker” as a “subtle means for discrediting discontent.” Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 254. An action particularly effective during the early labor disputes discussed in Glenn Frank Massay’s dissertation, “Coal Consolidation.”

<sup>39</sup> Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness*, 15-20.

<sup>40</sup> For more information about the southern West Virginia coal camps, see David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 9-12, 64-70, 75-79, and 122-3.

the town's dynamics. The miners owned their own homes or rented them from landlords outside of the company's purview. Third, was a diverse mix of the two, as in Barrackville, which began as an independent community with local political representation, but where the coal company constructed houses for the workers. The companies did not require workers to live in the camps, which gave the coal miners the opportunity to own homes or rent from other landlords.<sup>41</sup> The miners were not indebted to the company stores because they had access to local stores, unlike the controlling company towns in southern West Virginia.<sup>42</sup> The opportunity to own or rent homes free from the control of the region's coal companies could account for the relatively peaceful working conditions in Marion County.<sup>43</sup>

Coal operators also provided employees and their families with centers for social and spiritual advancement and sponsored various social programs. For example, in October 1909, the Federal Coal and Coke Company in Grant Town deeded land to the Catholic Church. In exchange for the company's aid, priests needed to make "every effort to meet the reasonable expectations of [the coal company] in the spiritual care of Catholic employees."<sup>44</sup> Coal companies, such as Consol, hired nurses to care for the miners and their families, built recreation facilities, funded Americanization campaigns, and promoted community improvement by advocating tidy homes and yards.<sup>45</sup> These

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<sup>41</sup> Workman, et al., "Coal Context," 28-9.

<sup>42</sup> Price Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s" *Journal of Economic History* 46 (December 1986): 1011-29.

<sup>43</sup> For the location of these towns in Marion County, see Appendix 1.2

<sup>44</sup> Land Deed in Grant Town between Rt. Rev. P. J. Donahue and the Federal Coal Company, St. Anthony's Church Box, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, WV. The author found no evidence that showed coal companies paid the local priests' wages.

programs sought to maintain a high quality of work from the mine workers and discourage unionism.<sup>46</sup> By 1890 the companies also discontinued the use of scrip and company store credit in lieu of cash payment for a monthly salary.<sup>47</sup> Paydays became an important day for the miners. Many mine workers took the day off and held parades to celebrate their wages. Some companies only paid miners once a month in anticipation of the coal miners' day off.<sup>48</sup> The paydays benefited both the miners and the coal operators. The miners provided basic necessities for their families each month, and the coal operators saw returns on their community investments. By funding and supporting various forms of welfare capitalism, the coal operators not only produced more effective and contented workers, they also formed good public relations with the larger Marion County community while continuing to protect their profits and suppressing unionization efforts.

Although the living conditions inspired harmonious working conditions, the introduction of immigrant and black miners into Marion County's mines created tensions among the workers. The labor composition in the region was fairly homogenous prior to

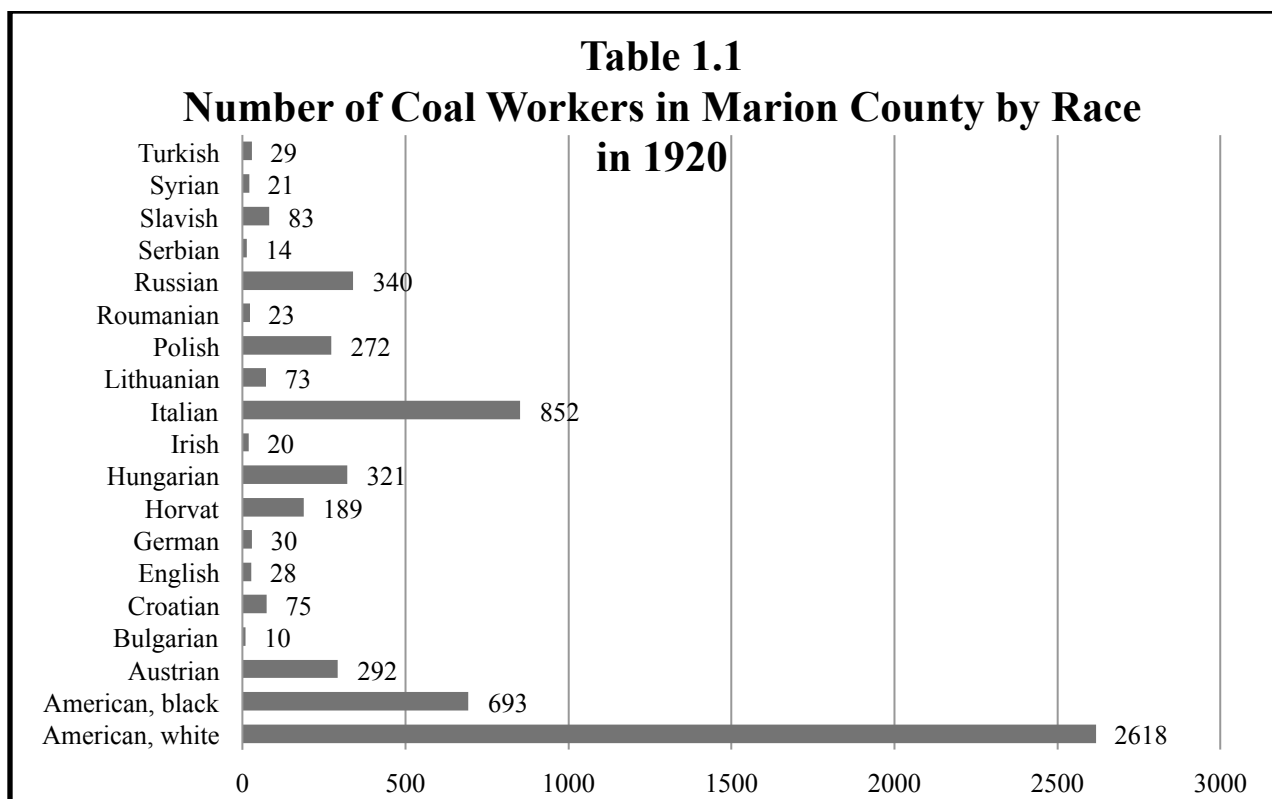
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<sup>45</sup> Workman, et al., "Coal Context," 31.

<sup>46</sup> For more information on these issues, see Workman, "Political Culture," 205-259; and John C. Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2-3, 69, and 99-118.

<sup>47</sup> Although the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals deemed the use of scrip illegal in place of a monthly wage, the coal companies found loopholes in the law. Often the coal companies provided cash advances to their employees in scrip. Occasionally these cash advances equaled the miners' monthly wages, and, therefore, the miners did not receive a paycheck for that month. Some coal companies liked the use of scrip because they did not have enough cash to pay the mine workers. Other companies did not pay the miners in scrip because the coal miners could leave the company with a very large debt due to the transient nature of mine workers. For more information, see Glenn Frank Massay, "Legislators, Lobbyists, and Loopholes: Coal Mining Legislation in West Virginia, 1875-1901" *West Virginia History* 32, no. 3 (April 1971): 162; and Workman, "Political Culture," 237-8.

<sup>48</sup> "Payday Brings Out Crowds," *Fairmont Times*, August 23, 1909; "Pay Day was Big in Clarksburg and Fairmont Districts," *Fairmont Times*, October 25, 1909; "Payday at Monongah," *West Virginian*, August 2, 1916.



Source: West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Reports 1930* (Charleston, WV: Tribune Printing Co., 1931), 252-3, and 259-60.

1890, but this changed after the industrial boom of the early twentieth century. As the coal industry expanded in Marion County, mines faced labor shortages. At this time, coal operators hired mine guards and secured injunctions against labor leaders to suppress union organization.<sup>49</sup> Soon, the labor pool from neighboring states dwindled and coal companies looked toward Eastern and Southern Europe to supply the needs for workers. In a larger effort to hinder organized labor, coal operators used these foreign-born workers to stop unionization efforts through a “divide and conquer” strategy.<sup>50</sup> During

<sup>49</sup> From the evidence the author examined, coal operators brought mine guards into the region as early as 1902. Clyde Johnson to Randolph Stalnaker, copy to A.B. Fleming, May 28, 1903; Copy of a telegram sent from W.P. Hubbard to A.B. White, August 21, 1903; William A. Ohey to A.B. Fleming, October 7, 1903; Fleming Papers, Boxes 82 and 86, WVHRC; Massay, “Coal Consolidation,” 278-81; and Workman, “Political Culture,” 216-7.

<sup>50</sup> Boris Emmet, *Labor Relations in the Fairmont, West Virginia Bituminous Coal Field*, Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin 361 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1924), 4-5.

the mid-1910s and early 1920s, more Italians journeyed to the region.<sup>51</sup> By 1920, immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe comprised nearly half of the mining workforce. African American mine workers made up the smallest portion of miners in Marion County. As they only made up a minor percentage of the mine workers, black miners were at the bottom of the social strata.<sup>52</sup> Coal companies brought black miners to Marion County from Alabama during the mine war period to keep the mines operational. The presence of African-American coal miners in Marion County was part of the “judicious mixture” attitude of the region’s coal operators as the UMWA gained more strength in the region.<sup>53</sup>

The entrance of ethnic miners added a multicultural dimension to the working-class identity. Language and cultural differences stood in the way of a unified workforce. Coal companies used these differences to divide the workers. Operators placed native miners in skilled and semi-skilled positions and hired immigrant and African American coal miners for unskilled jobs around the mines.<sup>54</sup> As coal operators introduced new technologies, such as the Joy loader, mine owners hired more immigrant coal miners because the machines required less mining expertise. Moreover, the layoff procedures conveyed the social stratification. During slow periods, the coal companies laid off bachelors of any ethnicity over married mine workers. If the mine required more layoffs, then the company let go of coal miners in order of social standing with black workers at

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<sup>51</sup> Klaus, “Uneven Americanization,” 191-214.

<sup>52</sup> Massay, “Coal Consolidation,” 207

<sup>53</sup> Emmet, *Labor Relations*, 4-5; and Bailey, “Judicious Mixture,” 157; and Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields 1908-1921*, Working Class in American History series (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 201.

<sup>54</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 236-237.



the bottom, Eastern and Southern Europeans just above them, and at the top native white miners.<sup>55</sup> Indigenous white mine workers resented these foreign-born coal miners because the immigrants worked for lesser wages.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, native coal miners and management accused the immigrant workers of criminal activities and drunkenness. Local newspapers chronicled crimes committed by “foreigners” and the “Black Hand.”<sup>57</sup> The “Black Hand,” an extortion racket comprised of Italian immigrants (mostly from Sicily), notoriously committed acts of violence, theft, and blackmail against members of the Italian community; however, all ethnic groups feared this organization. By emphasizing the criminal nature of workers from Eastern and Southern Europe, the local media created another barrier for all workers to overcome in later pursuits for unionization.

In several towns around Fairmont, such as Farmington and Monongah, Italians and Eastern Europeans participated in “wildcat” strikes before the UMWA organized the entire region.<sup>58</sup> One of these strikes occurred in Farmington in 1915, which resulted in the death of a popular law enforcement officer, Constable William R. Riggs, and created large fissures between the native white middle class and the ethnic working class. Some native white miners viewed the foreigners as disposed to radicalism (e.g. socialism) and

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<sup>55</sup> Massay, “Coal Consolidation,” 207.

<sup>56</sup> Bailey, “Judicious Mixture,” 150. Bailey specifically mentions Palatine, on Fairmont’s east bank of the Monongahela River, as an area with difficulty assimilating to the entrance of ethnic miners.

<sup>57</sup> “Two Men Held in Black Hand Plot,” *West Virginian*, April 18, 1922; “Three Local Black Handers to Hang at 5,” *West Virginian*, January 4, 1924; “Pepper Cast in Man’s Eyes,” *Fairmont Times*, October 10, 1924; “Officers Hold 35 Persons in Intimidation in Grant Town,” *Fairmont Times*, October 12, 1924; John C. McKinney, “The Black Hand!,” *Marion County Centennial Yearbook*, 76-78.

<sup>58</sup> Charles H. McCormick, “The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era,” *West Virginia History* 52, (1993): 39.

resented their presence in the mines.<sup>59</sup> The strike of 1915 antagonized these resentments because the participants were mainly Eastern European and Italians.<sup>60</sup> The striking miners claimed the walkout resulted from a new rule imposed by the company requiring miners to buy their own explosives to use in the mine.<sup>61</sup> On February 20, 1915, Fairmont's Sheriff C.D. Conaway along with several armed deputies, including Constable Riggs, traveled to the Jamison No. 9 mine in Farmington. Entering its fourth day, the coal companies and law enforcement wanted a quick conclusion to the strike. The police arrested two miners, causing several hundred striking mine workers to demand their release. Soon a violent clash erupted between the police and the coal miners. Constable Riggs received the brunt of the aggression. Many speculated about the brutality exacted upon Riggs—some pointed to his refusal to release the prisoners, whereas others claimed he enforced the Yost Law too forcefully. Historian Charles McCormick theorized that ethnic tensions between middle-class white Americans and working-class immigrants contributed to Riggs's death. Whether that was the case or not, this episode of labor strife shed a light on immigrant dissatisfaction with working conditions in Marion County. After this strike, the mine owners stepped up secret surveillance on immigrant mine workers.<sup>62</sup> Once the UMWA made serious gains in the region more immigrant workers joined the effort, and played a crucial role in the Marion County mine war.

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<sup>59</sup> Bailey, "Judicious Mixture," 150-1, 153, and 155.

<sup>60</sup> McCormick, "Death of Constable Riggs," 37-8; Klaus, "Uneven Americanization," 193-4.

<sup>61</sup> Klaus, "Uneven Americanization," 193-4.

<sup>62</sup> McCormick, "The Death of Constable Riggs," 33-58.

Unionization efforts began in Marion County as early as the late nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> The UMWA supported attempts to organize the state, particularly north-central West Virginia, as early as 1890. Despite brief episodes of labor management unrest in 1892 and 1902, labor relations in northern West Virginia remained relatively peaceful throughout the coal boom, (1880-1920).<sup>64</sup> Union organizers sent important labor figures, such as Mary Harris “Mother” Jones and Eugene V. Debs, to inspire unity among the state’s workforce.<sup>65</sup> To their surprise, labor leaders experienced hesitation about unionism from the region’s mine workers. With decent wages and adequate living conditions, coal miners in the Fairmont Field saw little need to organize under the union banner prior to World War I.<sup>66</sup> The use of welfare capitalism allowed coal operators to largely avoid labor unrest in Marion County. By and large, this tactic worked until World War I when President Woodrow Wilson created the National War Labor Board (NWLB), which supported labor unions and collective bargaining to meet war demands

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<sup>63</sup> Trade union organizations, such as the American Federation of Labor, felt industrialists during the Gilded Age (1865-1901) amassed too much political, economic, and social control over the working class, which caused various labor unions to organize and protect the nation’s laborers.

<sup>64</sup> Massay, “Coal Consolidation,” 258-283; Workman, “Political Culture,” 205-259.

<sup>65</sup> Each of these labor leaders came to the region at different times to support worker organizations. “Mother” Jones came to the region in 1902 to support a miners’ march and was later arrested. She again arrived in 1918 to encourage the miners due to union’s gains at the Labor Day celebration. Eugene V. Debs came to the region in 1897 where he found himself involved in the first injunction case in to north-central West Virginia. For more information about the efforts of these labor leaders in the region, see Workman, “Political Culture,” 205-259; Massay, “Coal Consolidation,” 247-283; *Mother Jones Speaks: Collected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Monard Press, 1983); Edward M. Steel, “Mother Jones in the Fairmont Field, 1902” *Journal of American History* 57 (September 1970): 270-305; *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, vol. 2, 1913-1919, ed. Robert Constantine (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 51-52, 67-69, and 113; and Jacob H. Dorn, ““In Spiritual Communion: Eugene V. Debs and the Social Christians” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 3 (2003): 303-322; Maier B. Fox, *United We Stand: The United Mine Workers of America 1890-1990* (Washington, DC: United Mine Workers of America, 1990), 146-7.

<sup>66</sup> This is not to say that miners in Marion County did not occasionally participate in wildcat strikes before this unionization attempts.

for coal and other supplies.<sup>67</sup> In response to the NWLB, the UMWA targeted the north-central West Virginia coalfields for organizational campaigns beginning in 1918 and lasting well into the late 1920s.

Fairmont's rise as a political, social, and economic power did not occur without serious political restructuring and legal maneuvering commanded by the region's coal operators. Rural industrialists expanded mining operations and imported workers from Eastern and Southern Europe, which caused ethnic tensions within the workforce. In an effort to ease tensions and defeat unionism, coal companies instituted various forms of welfare capitalism. However, once union organizers targeted north-central West Virginia with some success, benevolent acts of welfare capitalism disappeared and the operator's control transformed into secret mine guards and barbed wire fences. The union emphasized the similarities between ethnic and white workers in organizing campaigns claiming they both suffered political, economic, and social disenfranchisement from the powerful coal companies. As the UMWA increased unionization efforts in Marion County, labor leaders utilized spiritual language and class rhetoric to encourage working-class solidarity. Organized labor representatives provided an opportunity for inter-ethnic cooperation, but a close look shows a new set of conflicts between not only the coal operators and the union but also between the workers themselves.

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<sup>67</sup> Although the National War Labor Board (NWLB) promoted collective bargaining and protection for workers during World War I, the agency did not provide oversight for the workers after the war. Moreover, the President abolished the NWLB in 1919. For more information about the NWLB, see Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia*, 56.

## Chapter II: Trade Unionism and Religious Rhetoric in the Fairmont Field

We will have a good local up in heaven,  
Up there where the password is rest,  
Where the business is praising our Father,  
And no scab ever mar or molest.  
--Archie Conway, "A Coal Miner's Goodbye"<sup>1</sup>

As the coal industry flourished, Marion County miners and their families found themselves increasingly under the control of coal operators. In reaction, labor organizations, including the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), responded by intensifying their campaigns in the region. Other industrial workers in Fairmont, such as the glassworkers, painters, and tailors, embraced unionization and supported organized labor representatives on election ballots.<sup>2</sup> While these other professions obtained union representation, the UMWA struggled against operator resistance and miner indifference to bring the Fairmont Field under the union banner. By the 1920s, the UMWA placed great importance on the region because of its position as an unorganized borderland between the union North and the nonunion South. The post-World War I economic recession made this region even more significant as it became a battlefield for unionism against the open-shop movement, or the "American Plan."<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Marion County

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<sup>1</sup> Archie Conway, "A Coal Miner's Goodbye," cited in George Korson, *Coal Dust on the Fiddle: Songs and Stories of the Bituminous Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943), 247-8.

<sup>2</sup> For more information see, Ken Fones-Wolf, *Glass Towns: Industry, Labor, and Political Economy in Appalachia, 1890-1930s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 162-3.

<sup>3</sup> A closed-shop only hires union members. For the purposes of this study, open-shop has two meanings. The extreme view of open-shop was that the industrialists did not hire men affiliated with a union. A more liberal view of the open-shop policy operates on the basis that employees can choose whether or not to be members of organized labor unions and that has no effect on their ability to gain employment. The author uses the terms nonunion and union mine interchangeably with open-shop and closed-shop, respectively. The "American Plan," also known as the "Rockefeller Plan," characterized the conservative form of the open-shop movement that did not allow miners and other industrial worker to have union representation. Allen M. Wakstein, "The Origins of the Open-Shop Movement, 1919-1920" *The Journal of American History* 51, no. 3 (December 1964): 466. For more information about the

residents struggled with heightened ethnic tensions that reemerged amidst post-war fears about radicalism, socialism, and Bolshevism. The heightened state of fear bred nativist and racist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, which terrorized immigrant and black workers in the Fairmont Field. Responding to the social and economic unrest of the late 1910s and early 1920s, Marion County's miners joined the UMWA. As the union's attempts to organize the region increased, labor leaders employed religious language and class rhetoric in their speeches to bring miners into the union fold. The consequences of this blending of religiosity and working-class consciousness resulted in union miners placing their trust in the trade union gospel and committing to a prolonged battle against the open-shop movement.

Before World War I, union representatives found little success in Marion County for three main reasons. First, the coal operators employed various appeasement tactics, such as welfare capitalism and regionalism, to defeat the union's advances. Second, local miners benefited from more days of operation when mines in surrounding states were on strike. When union miners in southern West Virginia and other coal mining states staged walkouts, the "reluctant strikebreakers" in the Fairmont Field continued to work. The availability of work and good wages kept them in the mines and away from the picket line.<sup>4</sup> Last, the coal companies secured injunctions, "yellow dog" contracts, evictions, and ultimately used force against the labor leaders to suppress the rise of local unions.<sup>5</sup>

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"American Plan," see John C. Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 3, 99-118.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn Frank Massay, "Coal Consolidation: Profile of the Fairmont Field of Northern West Virginia, 1852-1903" (Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 1955), 234, 281. Massay used this term to describe the miners in the Fairmont Field.

<sup>5</sup> A "yellow dog" contract is signed between a company and an employee. It is an agreement that states the worker will not join a union while employed with the company. Prolonged strikes caused many

The actions of the coal company largely kept the union out of the Fairmont Field until 1918. As the post-war economic recession led to a push for better living and working conditions in north-central West Virginia, tensions between labor and management erupted.

The need for labor-management cooperation during World War I led to the expansion of union representation in the Fairmont Field. In 1918, C. W. Watson supported President Woodrow Wilson's wartime policies toward labor, such as the creation of the National War Labor Board (NWLB). Therefore, the coal operator allowed the UMWA to organize the Consolidation Coal Company (Consol) mines throughout the region.<sup>6</sup> Watson followed a liberal open-shop policy, which allowed both union and nonunion miners to work at the Fairmont Coal Company's operations in north-central West Virginia.<sup>7</sup> His sympathies toward the union made him unpopular among coal operators in the southern West Virginia fields, and, as a result, they succeeded in

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hungry miners to sign these contracts in order to feed themselves and their families. For more information about "yellow dog" contracts see Howard B. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia's Four Major Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields* (Morgantown, WV: McClain Printing Co., 1969), 78-9. Injunctions are court orders that prohibit a group (in this case, the union) from specific activities—more examples will be given throughout this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v.v. National War Labor Board. In 1918, President Wilson created the NWLB, a precursor to the Department of Labor. Business and labor leaders comprised members of the board. Resolving labor-management disputes was the main function of the NWLB. The NWLB also built homes around industrial centers to provide a stable work supply during the labor shortages incurred by the war. Additionally, President Wilson encouraged industrial owners to pay wartime laborers a living wage.

<sup>7</sup> Although C.W. Watson allowed the mines in north-central West Virginia to organize, he opposed unionism in the other mines owned and operated by Consol in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Kentucky, and southern West Virginia. Consol did this in order to off-set the costs of the "artificially high" wages paid to the union mines at the Fairmont Coal Company mines. Michael Workman, "Political Culture and the Coal Economy in the Upper Monongahela Region: 1776-1933" (Ph. D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 1995): 327. Harry M. Caudill, *Theirs Be the Power: The Moguls of Eastern Kentucky* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 54-5, 67-84, and 126.

blocking Watson's bid for the U. S. Senate.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not Watson's intentions toward unionism rested on his senatorial campaign, unionization drives continued with great zeal in the Fairmont Field throughout 1918. Local newspapers chronicled almost daily accounts of union meetings, recording nearly 300 or 400 men in attendance. On June 5, hundreds of miners gathered for a union meeting at Musgrave Hall, forcing UMWA officers to move the activities outside. The mine workers heard speeches from C. H. Batley, an International Representative from Charleston, West Virginia, Frank Keeney, president of District 17, and James Diana, an Italian International Representative that spoke to the Italian miners in their native tongue, as well as two unnamed Slavic and Greek speakers.<sup>9</sup> Union drives and events continued to attract miners throughout the county, and labor leaders often installed officers to newly formed locals.

The pinnacle of unionization efforts in Marion County in 1918 occurred on September 1 at the Labor Day celebration. Nearly ten thousand miners marched two miles from Monongah to Traction Park in Fairmont. Once the miners arrived, they heard speakers including Mary Harris "Mother" Jones and William Rogers, the president of both the West Virginia Federation of Labor and the Monongahela Valley Labor and Trades Council of Fairmont. Later that afternoon, the miners ate lunch together and enjoyed some entertainment—a baseball game between the Consolidation Coal Company team and the Lumberport team from Harrison County, music from the Fairmont and Polish bands, a drum corps, and dancing. The Fairmont *West Virginian* proclaimed that

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<sup>8</sup> Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 143. UMWA officers in District 17 offered their support to Watson and encouraged the union miners to do the same. Many southern coal operators became suspicious of Watson's offer to recognize the miners' union and claimed he did so to gain support for his senatorial campaign.

<sup>9</sup> "Watson Miners Hear U.M.W. Officers," *West Virginian*, June 5, 1918.



this event marked “the greatest year in the history of the labor movement in West Virginia.”<sup>10</sup> Even though this marked a high point for the UMWA, the coming year proved the greatest struggle in the history of organized labor in the region.

The economic downturn that followed the end of World War I threatened the UMWA’s position in the region. World War I brought great prosperity to the local and national coal industry; however, the NWLB provided little to no oversight for the workers who received union recognition, higher wages, more days of operation, and improved standards of living.<sup>11</sup> Many miners lost their jobs because of the post-war decline in the demand for coal, and soon joined the union at the picket lines. The UMWA called for a nationwide bituminous strike in November 1919, demanding the continuation of high wages and better living and working conditions. Loyal to their new national representation, miners across the Fairmont Field went on strike. To thwart the walkout, coal companies and some community members accused the miners of un-American activities.<sup>12</sup> On October 30, 1919, an advertisement purchased in the *West Virginian* by an anonymous source utilized political tones to justify the position against striking:

President Wilson has declared that the proposed strike would be illegal. ... In the Fairmont region, the operators have signified an intention to keep the mines open. Those who do not want to take part in this illegal and totally unnecessary and unjustifiable strike may feel assured that they will be protected in their right to work, which is just as fundamentally important as the right to strike.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Labor Day Observed,” *West Virginian*, September 2, 1918.

<sup>11</sup> For additional information about the NWLB and its effects in West Virginia, see Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 56.

<sup>12</sup> Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 103.

<sup>13</sup> “The Right to Work,” *West Virginian*, October 30, 1919.

The next day another advertisement appeared in the paper warning the public that unions might follow the path of the labor movement in central Europe: “[T]he workers who have elevated these dictator leaders [union representatives] to their positions of power [need to] check this tendency right now by refusing to be bound by a strike order over which they did not have the slightest control.”<sup>14</sup> The efforts of this and similar advertisements did not deter the region’s miners from participating in the strike. Newspaper headlines detailed the uniqueness of the Fairmont Field coal miners’ participation in the national walkout. All the mines closed—an unparalleled event in north-central West Virginia. While the strike officially ended in December 1919, miners in the region returned to work in mid-November.<sup>15</sup>

In 1922, UMWA officials called a general strike in both the bituminous and anthracite fields. The post-World War I recession continued to devastate the nation’s economy, and many miners in Marion County only worked a few days a month.<sup>16</sup> Coal miners desperate for work turned to the union for both financial support and a resolution to the strike. Additionally, the recent split of the Northern West Virginia Coal Operators’ Association (NWVCOA) into two organizations complicated the situation further for the union miners. The older established coal operations, such as the Consol mines, remained with the NWVCOA, whereas the newer coal companies that opened mines during the war boom became the Monongahela Coal Operators’ Association (MCOA). Coal operators of the NWVCOA wanted to preserve the cooperative employee-employer relationship

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<sup>14</sup> “Preserve the Right to Work,” *West Virginian*, October 31, 1919.

<sup>15</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 273-4.

<sup>16</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 286.

they formed during World War I through negotiations with the UMWA. The MCOA did not want to be dictated to by the union and chose to only employ workers without union membership.<sup>17</sup>

As the strike continued through the summer, Marion County coal operators deployed more aggressive tactics against the workers. In July 1922 the Fairmont and Cleveland Coal Company petitioned the court to repossess one hundred homes from miners in Rivesville, four miles outside of Fairmont.<sup>18</sup> The *West Virginian* reported that “the suits are the first of their kind to be brought in Marion County by any coal company since the beginning of the coal strike.”<sup>19</sup> Coal operators met with union officials in early March but failed to reach an agreement.<sup>20</sup> On March 21, 1922 Billy Sunday spoke before West Virginia miners in Charleston, brought to the meeting by the coal operators and business leaders to end the strike. In his short address, he “pleaded for cooperation of labor, capital, and the public.” As he left the convention, Sunday exclaimed, “I hope you will settle this before you leave so we can all go happy.”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately the miners did not heed this plea and continued to strike until August when Consol and the UMWA finally reached an agreement. The *West Virginian* expressed dissatisfaction from some of the coal operators who made concessions in order to reopen the mines.<sup>22</sup> The actions taken

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<sup>17</sup> For more information about the split between NWVCOA and MCOA see Workman, “Political Culture,” 286.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix 1.2

<sup>19</sup> “First Eviction Suits Brought in Courts Here,” *West Virginian*, July 27, 1922.

<sup>20</sup> “Local Miners’ Officials to go to Charleston,” *Farmer’s Free Press*, March 16, 1922; “Keeney Asks Operators for Another Meeting in Baltimore on March 25,” *West Virginian*, March 13, 1922.

<sup>21</sup> “Billy Sunday Speaks Before State Miners,” *West Virginian*, March 21, 1922.

<sup>22</sup> “Consol Accepts New Agreement this Afternoon,” *West Virginian*, August 17, 1922.

by the union and coal companies during the 1922 strike foretold how events during the mine war would unfold.

By late 1922, the union began to lose its influence in the state and membership declined. Additionally, labor-management relations suffered nationally due to the lengthy strikes in 1919 and 1922. With memories of the walkout of 1922 fresh in the minds of the coal companies, the UMWA met with the leading operators of the Central Competitive Field (CCF) to hammer out a wage scale agreement in Jacksonville, Florida on February 11, 1924. In March 1924, union leaders met with the NWVCOA in Baltimore and the MCOA in New York City to establish similar agreements. These contracts began April 1, 1924 and would last until March 31, 1927. The agreement stated that the coal companies would pay miners between \$6.75 and \$7.50 per day—essentially extending the 1922 wage contracts until 1927.<sup>23</sup> Despite the skepticism of the MCOA, Consol dominated the meeting and encouraged other coal companies to sign the contract.<sup>24</sup> Upholding the Jacksonville Agreement proved difficult for the newer coal operations that started operating during the war. The UMWA called several strikes against the open-shop movement throughout the region, and a mine war ensued in the Fairmont Field from 1924 to 1927.

The wartime coal and labor demands led to another influx of immigrant and black workers into Marion County. The number of Eastern and Southern European workers

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<sup>23</sup> Edmond M. Beame, “The Jacksonville Agreement: Quest for Stability in Coal,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (1955): 196.

<sup>24</sup> According to Beame: “In highly competitive markets, multiemployer bargaining may be a weak instrument for achieving price and wage stability, especially where a substantial portion of the industry’s output is under nonunion conditions.” *Ibid.*, 195.

rose from 2,525 in 1910 to 3,303 in 1920.<sup>25</sup> The new wave of immigrants into Marion County (those who came after 1900) did not assimilate to American customs, such as mastery of the English language, methods of cleanliness and housekeeping, and preparing American dishes, as quickly as the first wave.<sup>26</sup> Many of the new ethnic workers rejected Americanization and instead flirted with radical groups such as the Industrial Workers of the World, socialists, and the Black Hand.<sup>27</sup> The Red Scare of 1919 made native white Marion County residents suspicious of immigrant workers. More significantly, the number of black miners in the region rose drastically from 96 in 1910 to 693 in 1920.<sup>28</sup> The increase of black mine workers widened divisions within Marion County's working class. Conflict between the mine workers are described in Boris Emmet's 1924 study of the Fairmont Field for the U.S. Coal Commission. Emmet explained that "native white miners disliked serving on committees with 'ignorant niggers who just came from the South!'"<sup>29</sup> Several black workers came to the region during the Marion County mine war due to unstable working conditions caused by prolonged strikes in the Alabama coalfields during the early 1920s.<sup>30</sup> The racism toward black coal miners made it difficult for them to work together with white miners under the union banner.

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<sup>25</sup> West Virginia Department of Mines, *Annual Report 1930* (Charleston, WV: Tribune Printing Co., 1931): 252-3.

<sup>26</sup> Mildred A. Beik *The Miners of Windber: The Struggles of New Immigrants for Unionization, 1890s-1930s* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 128-9, 343.

<sup>27</sup> Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 128, 130.

<sup>28</sup> Massay, "Coal Consolidation," 207.

<sup>29</sup> Boris Emmet, *Labor Relations in the Fairmont, West Virginia Bituminous Coal Field*, Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin 361 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1924), 5.

<sup>30</sup> For more information about the Alabama coal strikes, see Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields 1908-1921*, in the *Working Class in American History* series (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 144-5; Workman, "Political Culture," 266-8.

Racial tensions manifested themselves through the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in Marion County. The first Klan formed in 1865 as a reaction to Reconstruction policies after the Civil War and lasted until 1872. In 1915 Colonel William J. Simmons reformed the organization in Georgia.<sup>31</sup> The group preached Christian fundamentalism, one hundred percent Americanism, and white supremacist rhetoric. Although the Klan committed extremist activities in Marion County, including dynamiting, burning crosses, and attempted murder, local newspapers ran several stories about the charitable nature of the KKK.<sup>32</sup> Often Klansmen and women, dressed in full robes, entered churches during worship to offer their donations. They asked the preacher to read a note to the congregation that expressed the Klan's zealous Christian beliefs.<sup>33</sup> By 1924, the Klan established Konclaves or secret associations throughout the state. The popularity of the KKK signaled to UMWA officers the difficulties they faced uniting Marion County's mine workers.<sup>34</sup>

To best communicate their union message, labor leaders frequently employed religious imagery in their speeches at organization drives and rallies. H. E. Peters and R.

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<sup>31</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Members of the Klan participated in several violent acts around Marion County. Most notably was the "Little Rosebud" Trial, a case that involved several prominent men with affiliations with the Klan that attempted to murder Dan Washington, a black man who flirted with a married white waitress in the Fairmont Hotel. "Klansmen on Trial Today," *Fairmont Times*, September 30, 1924; "Little Rosebud' State's Star Witness," *Fairmont Times*, October 2, 1924; "State Finishes Case in Klan Trial," *West Virginian*, October 1, 1924; "Prison Term Faces Jones," *Fairmont Times*, October 10, 1924; "Klan Cases Dismissed," *Fairmont Times*, October 21, 1924. The Klan also exploded dynamite during the 1924 local election in Monongah. After the election, the Klan sent a letter to Mary Lewis, a prominent African-American in Monongah, to apologize for frightening her with their activities. "Klansmen and Local Negroes against Putrid Politics," *Fairmont Times*, February 12, 1924.

<sup>33</sup> "Klansmen and Women Attend Two Churches," *Fairmont Times*, March 15, 1924.

<sup>34</sup> Workman, "Political Culture," 305-12.

M. Williams, local labor representatives that served Marion County, learned their oratory skills from their backgrounds in the ministry, which helped them emotionally connect with their audiences.<sup>35</sup> The combination of spirituality and unionization played an important role in the events of the mine war in north-central West Virginia. The trade union gospel originated as a blend of ideas from trade union's beliefs about standards of living and working conditions, "democratic idealism," and "Protestant moral and social perfectionism."<sup>36</sup> This philosophy derives its power from economic concerns melded with moral zeal and religious principles. Although the effectiveness of the spiritual language and imagery used during the Fairmont Field mine war is unclear, UMWA leaders in the region used the trade union gospel as an organizing tool to unionize the mine workers.

The trade union gospel emerged from progressive religious ideas, such as the Social Gospel Movement.<sup>37</sup> The Social Gospel Movement (1865-1920s) paved the way for labor organizers across the country to fuse religious and union principles. Proponents of the Social Gospel spoke of improving standards of living for the working class and poor. Reverend Charles Stelzle, labor representative for the Presbyterian Church, USA, believed that both the union and the church acted as a brotherhood that protected the working class.<sup>38</sup> He stressed the importance of education for workers of all trades

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<sup>35</sup> Hall, "The Role of Rhetoric," 104-134.

<sup>36</sup> Workman, "Political Culture," 343; "Who is Van Bittner?" *Fairmont Times*, June 12, 1925.

<sup>37</sup> "Progressivism" (lower case) describes the broad social and political reform to civic issues, such as education, immigration, and environmentalism. This political and social philosophy developed as a reaction to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and the influx of ethnic workers. "Progressive" (capitalized) denotes the political party formed in the early twentieth century.

<sup>38</sup> Charles Stelzle, a Presbyterian pastor from New York, fought tirelessly for the working poor during the early 1900s. He served as head of the Department of Church and Labor and the Board of Home

because, once they understand how to use the resources available to them, (e.g. libraries, museums, and art galleries) then laborers would demand better living and working conditions. With aid and assistance from progressive ministers, trade unions blended their philosophies with Christian traditions to expand their message to a larger section of the working class.

The use of scripture and spiritual metaphors by trade unionists did not occur strictly in the Fairmont Field during the mine war. Guided by national revivalists and the Progressive Movement during the 1860s and 1920s, labor organizers utilized religious language to encourage workers to join unions.<sup>39</sup> Although some labor leaders did not claim to be religious themselves, they employed spiritual language in their speeches. One such union organizer was Samuel Gompers (1850-1924), founder of the American Federation of Labor. Gompers directly addressed the positive role religion could play in labor-management relationship, stating:

[C]apitalists, don't turn your backs on organized labor, don't widen the chasm. Even the Bible lessons of our early childhood will change and we may be compelled to say, "Whither thou goest I cannot go ... Thy people were not my people, thy God is not my God."<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, Eugene V. Debs employed religious imagery in his speeches and writings to bring workers to the union.<sup>41</sup> Even though Debs and Gompers used spiritual language to

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Missions of the Presbyterian Church and later established the Labor Temple in New York City. As far as can be told, he never entered the region, yet his influence on the state's Social Gospel ministries is undeniable. The *Labor Argus*, an organized labor publication in Charleston, West Virginia, frequently reprinted his syndicated columns. For more information see, Charles H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915*, in the *Yale Studies in Religious Education* series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 236, 271, 281, 297, 299, 306, 316.

<sup>39</sup> Labor historian Herbert Gutman examined this connection between unionism and working class-spirituality during the Gilded Age. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement," 74-101.

<sup>40</sup> Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement," 87, footnote 54.



encourage unionism, both often criticized religious leaders for neglecting the needs of the working class. One target of Debs' frustration was Father C. J. Kluser, a priest in Morgantown.<sup>42</sup> Debs called the pastor a "dirty cur" and Debs' brother, Theodore, called Kluser a "foul mouth-priest ... paid from the Wall Street fund that was raised to discredit socialists and socialism."<sup>43</sup> Although Debs focused much of his wrath on the Catholic Church and other inattentive religious leaders, he appreciated the efforts of social Christians on behalf of the workers.<sup>44</sup> Debs often worked in tandem with social Christians to support working-class causes.

Just as Gompers and Debs, Van Amberg Bittner, International Representative of the UMWA, brought his own brand of trade union gospel to inspire working-class solidarity to the region during the mine war.<sup>45</sup> Born in Iron Bridge, a small town in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, in 1885, Bittner grew up around the mines. His father, Charles, was a coal miner and union man. Bittner began mining coal when he was

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<sup>41</sup> Eugene V. Debs (1855-1926) helped found the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) in 1905 but later spilt with the organization a few years later to work more closely with the Socialist Party. He ran as the presidential candidate for the Socialist Party in 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920. For more information see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. Eugene V. Debs.

<sup>42</sup> Father C. Joseph Kluser was a German priest that served several churches throughout north and central West Virginia, including Wheeling, Morgantown, Mannington, and Littleton. He began ministering in West Virginia in 1897.

<sup>43</sup> Through his struggles with the law and later in his life, many compared him to Jesus. Jacob H. Dorn, "'In Spiritual Communion: Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Christians'" *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2, no. 3 (July 2003): 303-325.

<sup>44</sup> Dorn, "'In Spiritual Communion,'" 303-325.

<sup>45</sup> Not much is written about Van Bittner and his influence on the Fairmont Field. Thomas R. Tull composed a master's thesis about Bittner, but did little to discuss his role in the region. Tull, "Van A. Bittner: A Labor Leader for Dynamic Times," (master's thesis, Marshall University, 1979). Betty Snyder Hall, "The Role of Rhetoric in the Northern West Virginia Activities of the United Mine Workers, 1897-1927," (master's thesis, West Virginia University, 1955); Hall did little as well to discuss his influence in the region. Historian Michael Workman's dissertation describes Bittner's role in Marion County and the Fairmont Field in great detail. Workman, "Political Culture," 341-346.

eleven years old and worked in several positions around the mine. Once he graduated from high school in 1911, Bittner served as president of a UMWA local union in Pennsylvania. Soon after District 5, also known as the “Pittsburgh District,” elected him president. Bittner served the union local until 1916 when the district forced him out after disputes over a wage agreement. The International President of the UMWA, John P. White (1911-1917), appreciated Bittner’s service to the union and appointed him as an International Representative. Bittner entered the Fairmont Field in 1924 with “the reputation as the union’s main trouble shooter.”<sup>46</sup> Both Bittner and UMWA International President John L. Lewis mixed and mingled with coal operators and politicians and through these associations “adopted the philosophy of ‘business unionism’.”<sup>47</sup> Bittner justified this position as he characterized himself as a “conservative among radicals, although a radical among ultra-conservatives.” Additionally, he explained that his brand of trade unionism “oppose[d] Socialism and all other –isms and radical movements.”<sup>48</sup> Bittner described himself as a moral man, and frequently utilized biblical stories or religious references to speak of the good works performed by the union.

As the union amplified its efforts in the region, Bittner and other UMWA officials sent labor organizers from the southern West Virginia UMWA, including H. E. Peters and R.M. Williams, to the Fairmont Field in 1918. During this time, Peters served the union by performing various activities in the region, but later became more heavily involved in organization efforts. In an interview with historian Betty Snyder Hall, John

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<sup>46</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 343.

<sup>47</sup> Hall, “The Role of Rhetoric,” 133-4; Tull, “Van A. Bittner,” 2-26; “Who is Van Bittner,” *Fairmont Times*, June 12, 1925.

<sup>48</sup> “Who is Van Bittner,” *Fairmont Times*, June 12, 1925. John L. Lewis served as UMWA president from 1920 through 1960.

S. Farnish, a local labor leader, described Peters as an “ex-Holy-Roller preacher,” who needed instruction about the trade union philosophy when he began his work with the UMWA.<sup>49</sup> In another interview conducted by Hall, Fred Mooney, former president of District 17, described Peters as a “fire and brimstone speaker” and explained that Peters’s ministerial language often seeped into his union speeches. Peters used the biblical story of the Pharaoh and the Israelites, and claimed this episode represented the first strike. The Pharaoh symbolized the coal operators and the actions of the Israelites justified the coal miners’ “use of strikes as a weapon by associating it with [this] revered Biblical story,” illustrating the “legitimising [sic] notion of right.”<sup>50</sup> Van Bittner also used this story in his union speeches.

In addition to Peters, R.M. Williams’ background in the ministry prior to his union activities played a significant role in his labor rhetoric. He differed from many other labor leaders in West Virginia in that he received a college education. Williams attended Oberlin College in Ohio and later received a degree from Mountain State Business College in Parkersburg, West Virginia.<sup>51</sup> Williams began his union activities in the state in 1918, and by 1919 he became an officer in a union local. His leadership abilities led to his election as vice president of District 17 in 1923. In another interview with Hall, Farnish described Williams as “a fighter and an eloquent speaker,” who was “very witty—interspersing his speeches with jokes.” He also explained that he “never

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<sup>49</sup> Hall, “Role of Rhetoric,” 104. Unfortunately, Hall did not deposit these interviews into any archive the author can locate, nor did the author find out any more information about Hall or her whereabouts. However, Hall includes copies of the letter correspondences between herself and the interviewees at the end of her thesis.

<sup>50</sup> Hall, “Role of Rhetoric, 104-5. This Bible story is found in Hebrews 11:4 and Exodus 7:1-7 (NSRV).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

knew a speech Williams made that he didn't fire enthusiasm in his audience."<sup>52</sup> Like Bittner and Peters, Williams also employed scriptural language in his union speeches. The spiritual backgrounds of these organizers' became important assets to bring religious, nonunion men into the union.

As the union continued to recruit new members, coal companies employed patriotic language in their anti-union messages to combat the UMWA's religious rhetoric. Industries across the country encouraged workers to accept industrial Americanism: "the process by which the habits of industry, obedience to authority, and the worship of law and order were instilled in every citizen."<sup>53</sup> West Virginia's business, political, and spiritual leaders along with the state's educators created social programs and classes that transmitted American customs and values, which included English lessons, instruction in hygiene, child rearing, cooking, and voting. West Virginians accepted the Americanization process, by and large, and identified those who did not assimilate as un-American.<sup>54</sup> Industrialists extended the use of patriotic messages to the name of their open-shop movement, the "American Plan." Businessmen explained that the "American Plan," as espoused by Elbert H. Gary of U. S. Steel, allowed nonunion workers to negotiate their own contracts with industries, emphasizing the American values of individualism and freedom of choice. Employees, under this policy, relied on welfare capitalism to redress any grievances to their supervisors instead of relaying information

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<sup>52</sup> Hall, "Role of Rhetoric," 106.

<sup>53</sup> Carletta H. Bush, "Religious Fervor in the Fairmont Field: Calls for Revival and Reform in the 'Coal City,' 1908-1927," *American Religious Experience*, [online journal] <http://are.wvu.edu/cbush.htm> (accessed 10 October 2007).

<sup>54</sup> For more information about postwar developments, see Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 60-79.

through a union.<sup>55</sup> Proponents of the “American Plan” claimed that, not only were unions anti-American and anti-capitalist, but they were also inefficient and took money away from the workers through dues and check off from their wages.<sup>56</sup>

The “American Plan” did not escape the criticism of the UMWA. The editor of the *United Mine Workers’ Journal (UMWJ)* called the movement a “gigantic conspiracy,” and John Brophy, president of District 2, explained that denying the right to strike “is the beginning of slavery for the mining community.”<sup>57</sup> Van Bittner placed an advertisement in the *West Virginian* chastising coal operators for supporting the “Plan.” He argued that “coal companies, casting aside every principle upon which Americanism is founded, adopted the [K]aiser’s principle of dishonoring contracts.” Becoming more heated as the ad continued, Bittner charged these companies with using the “American Plan” as a means to “[hire] armed guards, [evict] miners and their wives and little children [which ushered] in an era of discrimination, intimidation, coercion, and last by not least [as a way to institute] poverty and starvation for the miners.”<sup>58</sup> Despite opposition from union representatives against the extreme open-policy policy, more conservative union leadership, including Bittner and Lewis, favored a cooperative effort between the UMWA and coal companies through “business unionism.” Lewis intended to rid the union of radical idealists, such as John Brophy, who sought to nationalize the coal industry. Lewis also aspired to eliminate coal operators who wanted to continue

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<sup>55</sup> Wakstein, “Open-Shop Movement,” 466.

<sup>56</sup> The check off system deducted union dues from workers’ wages.

<sup>57</sup> “Union Busters,” *UMWJ* 33, no.5 (March 1, 1922): 6; John Brophy, “The Miners’ American Plan” *Labor Age* 11, no. 10 (November 1922): 4-5.

<sup>58</sup> “They Call it the ‘American Plan,’” *West Virginian*, June 30, 1925.

using uncompromising measures to destroy the union. By securing the Fairmont Field, the unions aimed at containing the open-shop movement and stop it from spreading to other union fields.

The new coal operations that opened in the Fairmont Field during World War I supported the “American Plan.” As Consol expanded its interest throughout central Appalachia, the company’s involvement in Fairmont declined. As a result, absentee-owned coal operations opened in Marion County, including Bethlehem Mining Corporation (a subsidiary of Bethlehem Steel located in eastern Pennsylvania) and the New England Fuel and Transportation Company (a Boston-based corporation). In a race to build mines in the region during World War I outside companies did not carry on the tradition of welfare capitalism programs. Moreover, the Bethlehem and New England operations felt the Jacksonville Agreement should have no influence on the way they conducted their operation, because they did not sign the contract.<sup>59</sup>

Once the Bethlehem Mining Corporation and the New England Fuel and Transportation Company opened in October 1924 under an extreme version of the open-shop plan, the amicable labor-management relationship in the region diminished.<sup>60</sup> In resistance to the open-shop policy at the Bethlehem mine in Barrackville, union miners formed a guard post that stretched several miles to prevent nonunion mine workers from going to work.<sup>61</sup> The New England Fuel and Transportation Co. mine in Grant Town also served as a strong union outpost in the Fairmont Field. In early October, the mine

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<sup>59</sup> Workman, et al., “Coal Context,” 31-2.

<sup>60</sup> “Mine Guard at Jamison 7,” *Fairmont Times*, October 2, 1924.

<sup>61</sup> “Bethlehem Corp. to Begin Work on Open Shop Basis, *West Virginian*, October 1, 1924; “Mine Guard at Jamison 7,” *Fairmont Times*, October 2, 1924. For the rest of the week, the *Fairmont Times* and the *West Virginian* chronicled the activities of the strikers in Barrackville and Grant Town.

placed injunctions against union miners in the town. Days later the police arrested several men in Grant Town for breaking the injunctions, including Lewis “Doc” Urich—a miner recently paroled for his activities during the Farmington strike of 1916 that killed Constable Riggs.<sup>62</sup>

As the police carted the miners off to jail for ignoring the court orders, women and children took their places on the picket line. The women, armed with various household items, did their best to protect their families from eviction. Law enforcement arrested nearly a dozen women, many of them “foreign,” for “casting pepper” into the eyes of a deputy sheriff.<sup>63</sup> Women became more active on the picket line as the mine war progressed. After a feature story in *Labor Age*, Steve Pucska’s wife of Barrackville became the face of the struggle. The article described her as an “Amazonian” woman “so effective [in her picketing that] she was arrested fifteen times.” She was not alone in her fight. When *Labor Age* asked other women in Marion County why they chose to protest against the coal companies: “the invariable answer [was] ‘you don’t know what it was before the union. We don’t want that again. We are for the union forever.’”<sup>64</sup> In addition to the miners’ wives, prominent women in the community joined their working-class counterparts on the picket lines.<sup>65</sup> Before and after school, many children joined their

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<sup>62</sup> “Doc Urich arrested at Grant Town,” *Fairmont Times*, October 7, 1924. For more information about the Farmington strike of 1916, see Charles H. McCormick, “The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era,” *West Virginia History* 52, (1993): 33-58.

<sup>63</sup> “Pepper Cast in Man’s Eyes,” *Fairmont Times*, October 10, 1924.

<sup>64</sup> Louis F. Budenz, “Steve Pucska’s Wife and Other Stories of Barrackville and Grant Town,” *Labor Age* (November 1925): 1-3.

<sup>65</sup> *West Virginian*, October 3, 1925.

families in front of the mines.<sup>66</sup> Women and children picketers remained fixtures until the union organized the entire field.

As the mine war continued, the Marion County court heard eviction cases against the union miners between December 4 and 12, 1925. Judge Meredith declared that because the coal company no longer employed the striking miners, management had the right to evict those mine workers from the company houses. Company officials gave the union miners until late December to evacuate their homes.<sup>67</sup> At a union rally held in Grant Town, Bittner condemned the company's eviction policy, stating: "It is not my conception of justice and liberty attained by our revolutionary forefathers ... there is a moral right involved that is higher than any legal right." He concluded the speech by reiterating the union's dedication to fight for "industrial freedom, [just] as Washington fought for independence, and as Lincoln fought to save the Union and abolish chattel slavery."<sup>68</sup> Miners in Grant Town shared Bittner's sentiments and refused to vacate peacefully.

Miners began arming themselves in resistance to the companies' army of mine guards. The Grant Town miners built fortifications and trenches on the hillside along the mine in the winter of 1924. The situation escalated by January 15, 1925, when a gun fight between John Kello, a union miner on strike, and Ray Tobin, a mine guard, mortally wounded both. The UMWA made arrangements for Kello's funeral. The newspaper and union journal described the funeral as the largest service in the history of Marion County

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<sup>66</sup> "Good Morning!," *Fairmont Times*, October 5, 1925; Workman, "Political Culture," 398.

<sup>67</sup> "Possession of Property Will Be Given Over Under Ruling," *Fairmont Times*, December 3, 1924.

<sup>68</sup> "Northern West Virginia Miners Hold Great Meeting on Mountain Top," *UMWJ* 35, no. 18 (Sept. 15, 1924): 8-9.



with nearly 5,000 miners in attendance.<sup>69</sup> In his eulogy, Bittner “declared that John Kello made the supreme sacrifice for the principles of humanity” and characterized Kello as a martyr who “died for us.”<sup>70</sup> The Catholic Church in Grant Town held a smaller funeral for Ray Tobin.<sup>71</sup> The miners lost the eviction case and the courts ordered them to vacate company housing soon after this violent act. The miners quietly emptied out of their homes, moved into union barracks erected on property near the mines, and disassembled their forts along the hillside.<sup>72</sup> As union miners in Grant Town settled into their new homes in the barracks, others grew weary of being out of work. In June 1925, union miners asked to be released from their contracts with the UMWA in order to work for the coal companies operating under the “American Plan.”<sup>73</sup> In response to the loss of several union mines, President Lewis suspended the autonomy of the local unions and installed International Officers to positions of power in District 17 in southern West Virginia and District 31 in the northern fields.<sup>74</sup> Lewis deemed this action necessary to protect the

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<sup>69</sup> “14 Arrested Following Slaying in Street Fighting,” *West Virginian*, January 16, 1925.

<sup>70</sup> *UMWJ* 36, no. 3 (Feb. 1, 1925); “Largest Funeral in History of County,” *West Virginian*, January 25, 1925.

<sup>71</sup> It is unclear whether the coal company paid for or sent representatives to Ray Tobin’s funeral; however, law enforcement arrested and tried several men in connection for his death. “Union Lawyers Seek Freedom of 12 Men Held for Murder,” *Fairmont Times*, April 1, 1925.

<sup>72</sup> Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 150; “Union Miners Will Vacate Grant Town,” *West Virginian*, January 22, 1925; “Miners Destroy Alleged Forts at Grant Town,” *West Virginian*, January 31, 1925. There are still trenches in Grant Town today, left over from the battles that occurred there in 1925.

<sup>73</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 390-393.

<sup>74</sup> “International Union Takes over Supervision of District 17 and Will Manage Its Affairs,” *UMWJ* 35, no. 13 (July 1, 1924); Percy Tetlow became president and organizers of District 17 in the southern coalfields controlled by the UMWA. Van A. Bittner acted as organizer of District 31. John L. Lewis installed John L. Studdard as president of the district. All of these men were International Representatives. The union sent other leading UMWA officers to Marion County throughout the mine war period to give speeches and rally the miners.

union's interest in the state and to eliminate internal conflicts within West Virginia's leadership.

The union continued to rail against corporate tactics that negated the Jacksonville Agreement and described the evictions, injunctions, and "yellow dog" contracts as the "unholy trinity."<sup>75</sup> As the mine war continued, more coal companies began operating under an open-shop policy, breaking their union contracts, and using these time-tested tactics to stop the UMWA. Frequently, coal operators evicted miners to intimidate striking miners. The union sought litigation to protect the miners' homes, but the courts typically favored the coal companies and evicted the miners. The West Virginia courts during the 1920s recognized the rights of the miners to join labor organizations and negotiate union contracts; however, due to injunctions, evictions, and "yellow dog" contracts, judges restricted the ability of mine workers to strike or enforce collective bargains.<sup>76</sup> Due to the evictions, by 1926 thousands of miners throughout the Marion County lived in crude barracks erected by the union to house them and their families. Many of these families moved into the barracks in 1924 and continued to live in them throughout the mine war period. Bittner expressed his frustration with the situation in the Fairmont Field in an article published in the *UMWJ*:

[A]s Christians and Americans we defy any man living to uphold the contract abrogation policy of the northern West Virginia coal operators on any other ground except that of worshiping at the altar of greed, avarice, dishonesty, and Mammon. . . . The money lenders were ejected from the Temple at Jerusalem for a

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<sup>75</sup> "The Unholy Trinity," *Labor Age* (Sept. 1927): 22.

<sup>76</sup> Between 1924 and 1928, the courts issued twenty-one injunctions against the UMWA. The local papers published the notices of the injunctions. *Fairmont Times*, October 7 and 12, 1924. The royalties that Judge Lazelle in Monongalia County received from the Paisley Coal Company for use of land in Robinson Run colored the opinion of the court when ruling on cases involving the coal operators and organized labor. For more information about Judge Lazelle and his relationship with coal operations, see Workman, "Political Culture," 357-9.

far less dastardly act than that of the coal operators of Northern West Virginia who evicted these little children from their homes during the cold dreary blasts of winter.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, union representatives found themselves continuously served with injunction notices. On one visit to Fairmont in 1925, law enforcement served John L. Lewis “enough injunctions to paper a room.”<sup>78</sup> As the mine war progressed, the *Hitchman* injunctions against the UMWA became more strict and specific against organization activity.

In 1907, the U.S. Circuit Court for the Northern District in West Virginia handed down the *Hitchman Coal & Coke Company v. Mitchell, et al.*, which largely shaped legal rulings in Marion County during the mine war. Judge Alston Dayton of Philippi restricted the union protest against “individual employment” (or “yellow dog” contracts) in the Hitchman mines in Preston County. These contracts were drawn up by the mine companies and signed by the miners stating that they [the mine workers] would have no affiliation with the UMWA or any other union while employed at the mine. The state’s Appeals Court overturned the decision in 1914, but the U.S. Supreme Court later upheld the ruling in 1917. The *Hitchman* injunctions became a widely used resource for the coal operators against the union, especially after World War I. As coal prices began to fall, coal operators needed to cut costs and chose once again to use “yellow dog” contracts and injunctions to keep the union out of its business affairs.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *UMWJ* 37, no. 14 (July 15, 1926):4; “Open Letter to the People of Northern West Virginia,” *West Virginian*, July 1, 1926.

<sup>78</sup> “Law is First to Greet John L. Lewis,” *Fairmont Times*, September 26, 1925.

<sup>79</sup> Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia*, 57, 100, 103-4, and 116; Bush, “Religious Fervor;” and William M. Boal and John Pencavel, “The Effects of Labor Unions on Employment, Wages, and Days of Operation: Coal Mining in West Virginia” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* (Feb. 1994): 272.

Judge Meredith granted one of the most extensive *Hitchman* injunctions in September 1925 to several miners in Watson. The sweeping judgment denied union picketers their civil rights because the order barred striking miners and their families from:

[Yelling], [barking] like dogs, [making] motions and demonstrations at the plaintiffs, calling them scabs, yellow dogs, Jackasses, schimmelbacks, starve-outs, drug store cowboys. Sing objectionable songs such as “Go Long Scab,” “How do you do Mr. Scab,” and “Shoot them in the head, shoot them in the feet, shoot them in the dinner-bucket, how they going to eat.”<sup>80</sup>

Later that month, Judge Meredith charged picketers in Monongah with contempt of court. When the judge asked the miners if they knew that picketing was illegal, one miner spoke up stating: “Yes, but I am a United Mine Worker and I’ll stay here on the picket line till [*sic*] I die.”<sup>81</sup> In early October the judge found the picketers guilty and called them back for sentencing in November.<sup>82</sup> Soon after the ruling, the Consol mine in Monongah opened under a nonunion policy.<sup>83</sup> In response to the injunctions, the union petitioned various courts throughout north-central West Virginia to dismiss the ruling based on the fact that they infringed on the First Amendment rights of the UMWA as granted by the Constitution; however, the courts denied their requests.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Judge Meredith Grants Order,” *West Virginian*, September 25, 1925.

<sup>81</sup> “Contempt Cases,” *West Virginian*, October 6, 1925.

<sup>82</sup> “49 Picketers Found Guilty,” *Fairmont Times*, October 14, 1925.

<sup>83</sup> “Monongah Plant Dumps Coal Today,” *West Virginian*, October 14, 1925; Workman, “Political Culture,” 398-9. The loss of Monongah as a union stronghold devastated the UMWA. For years, Monongah served as an epicenter for union activity, dating back to the Miners’ March in 1902.

<sup>84</sup> In May 1926, UMWA representatives requested the Circuit Court Judge I. Grant Lazelle halt enforcing injunctions on the union because the coal companies rejected the Jacksonville Agreement. Judge Lazelle denied their requests stating that individual companies did not sign the contract and no miner signed this agreement individually. For more information, see Beame, “Jacksonville Agreement,” 196-205.

Although the courts restricted union activities at mine sites, UMWA officers continued to conduct mass meetings throughout Marion County. On April 1, 1925, Van Bittner, William Green, and T. C. Townsend, legal counsel for the union, addressed 5,000 miners at East/West Stadium, in the heart of Fairmont. The UMWA met to celebrate Mitchell Day, a union holiday commemorating the presidency of John Mitchell (1898-1908) who negotiated the eight-hour work day. The UMWA also made the call for an official strike in the region because the coal companies ignored the terms negotiated in the Jacksonville Agreement. Several months later, the union called a second strike. Bittner sent announcements to the local newspapers directly appealing to black miners. He accused the coal operators of enslaving African American mine workers with nonunion policies.<sup>85</sup> To make the official announcement of the strike, President Lewis addressed a crowd of 20,000 at Fairmont's Old Fairgrounds on September 26, 1925.<sup>86</sup>

As the UMWA continued to strike, dissenting voices in the local leadership spoke out against the Jacksonville Agreement. R.M. Williams, once an active union leader and organizer in the Fairmont Field, now claimed artificially high wages set by the Jacksonville Agreement hurt coal companies, especially in southern West Virginia, and put union miners out of work. Bittner and Lewis asked him to resign from the UMWA in 1926. Williams claimed the union barred him because of his relationship with a woman married to a union miner, but it seems more likely that his opposition to the Jacksonville Agreement led to his removal. Williams became disgruntled with President Lewis,

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<sup>85</sup> "To the Negro Miners Whom the Non-Union Coal Operators of Northern West Virginia are Attempting to Enslave," C.E. "Ned" Smith Collection, Series I, Box 6, WVRHC, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.

<sup>86</sup> *Fairmont Times*, September 27, 1925; *UMWJ* 36, no. 19 (October 1, 1925); "10,000 Miners and Supporters Form Huge Line," *West Virginian*, September 26, 1925.

Bittner, and other “outside” union leaders. In the spring of 1926, he made a dramatic speech peppered with religious language in opposition to the UMWA’s leaders:

If these people representing the International Union were free from Sin, as pure as Jesus, then we wouldn’t wonder at their sentiment. Let them remember what Jesus said when the bad woman was brought before him and the multitude wanted to stone her to death. He said, “Let them who are among you without sin cast the first stone.” They had principle enough to walk away. . . . What damn Block Heads, believing that they have as much power as Jesus Christ and that the miners must take whatever they say. Any help I can get to run them out of West Virginia, from the Devil or Jesus, will be received with thanks, and wither [*sic*] I live or die I will continue to fight for the miners of West Virginia.<sup>87</sup>

During these remarks, Williams promoted a counter-union he created with his paramour, Margaret Fowler.<sup>88</sup> A few miners joined William’s counter-union, but overall union miners in the Fairmont Field continued to put their faith in the UMWA.

The union continued their organization efforts even though they faced great adversity, including declining membership and more nonunion mines. To keep up morale and remind miners to remain steadfast in their purposeful struggle, Bittner and union officers held the District 31 Convention on March 17, 1927, Saint Patrick’s Day. When Bittner addressed the nearly one thousand members in attendance, he explained the significance of the day: “We called this convention for [today] because we want to drive the snakes out of Northern West Virginia just as St. Patrick drove them out of Ireland hundreds of years ago.”<sup>89</sup> As his speech continued the religious language did as well: “You men have got to fight and die for the welfare of your helpless little children if for nothing else. It is your *supreme duty*. Make up your minds that you have got to stop

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<sup>87</sup> Speech Delivered by R.M. Williams, March or April 1926, Van Bittner Collection, microfilmed, WVRHC, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia.

<sup>88</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 408.

<sup>89</sup> “Convention,” *UMWJ* 38, no. 10 (April 1, 1927): 3.

nonunion production within the next few weeks and for *God's sake do not fail in your tasks* as there is too much at stake.”<sup>90</sup> Bittner felt very strongly about protecting miners and their families. He explained that his moral code came simply from his mother teaching him the “Golden Rule.”<sup>91</sup> Using the trade union gospel, Bittner spoke to the common worker in a language they understood.

The union faced numerous and seemingly insurmountable difficulties during their organization campaigns. The racial tensions between native white workers and ethnic miners hindered cooperation among the rank-and-file. As the 1920s progressed, the open-shop movement proved a formidable foe against the union, and the UMWA’s membership declined as miners left to work under the “American Plan.” Additionally, the reemergence of the Klan with its fundamentalist belief system tested the loyalty of union mine workers to the more progressive trade union gospel. As the mine war continued, local ministers saw these events as an opportunity to intervene. More progressive ministers supported the union and used the pulpit as a platform for protest. Conservative evangelicals encouraged coal miners to live sober and obedient lives, following the Christian work ethic, for work in this life equaled reward in Heaven. Still more ministers remained silent on the labor-management dispute, hoping the miners and the coal operators would resolve the issue themselves. Whichever way they leaned, the significance of religious symbolism during the mine war cannot be underestimated.

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<sup>90</sup> “FW Reports,” March 17, 1927, C.E. “Ned” Smith Papers, Series 1, Box 6, WVRHC, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia. Italicized for emphasis by author.

<sup>91</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 345.

### Chapter III: “The Devil Was the First Scab:” the Spiritual Battle for Marion County’s Working Class<sup>1</sup>

[T]he gospel is a religion fitted for to-day, and it will answer the social problems of to-day, whether propounded by workman, employer, or consumer.

--Harry W. Cadman, “The Christian Unity of Capital and Labor”<sup>2</sup>

The heightened atmosphere of the mine war spurred local ministers to take action. Progressive ministers supported organized labor, conservative preachers opposed trade unionism, and many other religious leaders did not take a firm position fearing resentment from both sides.<sup>3</sup> The battle between coal operators and mine workers also exacerbated the ethnic tensions between the native upper, middle, and a faction of working-class Protestants against the foreign-born, working-class Catholics.<sup>4</sup> The mine war that erupted provides a model for understanding the circumstances in which pro-labor and anti-union ministerial positions developed. The consequences of religious involvement caused Marion County residents to evaluate labor-management unrest, as well as the role of the church in the community and their working lives.

Marion County’s religious community followed a very similar path as the rest of West Virginia. The tent revivals and circuit riders of the Second Great Awakening burned through the region inspiring spiritual conversions. Men and women began

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<sup>1</sup>“Devil First Scab,” *Labor Argus* (Charleston, WV), June 28, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915*, Yale Studies in Religious Education series (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 79.

<sup>3</sup> When using “progressive” and “conservative” the author is not referring to a political perspective, but rather the religious outlook spiritual leaders used to preach to their congregations. “Progressive” refers to the incorporation of secular ideas into the Christian faith. For example, these preachers approached biblical study with historic and literary criticism. In contrast, “conservative” pastors believed in the inerrant nature of the Bible, and followed a Fundamentalist approach to Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term “upper class” denotes those who control the means of production, i.e. coal operators and other industrialists, “middle class” refers to the managers at the mines, skilled glass workers, machinists, and other craft unionists, and “working class” signifies coal miners and other unskilled laborers.



hosting religious services in their homes until they could construct more permanent places of worship. Churches, predominantly of the Protestant faith, sprang up around the county between 1850 and 1900. Local prominent business and political leaders attended local churches, including “the Father of the Statehood Movement,” Francis Pierpont and Senator Waitman T. Willey (both Methodists); and A. B. Fleming (a member of the Presbyterian Church).<sup>5</sup> As Marion County industrialized, Catholic churches grew with the importation of Irish immigrants working on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. When the coal industry developed, Catholic churches continued to flourish as immigrant workers from Southern and Eastern Europe came to the region between the mid-1860s and World War I.<sup>6</sup> Many of the Catholic churches in Marion County relied on financial assistance from coal operators. In the towns of Grant Town and Barrackville, the Catholic Church built on land deeded by the Federal Coal Company and the Bethlehem Coal Company. Although the coal companies provided funding for these churches, coal operators did not dictate the materials used in the priests’ sermons.<sup>7</sup> These places of worship competed for adherence to their specific doctrines, which later stirred ethnic tensions that boiled over during the mine war period.

In contrast to middle- and upper-class organized religion that demanded church attendance and participation in faith-based groups, working-class faith worked

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<sup>5</sup> Marion County Historical Society, Inc., *Marion County Centennial Yearbook* (Fairmont, WV: Fairmont Printing Company, 1963), 64-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 65-66.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, 30 October 1909, St. Anthony’s Church, Grant Town, West Virginia Box, and All Saints Church, Barrackville, West Virginia Box, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, West Virginia.

independently of these institutions.<sup>8</sup> While retaining their autonomy, working-class grassroots organizations also acted cooperatively with middle-class religious movements, such as the Social Gospel Movement. Previously religion and labor historians, including Liston Pope and Herbert G. Gutman, argued that the Social Gospel, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and other middle-class social programs operated parallel to working-class associations.<sup>9</sup> However, connections bound these middle-class groups with working-class organizations—namely, the use of religious language by union organizers and ministerial associations that worked with both middle- and working-class congregants.

Just as the nature of working-class religiosity is complex and nuanced, so is the relationship between religion, labor, and capital.<sup>10</sup> Ministers across the country divided over important subjects, such as Prohibition, living and working conditions, and salvation, that impacted social, cultural, economic, and political facets of society. Some religious leaders preached a Fundamentalist doctrine, whereas others turned toward social

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), xvi-xx. Fones-Wolf explores the roles of theology and unionization by challenging conventions held by institutional labor historians. His research provides a nuanced view of working class faith and the ways organized religion could assist workers in their struggle for a higher standard of living.

<sup>9</sup> Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965); Herbert G. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: the Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age" *American Historical Review* 72, no. 1 (October 1966): 74-101; Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Kevin J. Christiano, "Religion and Radical Labor Unionism in the 1920s" *Journal for the Scientific Research of Religion* 27, no. 3 (September 1988): 378-388; E.P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963). For many years, historical monographs concerning the working class neglected the importance of religious expression and instead relegated it to a peripheral role in the workers' lives or as a tool of repression. Other historians argue that religion, especially Christianity, hindered the rise of a unified working-class culture.

<sup>10</sup> Dwight B. Billings, "Religion as Opposition: a Gramscian Analysis" *The American Journal of Sociology* 96, no. 1 (July 1990): 1-31.

Christianity that stressed a more ethical approach to spirituality.<sup>11</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, pastors nationwide took a stand with labor unions to organize the working class. They united on the belief that unionism provided workers with a brotherhood concerned with ending poverty and increasing standards of living. The Social Gospel spoke of uplifting the working class and the poor and expressed a willingness from religious bodies to work with organized labor. At the local level, ministers, such as Dr. J. C. Broomfield and Reverend Eugene Neubauer attempted to uplift the worker and encourage unionism. In addition to Fundamentalism and Social Christianity, Marion County's religious landscape included the Catholic Church. The majority of priests remained neutral with respect to the labor unrest. Although many Italian Catholics participated in the mine war strikes, the church depended on the financial support of the coal companies and some priests chose not to support the miners. The convergence of these religious doctrines expressed the complex social, cultural, and economic problem the mine war created in the Fairmont Field.

Religious leaders in Marion County frequently took positions on social issues related to the mine workers, such as socialism and temperance. During the local election of 1911, the Fairmont Ministerial Association (FMA), an ecumenical organization of preachers in the city, asked Dr. Broomfield to deliver an address, which he entitled: 'Is Socialism as a Protest Justified?' He explained that "protest spells progress" and encouraged voters to remember that at the polls.<sup>12</sup> Although the socialists did not win the election, they continued to receive approval from Fairmont's preachers. In February

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<sup>11</sup> Social Christianity emerged around the mid-1860s in response to the wealth amassed during the Gilded Age. For more information about the Social Gospel, see Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> "Dr. Broomfield's Strong Sermon to Socialists Heard by Large Crowd," *Fairmont Times*, November 4, 1911.

1912, the FMA again requested that Broomfield deliver a sermon defending the aims of socialism. Broomfield explained that he approved of Christian socialism, a belief “built upon cooperation and brotherhood between the working and capitalist classes. This cooperation, however, would not be possible without a change of heart. Until individuals are saved from their sins and [become] creatures in Christ, true brotherhood is impossible.”<sup>13</sup> Broomfield concluded his speech by evoking the scripture: “but strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things—‘the things essential to your social and economic well-being’—will be given unto you as well.”<sup>14</sup> In fear of growing support of socialism, local political leaders passed laws forbidding public speeches without consent from local authorities or the mayor. Eventually, support for socialism and other similar radical ideas in Marion County dissipated after the riot in Farmington in 1915 and the Red Scare in 1919.<sup>15</sup>

Local religious leaders also used their pulpit to express concerns about the consumption of alcohol in Marion County. Dr. J. C. Broomfield and evangelist Billy Sunday teamed with middle-class voluntary organizations, such as the Women’s Crusade (later the Women’s Christian Temperance Union), and held several revivals in 1912 to run the “demon rum” out of Fairmont and surrounding towns.<sup>16</sup> These successful

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<sup>13</sup> *Fairmont Times*, February 26, 1912; Stephen Cresswell, “When Socialists Ran Star City” *West Virginia History* 52 (1993): 59-72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Matthew 6:33 (NSRV). In the middle of the quoted Bible passage are the words of Dr. Broomfield.

<sup>15</sup> Charles H. McCormick, “The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era” *West Virginia History* 52 (1993): 33-58.

<sup>16</sup> *Fairmont Times*, April, May, and November 1912; Michael Workman, “Political Culture and the Coal Economy in the Upper Monongahela Region: 1776-1933” (Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 1995): 196-7; Carletta H. Bush, “Religious Fervor in the Fairmont Field: Calls for Revival and Reform in the ‘Coal City,’ 1908-1927,” *American Religious Experience*, [online journal] <http://are.wvu.edu/cbush.htm> (accessed 10 October 2007).

campaigns not only made the county dry, but also converted thousands of Marion County's citizens. The revivals also created cultural fissures between the native white Protestants and foreign-born Catholics. Some ethnic workers viewed the efforts of the Temperance Movement as an impediment to their ethnic traditions. The tensions between the indigenous and foreign workers created a fissure that led to a disjointed working class.

Although growing animosity characterized relations within the working-class, the prosperity of the wartime coal boom created a social contract between labor and capital. In 1918, coal operators across the Fairmont Field signed an agreement with the UMWA allowing union representation for the miners. Marion County flourished as the war effort demanded more coal. Once the war concluded, the economy took a downward turn and the accord that joined mine workers and management soon faltered. Coal operators wanted to run their operations without interference from "outsiders," such as the UMWA. When threat of strikes emerged in late 1919, one local preacher voiced his objections to the walk out. Pastor Glenn W. Steward complained, "Men Strike for more Wages—Why not Strike for more Religion? Why not make 'the Little Red Church' the Place of Arbitration?"<sup>17</sup> In order to bring peace back to the mines, industrialists turned to welfare capitalism and religion. In early November 1920 members of the local women's organizations, the WCTU and other church groups, headed by Mrs. C. E. Hutchinson, the wife of a coal operator, made arrangements for a month long Billy Sunday-led revival.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Church Services: Monongah Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *West Virginian*, November 1, 1919.

<sup>18</sup> "Women's Organizations Ready for Billy Sunday," *Fairmont Times*, November 22, 1920. Mrs. Hutchinson could not fulfill her duty as chair of the planning committee as she was placed in a sanitarium in late November; *Fairmont Times*, November 29, 1920.

Prominent men in the community, such as H. J. Hartley, owner of a local department store, Brooks J. Hutchinson, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Hutchinson, and R. M. Hite, another local coal operator, formed the financial committee for the Sunday revivals.<sup>19</sup> Once the financial committee raised twenty thousand dollars, construction for a tabernacle began on November 23. The committee only used union labor to build the place of worship.<sup>20</sup> After months of planning, the region welcomed the world-renowned baseball evangelist, Billy Sunday, on January 2, 1921.

Bringing evangelist Billy Sunday into Marion County allowed industrialists to use religion to promote pro-business and pro-American rhetoric to the middle and working classes.<sup>21</sup> The charismatic leader gained the support of the Fairmont Ministerial Association (FMA). The FMA represented a diverse facet of the region's religious landscape. While the organization asked Dr. Broomfield to present a sermon promoting socialism in 1911 and a lectureship about the labor problem during the mine war, the FMA did not perceive any discrepancy between those progressive actions and welcoming the more Fundamentalist spiritual leader Billy Sunday to Fairmont. The FMA agreed

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<sup>19</sup> *Fairmont Times*, November 30, 1920.

<sup>20</sup> "Construction of Tabernacle to Begin," *Fairmont Times*, November 23, 1920. The Billy Sunday Tabernacle was located on the corner of Gaston Avenue and Fifth Street. The use of union labor to build Sunday's tabernacle differed from the position he took during the 1915 revivals in Philadelphia where Sunday "went out of his way to build his tabernacle with non-union labor." Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, 184.

<sup>21</sup> This tactic did not occur solely in this region; other examples of industrialists using revivals to quell class consciousness include: the period of labor strife in Philadelphia in 1915 and in Gastonia, North Carolina during the textile strike in 1927. Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, vii-xx; Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, 29; Kevin J. Christiano, "Religion and Radical Labor Unionism," 380. During the textile strike in Gastonia, journalist H. L. Mencken wrote a revival could be "more economical and effective [than] a private militia or an army of 'scabs'."

with the evangelist's message on temperance and modest living; yet its members also held a liberal position toward labor.<sup>22</sup>

Billy Sunday began his services lauding Fairmont for its great prosperity and encouraged the region's leaders to continue civic boosterism. The evangelist positioned himself against radical elements, such as progressive policies, socialists, organized labor, and immigrants, particularly those from Eastern and Southern Europe. Instead, Sunday promoted clean living, piety, hard work and obedience to authority as a way to achieve otherworldly rewards. His message of prohibition, intense reading of Scripture, and frequent prayer as spiritual instruments to quell social unrest matched the beliefs of the business men who attended and promoted his services.<sup>23</sup> On January 13, Ephraim Morgan, governor-elect and prominent figure from Marion County, made an appearance to show his support for the religious activities.<sup>24</sup> Days later, Sunday hosted a men-only sermon with a noteworthy presence from local coal companies. A singing quartet represented Consolidation Coal, and John O. Brooks, superintendent from a Consol mine attended. During his address, Sunday rebuked socialism and its well-known leader Eugene V. Debs and reminded the congregants that America faced great ill if lenient immigration policies continued.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> There are no records of the exact membership of the Fairmont Ministerial Association. Local newspapers portray them as a varied group interested in discourse and education concerning the diverse problems plaguing the region.

<sup>23</sup> Workman, "Political Culture," 199.

<sup>24</sup> "Billy Sunday Applauded," *Fairmont Times*, January 14, 1921.

<sup>25</sup> "Fourth Sunday of Billy Sunday," *Fairmont Times*, January 24, 1921; Workman, "Political Culture," 201.

Mine workers and other laborers in Marion County played a significant role in the Sunday revival. He directed many of his remarks to the workers, and commented on the relationship between the working class and the local industrialists. Sunday's campaign peaked on January 26 with the greatly anticipated "Miners' Night." Coal miners from across the region congregated in front of the courthouse to march to Sunday's tabernacle. Nick Aiello, president of UMWA Sub-District 4, and Glen McKnight, a miner from Hutchinson, led the procession.<sup>26</sup> As they filed into the tabernacle, Billy Sunday greeted them wearing a miners' cap and lamp. Sunday's sermon encouraged greater cooperation between the mine workers and coal operators. He explained that lockouts and walkouts did not benefit either group because "[w]hen capital strikes at labor it cuts off its right hand, and when labor strikes at capital it cuts off its right hand." He ended the services by reminding miners to turn to the Bible as "the remedy for differences." When the *Fairmont Times* reported on "Miners' Night" the next day, the paper exclaimed it was the "first time coal miners have been permitted to take a prominent place in the religious life of the community."<sup>27</sup> As the Billy Sunday Revival drew to a close in February, the newspaper praised the evangelist's influence on the region. Not only did he convert thousands of people in north-central West Virginia, but, according to the *Fairmont Times*, he also "better prepared [community members] for sweeping changes in the manner of county lives."<sup>28</sup> To continue the religious zeal that began during his revival, Billy

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<sup>26</sup> For Hutchinson's location in relation to Fairmont, see Appendix 1.2

<sup>27</sup> "Miners Plan Spectacle for Tabernacle," *Fairmont Times*, January 18, 1921; "Miners' Night Boosted," *Fairmont Times*, January 20, 1921; "Mine Lamps Twinkled at Billy Sunday Meeting," *Fairmont Times*, January 27, 1921.

<sup>28</sup> "Fairmont Broke Record," *Fairmont Times*, February 14, 1921.



Sunday clubs sprang up across Fairmont and other satellite communities.<sup>29</sup> Sunday again returned to meet with union representatives and coal operators during contract negotiations to plead for the miners to remain at work as the 1922 walkout approached.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to impacting the development of organized labor, local churches also served an important social role in Marion County. Early Americanizers used places of worship and church groups to disperse information about American traditions, values, and mores to both native and foreign-born workers and their families. These programs for the working class concerned American customs, such as hygiene, cooking, instruction in English, and voting.<sup>31</sup> Americanization efforts during World War I set out with the objective of uniting United States citizens under a collective definition of Americanism to defeat the enemy.<sup>32</sup> As the war concluded, business leaders across the country used the public relations and mobilization devices developed during the war to incorporate capitalistic values into the new definition of patriotism. American industrialists, including those in north-central West Virginia, sought to create an efficient and docile workforce. As a result of the efforts of these business leaders, the open-shop “American Plan,” used rhetoric about preindustrial principles concerning individual bargaining to

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<sup>29</sup> “Billy Sunday Club No.3,” *West Virginian*, May 22, 1922; “Billy Sunday Business Men’s Club,” *West Virginian*, August 4, 1922; “Billy Sunday Bible Class Plans Dinner,” *Fairmont Times*, February 21, 1924.

<sup>30</sup> “District 17 Convention Addressed by Billy Sunday,” *West Virginian*, March 21, 1922.

<sup>31</sup> Mary Behner Christopher, a home missionary worker in Scotts Run in nearby Monongalia County, conducted many of these Americanization programs. For more information, see “‘I Wonder whom God Will Hold Responsible’: Mary Behner and the Presbyterian Mission on Scotts Run,” ed. Christine M. Kreiser *West Virginia History* 53 (1994): 61-94.

<sup>32</sup> Vera Andrew Harvey, *The Silver Gleam: Pageant and History of the West Virginia Federation of Women’s Clubs in Celebration of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary, 1904-1929*, (Charleston, WV: n.p., 1929).

entice miners back to work.<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically, although the coal operators promoted individual contracts, they continued to hold meetings of the Northern West Virginia Coal Operators' Association (NWVCOA), the Monongahela Coal Operators' Association (MCOA), and the Fairmont Coal Club; groups dedicated to ensuring their power and economic interests in the region.<sup>34</sup>

As Marion County joined together under the teachings of Billy Sunday, racial tensions resurfaced causing difficulties in creating a united workforce. Some of the racial divisions stemmed from Americanizers' sentiments. Proponents of the nationalist movement argued immigrants needed assimilation programs because of their leanings toward lawlessness, drunkenness, violence, and radicalism. Newspapers in Fairmont also conveyed the region's racial division. *Fairmont Times* editor, C. E. "Ned" Smith viewed the mine war not as a battle for miners' rights but as struggle between obedient native white mine workers and radical, law-breaking foreign-born coal miners. Smith described the "typical strikers' picket line" as composed of "not more than ten per cent native whites, ten per cent Negroes, and the rest foreign born with the Italian type predominating."<sup>35</sup> His nativist propaganda and position against labor organization made him a target for union miners and UMWA representatives.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For a fuller discussion of the Americanization movement in West Virginia see, John C. Hennen, *The Americanization of West Virginia: Creating a Modern Industrial State, 1916-1925*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996): 4, 76-78.

<sup>34</sup> "Coal Official Notes," *Fairmont Time*, October 12, 1924; "Local Coal Operators Expect Good Week," *Fairmont Times*, March 25, 1925; Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 3; Workman, "Political Culture," 364-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Fairmont Times*, July 17, 1926; Workman, "Political Culture," 384-5.

<sup>36</sup> Workman, "Political Culture," 385.

Indigenous workers once again turned against unassimilated “foreign” workers when the economic boom created by World War I and the coal industry began to falter. After the war, the ideals that steered the early Americanization efforts transformed into a more intense expression of nativism and anti-radicalism that led to movements such as the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>37</sup> The renewed Klan exerted their political, cultural, and social influence in region’s revival movement in the 1920s. On several occasions, Klansmen and women, clad in their white robes and hoods, attended church services throughout Marion and Harrison counties. Members of the KKK often brought donations and letters, which they asked the ministers to read, that described the Klan movement, such as the one delivered to Reverend Whitner of the Barrackville Baptist church: “We magnify the Bible as the basis of our constitution, the foundation of our government, the source of our laws, the sheet-anchor of our liberties, the most practical guide of all right-living and the source of all true wisdom.”<sup>38</sup> In some instances after the minister read the letter, he offered a prayer for the Klansmen and women and then the Klan proceeded out of the church as the congregation sang “America.”<sup>39</sup> Some preachers, such as Reverend O.F. Nease of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Enterprise in Harrison County, even officiated over Klan funeral services.<sup>40</sup> Ministers also took active roles in the KKK. Reverend O.E. Jones, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, served as the

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<sup>37</sup> Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 74-76. For more information about the Ku Klux Klan and its activities in Marion County, see Workman, “Political Culture,” 203-4.

<sup>38</sup> “Klansmen and Women Attend Two Churches,” *Fairmont Times*, March 18, 1924; “Klan Members Visit Churches,” *Fairmont Times*, April 15, 1924.

<sup>39</sup> Workman, “Political Culture,” 316.

<sup>40</sup> “Reverend Nease at Owings,” *Fairmont Times*, April 18, 1924.

General Kleagle at Marion County's regional headquarters in Shinnston.<sup>41</sup> The participation of some religious leaders with the Ku Klux Klan and their activities further alienated religious organizations with ethnic community members.

As the Klan continued to gain membership across the country, the union took a firmer stance against the ethnically and racially-motivated radicalism exhibited by the KKK. Initially, the UMWA sidestepped dealing with the Klan and chose to remain neutral so as not to estrange white members with KKK affiliations.<sup>42</sup> This changed as the Klan began terrorizing immigrants and blacks in Marion County by burning crosses and dynamiting buildings.<sup>43</sup> On Labor Day in 1925, union organizers hosted several rallies across the county as the KKK assembled to parade and conduct a public meeting in Fairmont with 6,000 people in attendance. James L. Studdard, vice president of sub-district 4, spoke harshly against the Klan, describing them as "un-American, anti-labor," and stating that they served as "troublemakers" in the region.<sup>44</sup> The day after Studdard's remarks, Ned Smith defended the Klan's mission of securing white Anglo-Saxon Protestants' control of America. By ridding Marion County of ethnic and black miners

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<sup>41</sup> A Kleagle, in the second version of the Klan, was the man in charge of recruiting new members to the organization. The author is not sure what "General" title before Kleagle means.

<sup>42</sup> "Miners Sidestep Klan Dispute in Diplomatic Way," *West Virginian*, February 21, 1924; Workman, "Political Culture," 331.

<sup>43</sup> The Klan wrote a letter to Mary Lewis, a prominent African-American woman in Monongah, apologizing for scaring her after setting off explosions near her home. They claimed that it was not aimed at her, but did emphasize their racial supremacist rhetoric. Additionally, several Klan members in the region participated in the attempted murder of Dan Washington, a black man working at a local hotel for hitting on a waitress who worked at the same hotel. This case was known as the "Little Rose Bud Case." For more information, see Workman, "Political Culture, 316-320.

<sup>44</sup> *West Virginian*, August 20, 1925.

and the union, Smith editorialized that native white miners could achieve “a closer relationship” with their management.<sup>45</sup>

As Fundamentalism and nativist groups continued to extend their influence over the region, the Catholic Church by and large took a position of neutrality toward the labor-management unrest. Instead, priests in Marion County concerned themselves with preserving an amicable relationship with the coal operators, who provided financial stability to the church, and the foreign-born mine workers who comprised a significant portion of the church’s congregation.<sup>46</sup> The priests looked to the Italians that immigrated to America before 1900 to impart their knowledge of American customs and culture to new immigrants and the younger generation. Established Italians living in the city of Fairmont frequently interacted with the native white middle and upper classes that perpetuated American values and customs. These Italians worked with church leadership as long as the diocese placed an Italian-speaking priest in Marion County.<sup>47</sup> Italian immigrants living outside of Fairmont constructed their class identity separate from those in the city. Many of the second-wave Italians (those who came to the region after 1900) lacked the community resources to adapt to their new surroundings. Italians in the coal camps noticed the inconsistencies between the promises of the labor consulates and realities of their new homes and profession. As a result, new immigrants asserted their class consciousness through participation in union activities. These Italians and mine

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<sup>45</sup> “Good Morning!” *Fairmont Times*, September 9, 1925.

<sup>46</sup> By the 1920s, the region’s coal industry employed 72 percent of the Italian immigrants. William B. Klaus, “Uneven Americanization: Italian Immigration to Marion County, 1900-1925,” in *Transnational West Virginia: Ethnic Communities and Economic Change, 1840-1940*, edited by Ken Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press): 193.

<sup>47</sup> Klaus, “Uneven Americanization,” 191-211.

workers from Eastern Europe acted out against the racist attitudes of the Klan as well as a feeling of rejection from the Catholic Church.<sup>48</sup> Many of the striking Italians viewed some priests, such as Father C. Joseph Kluser, as an impediment to their union goals. Strikers on the picket lines accused priests of aligning themselves with capitalists and that the Catholic Church worked against unionization.<sup>49</sup>

The Wheeling Diocese focused great attention and resources to the parishes in Marion County, particularly Fairmont. Bishop John J. Swint responded to the demands of the Italians in the region who wanted to open new parishes. Just before outbreak of the mine war, Swint sent Father Forestier and two La Salette Fathers to establish a new parish in Fairmont.<sup>50</sup> The La Salette Fathers grew slightly concerned that the strike would complicate their initiative in the region. Although the Fathers tolerated the miners, they did not assist the mine workers in their struggle for union recognition. Forestier later wrote the Bishop that “the labor conditions render the work of the Fathers very difficult. [U]nless the labor situation is settled, the mission may just as well be abandoned.”<sup>51</sup> Italians in Marion County rallied and convinced the Bishop they would work with the church hierarchy if the Bishop assisted them in the goal of establishing a national parish. Since the striking miners could not financially support the efforts to

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<sup>48</sup> *West Virginian*, August 20, 1925. Immigrant miners from Eastern and Southern Europe at the picket lines in Rachel chanted: “We don’t want the American Plan or the Ku Klux Klan.”

<sup>49</sup> Klaus, “Uneven Americanization,” 208-9.

<sup>50</sup> The La Salette Fathers are a Roman Catholic missionary group of priests named after an apparition of the Virgin Mary witnessed by two children in La Salette, France. The Fathers established a mission in Harford, Connecticut and sent missionaries to West Virginia at the request of Bishop Swint to establish a new Italian parish in 1925. The La Salette Fathers’ missionary work continues today throughout the world.

<sup>51</sup> Father S. Forestier, Nashua, NH to Right Reverend Bishop J. J. Swint, Wheeling, WV, 6 October 1925, Bishops’ Correspondence, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, West Virginia.

build a new church or hire a priest, the Fathers turned to more affluent Italians in Fairmont with the economic means to do so.

As the La Salette Fathers worked to establish an Italian parish in Fairmont, priests near the coal camps assisted the financial stability of their churches. Father C. J. Kluser served the congregation at St. Patrick's church in Mannington and tended to the Catholics in his jurisdiction, including the Rachel miners near Downs.<sup>52</sup> Downs did not have a church building, so Father Kluser held Mass in a schoolhouse owned by the company. Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, manager of coal operations at Downs and his wife, offered their support to the priest. Mrs. Mitchell conducted Sunday school services. Kluser began missing Mass and some Catholics left the church and worshiped with Protestant denominations. The priest explained that he no longer served the congregation in Downs because of the striking miners' poor attitude toward the church:

I found that nearly all of these people are foreigners who care nothing for religion. Many who call themselves Catholics, belong, according to their statement, to the "Russian Orthodox Church." They are genuine Bolshevik. Several of them told me right to my face: "We do not care for any Church, for the Church is doing nothing for our economic relief; it always stands by the capitalists."<sup>53</sup>

Kluser wrote the Bishop that he feared for his life because of the intense hatred exacted against the church. However, the priest worried about his financial security if he continued to pastor over Downs. The region's priests questioned the ability of the striking miners to provide the funds to maintain the churches and the clergy. Kluser served wealthier parishioners in Mannington and largely ignored the more destitute

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<sup>52</sup> Father C. Joseph Kluser was a German priest that served several churches throughout north and central West Virginia, including Wheeling, Morgantown, Mannington, and Littleton. He began ministering in West Virginia in 1897. For Rachel's location in relation to Fairmont, see Appendix 1.2.

<sup>53</sup> Father C. J. Kluser, Mannington, WV to Right Reverend Bishop J. J. Swint, Wheeling, WV, 3 April 1923, Bishops' Correspondence, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, West Virginia.

working-class Catholics in Downs. He owed no debt to the diocese, unlike other priests in the area, and knew the striking miners in Rachel could not support a church.

Noticing the lack of spiritual leadership and dwindling church membership, Father Thomas H. Collins, the attending priest in Farmington, wrote to Bishop Swint asking the bishop to give him authority over the church in Downs.<sup>54</sup> Collins took a more empathic view of the labor-management dispute, stating: “It does no good to tell the coal miners who are on strike that they are wrong.”<sup>55</sup> He believed that the priests should not involve themselves in the mine war but, rather, encourage both sides to come together and discuss a resolution to the labor strife. Collins’s standpoint was not completely impartial; the priest accepted financial assistance for the church from the coal operators. Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell promised to provide a church if Collins would hold on until the spring; the priest wrote to Bishop Swint that he would wait.<sup>56</sup> Father Collins obtained financial support from the coal operators, rendering him less than objective.

Father Collins’s acceptance of financial assistance from coal companies was not unique. Other Catholic parishes across the county received land and loans to construct church buildings, including St. Anthony’s Church in Grant Town and All Saint’s Church

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<sup>54</sup> Father Thomas Collins became the first pastor of St. Peter’s Parish in Farmington in 1921. Bishop John Joseph (J.J.) Swint ministered to the congregation at the St. Patrick’s Parish in Weston, West Virginia until February 1922 when he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop. In December 1922, two months after the death of Bishop Patrick James (P.J.) Donahue, Swint was promoted to serve as the fourth Bishop of Wheeling. He served as Bishop in Wheeling from 1922 to 1965. For a brief sketch of West Virginia’s parishes and priests, see the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston website, [www.dwc.org](http://www.dwc.org). For Farmington’s location in relation to Fairmont, see Appendix 1.2

<sup>55</sup> Father Thomas H. Collins, Farmington, WV to Right Reverend Bishop J. J. Swint, Wheeling, WV, 8 February 1923, Bishops’ Correspondence, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, West Virginia.

<sup>56</sup> Father Thomas H. Collins, Farmington, WV to Right Reverend Bishop J. J. Swint, Wheeling, WV, 8 February 1923, Bishops’ Correspondence, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, West Virginia.



in Barrackville. On behalf of St. Anthony's, Bishop P. J. Donahue signed an agreement with New England Fuel and Transportation Company to build a new church. The contract stated that the coal company would deduct payments for the loan from the Catholic miners' paychecks. The coal operators promised to encourage workers to support the church and attend Mass as long as the diocese promised to "meet the reasonable expectations of the [coal companies] in the spiritual care of the Catholic employees."<sup>57</sup> The diocese made a similar deal with the Bethlehem Mining Corporation for the construction and management of All Saints Church in Barrackville.<sup>58</sup> By making such contracts the region's coal companies exerted its power over the church and its congregants. The influence of the coal operators over the churches could explain the lack of participation from the priests during the mine war period. Aside from the La Salettes, Father Kluser, and Father Collins, the Catholic parishes largely remained silent concerning the labor strife in Marion County.

Although evangelist Billy Sunday supported the region's capitalists with his Fundamentalist doctrine and the Catholics remained neutral in their dealings with the labor-management unrest, some ministers turned toward the Social Gospel. The Social Gospel Movement caused religious leaders across the country to take a more secular and progressive approach to understand the needs of their congregation as well as the nation. Social Gospellers considered an increase in the standards of living a priority. Leaders, such as Reverend Charles Stelzle, explained that empowering the working class benefited

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<sup>57</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, 30 October 1909, St. Anthony's Church, Grant Town, West Virginia, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archive, Wheeling, West Virginia.

<sup>58</sup> All Saints Church, Barrackville, West Virginia, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archives, Wheeling, West Virginia.

all.<sup>59</sup> Stelzle believed that continued oppression of the working class would lead to revolution and the remedies to unrest are “free libraries, art galleries, schools, churches, and prohibition.” By providing the workers with these outlets, they would aspire for improved living and working conditions for themselves and better educational opportunities for their children.<sup>60</sup> Stelzle stressed that if coal operators exposed the workers to higher standards of living, they could achieve an environment of cooperation between capital and labor. Ministers in Marion County that embraced the principles of the Social Gospel employed religious rhetoric and symbolism to critique coal operators, support events hosted by union representatives, and provide various resources, such as clothes, food, time, and intelligence, to striking miners.<sup>61</sup>

The mine war period in Marion County reflected a time of religious change in America. The Social Gospel emerged as a reaction to social ills recognized by Protestant clergymen in post-Civil War America. Shifts in America’s political, economic, social, and cultural structure caused ministers to evaluate the role of the church in solving the new problems facing the country. As twentieth-century scientific reasoning entered into American thought, churches began incorporating literary and historical criticisms of the Bible into Sunday schools lessons. Additionally, pastors focused on creating a heaven on earth through sociological approaches to volunteer activities, such as the home and

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<sup>59</sup> Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, 281-313.

<sup>60</sup> “Religion and Social Service,” *Fairmont Times*, May 1, 1924. Social Gospelers often wrote about solutions to poverty in the United States, some of their solutions included: “1) philanthropy and individual gifts; 2) organized charity; 3) thorough investigation of social conditions and the causes of poverty; 4) tenement house legislation, public baths, small parks and playgrounds, social settlements, etc.; 5) the battle for industrial justice.” Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel*, 266.

<sup>61</sup> David Kowalewski and Arthur L. Greil, “Religion as Opiate: Church and Revolution in Comparative Structural Perspective,” *Journal of Church and State* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 511-526.

foreign missionaries and the Epworth League.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to the Social Gospel movement, many Protestant denominations continued to espouse more Fundamentalist Christian doctrines. Fundamentalist clergy rejected sociological reasoning and, instead, stressed the inerrant nature of the Bible, a literal heaven and hell, the approaching Second Coming, and a belief that individuals are responsible for their own salvation. This theology emphasized personal piety and reflection on otherworldly interests rather than social morality and attention to current affairs such as those preached by social Christians.<sup>63</sup> Although these theological doctrines differed from one another, Protestants could attend both social Christian and Fundamentalist services without reservations because both preached similar messages, including: temperance, hard work, prayer, and bible study. For that reason, the Fairmont Ministerial Association (FMA)—with support from local business leaders—invited Billy Sunday to conduct revivals where he chastised “foreign” workers while also asking Dr. Broomfield to speak out against the region’s industrial problems.

Upon arrival in Marion County, Dr. John Calvin (J. C.) Broomfield quickly became the most outspoken ministerial voice for progressive change. Born in Eyemouth, Scotland, in 1872, Broomfield immigrated to the United States and quickly entered the ministry.<sup>64</sup> He served as pastor for the Methodist Protestant Temple, also known as the “People’s Temple,” in Fairmont for nineteen years. During his long tenure, Broomfield

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<sup>62</sup> Hopkins, *Rise of the Social Gospel*, 105-6, 266. The Epworth League was a youth group that organized social activities in the Methodist Church. Formed in Cleveland, Ohio in 1889, it was named for the birthplace of Methodist founder John Wesley. It is now known as the United Methodist Youth Fellowship.

<sup>63</sup> Clifford A. Grammich, Jr., *Local Baptists, Local Politics: Churches and Communities in the Middle and Uplands South*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999): 27-55.

<sup>64</sup> Lyle Johnston, “Moments from Our Past,” in *Historian’s Digest* 44, no. 4 (September 2004): 2.

showed great enthusiasm for progressive elements in the city. He became an important member of the community through his participation with the “Four Minute Men” and his service in Alabama collecting rations for the troops during World War I.<sup>65</sup> The Methodist Handbook outlined the conduct of a good Christian as “a public man ... making his influence felt in society, business relations, political issues, in support of the law, and promotion of the public welfare”—a role exemplified by Broomfield through his participation with these civic organizations.<sup>66</sup> Through his association with the FMA, Broomfield delivered speeches about socialism and labor issues.

In 1925, Broomfield left Fairmont to serve in Pittsburgh; however, he continued to stay abreast of the labor-management unrest. As the mine war escalated, the FMA asked him to present a lectureship about industrial problems plaguing the region. In his speech, he explained that the impact of industrial issues on the public, not just the workers and mine operators, and the ways in which these issues involved religious leaders. Broomfield directed strong words to trade unionists expounding that the Bible did not condone the use of collective bargaining; instead, corporations should pay wages based on “individual merit.” Additionally, he chastised the coal operators for their brutal tactics including the use of mine guards, searchlights and dynamite. Broomfield claimed this environment created a “miniature western battlefield.” Broomfield concluded his remarks with uplifting words to the worker: “Opposition to the right of labor to organize is foolish. The day of industrial democracy is coming. Morning is here and the labor

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<sup>65</sup> The “Four-Minute Men” Division was a group of men and boys that gave brief speeches in support of America’s participation in World War I. The group was created by the Committee on Public Information, an independent government agency that disseminated propaganda during the war effort. Hennen, *Americanization of West Virginia*, 9, 14-18.

<sup>66</sup> John Emory Godbey, *The Methodist Church-Member’s Manual: A Handbook-Book for Every Methodist*, (St. Louis, MO: South-Western Methodist Publishers, 1886): 177-191.

movement is responsible for it.”<sup>67</sup> After Dr. Broomfield presented these lectures, Reverend Oren H. Baker, pastor of a Baptist church in Morgantown, defended the material discussed by the lecturer explained that it was the responsibility of the church to “condemn guerrilla warfare” tactics used by local coal operators. Baker accused management in the coal industry of “gross-short sightedness and poor sportsmanship” because of a concerted effort to remove union agitators from state.<sup>68</sup>

Broomfield and Baker were not alone in their support of organized labor, other pastors in Marion County offered their resources to the union cause. In April 1925, during a union rally held at East/West Stadium to celebrate Mitchell Day, Reverend Eugene Neubauer delivered a prayer before the speakers took the podium.<sup>69</sup> Later that year, Reverend George E. Bevans and the congregation at the First Presbyterian Church in Fairmont donated clothing to the families of striking miners living in union barracks. He claimed the miners’ families needed the assistance of the church “regardless of the labor controversy.”<sup>70</sup> The intellectual, spiritual, and material support that these ministers provided the miners offered the union an important ally against the nonunion policies coal operators implemented.

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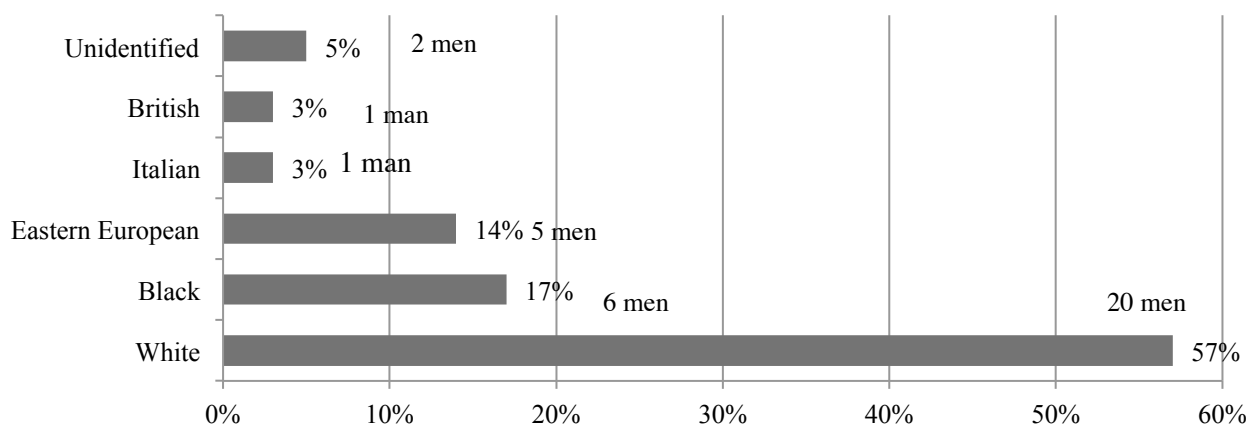
<sup>67</sup> “Dr. Broomfield Assails Law and Coal Operators,” *West Virginian*, January 12, 1925.

<sup>68</sup> “Defends Dr. Broomfield,” *West Virginian*, January 13, 1925.

<sup>69</sup> “Stadium,” *Fairmont Times*, April 2, 1925.

<sup>70</sup> “In One Day’s News,” *Labor Age*, December 1925.

**Table 1.2**  
**Nationalities of Miners who Perished in the**  
**Barrackville Mine Disaster**



Source: “Men May Be Alive” *Fairmont Times*, March 18, 1925.<sup>71</sup>

An example of ministers offering their time and talent to devastated miners in Marion County occurred on March 17, 1925 due to the Bethlehem Mine disaster in Barrackville.<sup>72</sup> Thirty-five men perished in this explosion. The mine workers killed in this tragedy represented various nationalities, including: native whites, African-Americans, Eastern European immigrants, Italians, and British miners.<sup>73</sup> Even though

<sup>71</sup> For the names of these men see Appendix 1.3.

<sup>72</sup> This disaster took center stage in the mine war because the coal company, West Virginia state attorney general, Howard B. Lee, and Ned Smith suspected striking miners placed a nitroglycerine bomb in an air vent, which caused the incident. Veteran miners claimed the explosion occurred because the coal companies hired “scabs” inexperienced with use of explosives in the mines. After an investigation, the coroner’s jury concluded that the disaster resulted from a slate fall, which caused a beam to collapse onto a mine car rail and ignited a collection of gas. Although the evidence was inconclusive as to fault, the precarious position the coal operators placed unskilled miners in coupled with the violence exhibited by some union miners left these nonunion mine workers susceptible to dangerous incidents.

<sup>73</sup> The heterogeneous mix of coal miners clearly refutes Howard B. Lee’s and Ned Smith’s assertions about the nonunion workers’ racial makeup because clearly some ethnic and black miners continued to work at open-shop mines during the mine war. Lee, *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, 150; “Men May Be Alive” *Fairmont Times*, March 18, 1925. See Appendix 1.4 for the names and ethnicities of the miners.

local preachers stood at odds over the issue of unions, clergymen and religious groups rallied around the mine workers and their families during this time of tragedy. Women's organizations, in connection with the Red Cross, collected supplies and made meals for the search and relief efforts. The "People's Temple" in Fairmont became the center of operations for the aid work. Several pastors also joined the congregations helping the families in Barrackville, and used their experiences assisting the relief efforts as material for their March 22 Sunday sermons. The newspaper also noted the generous donations from the Salvation Army, Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Christians, United Brethren, and Jewish denominations.<sup>74</sup> The ecumenical spirit exhibited by the various religious groups provided the community with a sense of harmony and comfort during a period of great strife.

After 1925, the local newspapers no longer recorded the works of the church with respect to the events of the mine war. It is unclear whether the churches chose to limit or suspend their ministerial attention to labor-management unrest or if the loss of enthusiastic evangelists, such as J. C. Broomfield and Billy Sunday, left Marion County without a voice for either side. It is, however, important to understand that religious involvement offered pro- and anti-union supporters a social and cultural outlet to protest for their position in the 1920s. In spite of the contradictory sentiments expressed by Broomfield and Sunday about the mine war, the Catholic Church continued to maintain its neutrality hoping the coal operators and miners would work out their differences on their own, without spiritual intervention. The religious environment in Marion County during the 1910s and 1920s reflects the fact that religious doctrines are not unwavering;

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<sup>74</sup> "Mine Horror Reflected in Services of the Churches" *Fairmont Times*, March 23, 1925; "Heroic Work of Local Women Keeping Home Fires Burning Provide Relief at the Mine," *Fairmont Times*, March 23, 1925.

instead, they are dynamic and adapt to social situations and cultural values.<sup>75</sup> Different creeds impacted similar groups: the same miners that attended Billy Sunday's revivals in the early 1920s could have also attended Dr. Broomfield's speech about the industrial problems without any contradictory feelings about the evangelists' dissimilar theological positions.<sup>76</sup> It is impossible to quantify the number of miners persuaded by the union or dissuaded by the coal operators to join the UMWA's cause. Yet it is clear that both groups believed the church provided an emotional escape for the working class and that the miners, the coal companies, and the union used a plethora of religious interpretations to champion their differing positions.

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<sup>75</sup> Billings, "Religion as Opposition," 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.



Conclusion: “Get Thee Behind Me Satan”

Oh those West Virginia hills so magnificent, so grand.  
 With their people standing faithful, as all West Virginians can.  
 Is it any wonder then that my heart with rapture thrills?  
 For better times will soon be coming to those West Virginia hills.  
 Over the hills, beautiful hills,  
 There’s been hard times in the West Virginia hills.  
 But if we all united stand and you take your brother’s hand,  
 Better times will soon be coming to the hills.  
 --“Better Times Will Soon Be Coming to the Hills”<sup>1</sup>

The mine war left a tremendous impact on Marion County, West Virginia. The era of optimism, progress, and Fairmont’s prosperity ended abruptly due to the post-war economic recession, overdevelopment of the mining industry, labor-management unrest, friction within the union, and ethnic tension between native white and immigrant workers. Examining the lives of the region’s miners shows the unique ways mine operators, union representatives, religious leaders, and members of the community adapted to the effects of rapid industrialization in Appalachia.

For nearly half a century, coal operators squashed union organization campaigns with welfare capitalism programs, including Americanization classes, constructing baseball fields, and funding hospitals. Coal supply demands during World War I required cooperation between mine workers and coal operators and leading coal companies in the Fairmont Field, such as the Consolidation Coal Company, allowed the UMWA to organize the region in order to ensure industrial peace and steady coal production. After the war, the union commenced lengthy strikes in 1919 and 1922, creating unsteadiness in the already volatile industry. In an attempt to promote better employer-employee relations, regional coal operators met with UMWA leaders to sign a

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in *Voices from the Mountains*, collected and recorded by Guy and Candie Carawan (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 197.

three-year contract known as the Jacksonville Agreement designed to stabilize the mining industry. Mines that opened during the war did not agree with the union contract and chose to abrogate the agreement. The replacement of native operators with absentee mine operations brought an end to the welfare capitalism programs, which led to the prolonged labor dispute. Foreign firms introduced more extreme tactics against the UMWA: including evictions, injunctions, “yellow dog” contracts, mine guards, and an open-shop policy, known as the “American Plan.” Coal operators believed cutting labor costs would help them compete with nonunion mines in Kentucky and southern West Virginia. The mines continued producing large tonnages of coal, but the demand never returned to wartime levels. Ultimately the industry floundered as the coal mined in the Fairmont Field flooded the market, driving coal prices down even lower.

Reacting to the coal companies’ unfair practices and in an effort to increase their standards of living, mine workers chose to join the union. The main complaint of the Marion County miners was the inconsistent days of operation after the war.<sup>2</sup> The goals the union set, such as an increase in the standards of living and working, more days of operation, and steady wages, failed to materialize. Eventually as both the union and the coal industry wavered after World War I, Marion County’s mine workers remained in the precarious position of being unable to collectively voice their political and economic interests. Coal companies imported new mine workers from Alabama and Eastern and Southern Europe, to work as “scab” labor that later resulted in an oversupply of workers. Additionally, operators invested in new mining machines that needed fewer workers in

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<sup>2</sup> Boris Emmet, *Labor Relations in the Fairmont, West Virginia Bituminous Coal Field*, Bureau of Labor Statistics Bulletin 361, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1924), 84.

the mines. After years of participating in striking activities and living in union barracks many miners could not continue and left to work in the mines under a nonunion basis.

The use of spiritual language during organization campaigns was an effective tool in the UMWA's arsenal against the coal operators. Van Bittner used his own form of the trade union gospel to encourage union membership. He explained that his beliefs stemmed from the "Golden Rule."<sup>3</sup> Drawing upon biblical stories, Bittner emphasized the possibility of inter-ethnic cooperation under the union banner. Other labor leaders in the Fairmont Field, including R. M. Williams and H.E. Peters, also employed religious imagery in their spirited addresses for the UMWA. The union urged coal miners to form a Christian brotherhood with their fellow miners in order to achieve their political and economic objectives. Although it is unclear how many mine workers joined the union based on the use of a trade union gospel, sociologists, such as Dwight Billings, explain that the use of "collective symbols" in UMWA speeches and writings "sustain[ed] the miners' commitment" to the mine war. Blending religious sentiment with union rhetoric served to show how organized labor was both a support system and an emotional outlet for the coal miners.

Just as the labor leaders, industrialists in Fairmont used spirituality and "collective symbols" to inspire workers to return to work and obey their superiors. As part of their welfare capitalism programs, coal operators and local business leaders hosted Billy Sunday revivals. Sunday's other-worldly message encouraged miners to work hard in this life to receive their reward in Heaven. Moreover, mine owners employed patriotic overtones as a way to end the mine war and anonymous sources published advertisement

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Workman, "Political Culture and the Coal Economy in the Upper Monongahela Region: 1776-1933," (Ph.D. dissertation, West Virginia University, 1995), 343; "Who is Van Bittner?," *Fairmont Times*, June 12, 1925.

in the Fairmont newspaper accusing the striking miners of radical and un-American activities.<sup>4</sup> Industrialists also purposefully named their extreme open-shop policy the “American Plan” to mobilize patriotic support for and obedience to industry. Coal operators enticed miners back to work with the individual contracts offered through the “Plan.” Exhausted from prolonged strikes and desperate to provide for their families, miners signed “yellow dog” contracts and returned to work under the open-shop policy. By incorporating religious and patriotic language, coal operators urged miners to leave the union and return to work.

Even though the union used religious language to bring workers together, a negative result of religious involvement during the mine war was the heightened ethnic tensions between native working- and middle-class Protestants and foreign-born, working-class Catholics. Immigrant workers felt targeted by Prohibition and Americanization campaigns. Evangelist Billy Sunday directed accusatory comments about ethnic workers’ propensity for violence and warned that America should tighten its immigration policies.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, local newspapers chronicled drunken and lawless activities perpetrated by “foreign” workers. These xenophobic attacks fostered the growth of nativist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan in Marion County. The Klan espoused a desire for one hundred percent Americanism, a belief in Christian fundamentalism, and the superiority of the white race. The Klan’s membership rose as coal operators imported workers from Europe and hired African American workers from

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<sup>4</sup> “Preserve the Right to Work,” *West Virginian*, October 31, 1919; “The Right to Work,” *West Virginian*, October 30, 1919.

<sup>5</sup> “Billy Sunday Applauded,” *Fairmont Times*, January 14, 1921; Fourth Sunday of Billy Sunday, *Fairmont Times*, January 24, 1921; “Miners Plan Spectacle for Tabernacle,” *Fairmont Times*, January 18, 1921; “Miners’ Night Boosted,” *Fairmont Times*, January 20, 1921; “Mine Lamps Twinkled at Billy Sunday Meeting,” *Fairmont Times*, January 27, 1921; “Fairmont Broke Record,” *Fairmont Times*, February 14, 1921.

the South to serve as strikebreakers. In reaction to these negative sentiments and the difficulties adjusting to their new lives in America, some ethnic miners joined radical groups, such as the Communists, socialists, and the Black Hand. Quickly, interest in these radical organizations dwindled, and Eastern and Southern European miners joined the UMWA.

The religious environment in Marion County provides a revealing community study model for understanding how religious leadership developed pro-labor and anti-union positions. Previously, labor historians neglected to identify the nature of working-class spirituality and its impact on union organization. These early labor historians employed Marxist theory to study workers. This perspective rejected religious expression because religion was as an “opiate of the masses.”<sup>6</sup> However, the relationship between religion and the working class is far more complex. Spirituality for Marion County’s mine workers did not restrict itself to organized religion’s doctrines. Rather coal miners and other members of the community gravitated to messages that suited their political, economic, social needs. Thus, miners in the Fairmont Field attended Billy Sunday’s “Miners’ Night” while later turning toward the trade union gospel touted by Van Bittner and other UMWA leaders. Anti-labor messages from evangelist Billy Sunday and some Catholic preachers stemmed from traditional Christian teachings, temperance, hard work, and obedience, as well as church’s reliance on the coal companies’ financial support. The pro-labor message from Reverends Broomfield, Baker, and Neubauer emerged from the progressive Social Gospel ministry. Religious leaders on both sides had to walk a fine line between condemning the coal companies and

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<sup>6</sup> David Kowalewski and Arthur L. Greil, “Religion as Opiate: Church and Revolution in Comparative Structural Perspective,” *Journal of Church and State* 32, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 511.

mine workers. Historian Ken Fones-Wolf notes that although the churches relied on financial assistance from industrialists, ministers “had to stand for order, continuity, and stability despite forces pressing for a greater social vision.”<sup>7</sup> Because of their commitment to tradition and order, most churches never veered far from the center and reminded silent on the issues concerning labor strife.

The extreme positions demonstrated by pro-labor and anti-union ministers in Marion County illustrate how the churches used religious justifications to argue for their respective side. Dwight Billings’s comparative study of the textile mills in Gastonia, North Carolina and coal mines in southern West Virginia examines the dichotomy between ministerial perspectives for and against unionism. He claims the clergy in Gastonia “[acquiesced] ... to the norms of ‘capitalist paternalism’” and took “an uncritical acceptance” of the capitalistic values established by mill operators.<sup>8</sup> This is a simplistic view of the choices ministers made during labor-management disputes. While some religious leaders, including evangelist Billy Sunday, accepted and incorporated the company line in their sermons, by and large, many ministers chose not to speak out for either side. Remaining silent concerning the mine war allowed pastors in Marion County to bring order back to the region and encourage mine operators to resolve their issues without religious intervention.

Billings also examines the use of spiritual symbols and rhetoric during the mine wars in southern West Virginia. While miner-ministers became the driving force for the

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<sup>7</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Trade Union Gospel*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> Much of his research of the textile mills in the Piedmont stems from Liston Pope’s monograph *Millhands and Preachers*. Whereas Pope’s research added to the understanding of the textile strike, he failed to examine the impact of the “New Theology,” or Social Gospel on the Protestant denominations and instead views the region’s churches as the mouthpiece for industry. Billings, “Religion as Opposition,” 14.

miners in the southern coalfields, ordained ministers offered their time and talent to speak for the workers and their right to organize in Marion County.<sup>9</sup> Shifts in American theology to “this-world” concerns meshed well with union’s message of social justice. Some Fairmont ministers supported unions by donating supplies to the miners and their families and conducting sermons concerning the labor-management unrest.<sup>10</sup> The state’s labor newspaper, *The Labor Argus*, also published Reverend Charles Stelzle’s articles, infusing West Virginia’s trade unions with the Social Gospel doctrine.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, Fairmont’s church leaders had a history of supporting radical thought. During the 1910s, the Fairmont Ministerial Association asked Broomfield to present a sermon about Christian socialism.<sup>12</sup> The tradition of social Christianity coupled with union’s use of spiritual language combined to establish a pro-labor position during the mine war.

For many years, the Internal Colony Model found favor among Appalachian scholars for explaining the economic backwardness of the region. In this model, as described by Harry Caudill in *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, David Alan Corbin’s *Life, Work, and Rebellion*, and James Alexander Williams’s monograph *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry*, absentee industrialists entered Appalachia and extracted the region’s natural resources and quickly exited Appalachia without establishing a self-

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<sup>9</sup> Billings, “Religion as Opposition,” 20.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Broomfield represented the Fairmont Ministerial Association and spoke about the “industrial problems” plaguing north-central West Virginia. Reverend Neubauer offered a prayer before a union meeting, and Reverend Bevans donated items to the striking miners and their families. “Dr. Broomfield Assails Law and Coal Operators,” *West Virginian*, January 12, 1925; “Defends Dr. Broomfield,” *West Virginian*, January 13, 1925; “Stadium,” *Fairmont Times*, April 2, 1925; “In One Day’s News,” *Labor Age*, December 1925.

<sup>11</sup> The *Labor Argus* (1906-1911; August 15, 1912) housed in the West Virginia State Archives in Charleston, West Virginia reprinted Reverend Stelzle’s syndicated articles.

<sup>12</sup> “Dr. Broomfield’s Strong Sermon to Socialists Heard by Large Crowd,” *Fairmont Times*, November 4, 1911; *Fairmont Times*, February 26, 1912.

sustaining economy for the people.<sup>13</sup> Ned Smith expressed this view in his “Good Morning!” editorial in 1926:

Perhaps the chief reason West Virginia has been so callous in reference to her history is that the state is just rounding up a three decade period of industrial development. The developers, generally speaking, have been men from other states whose only interest in West Virginia was to extract her natural resources, to devastate her forests, pollute her streams, and draw from her innards the flowing gold and black diamonds. For these developers, the game was too fast for sentiment. And the native West Virginians, sitting quietly amid the ashes of his boyhood and rich in the folklore of his ancestors, watched Progress smash the shrines of the past.<sup>14</sup>

By emphasizing the function of outside capitalists, scholars equate Appalachia to an exploited subregion inhabited by residents who are stripped of agency in their communities’ economic development. Rather than developing as an isolated coal town, Fairmont’s civic leaders attempted to create a more diversified economy. For the most part, indigenous industrialists spearheaded the drive for a diversified economy. Absentee mine companies operated in the region as early as the 1900s but had a small role in the region’s political and economic decisions. Ultimately, indigenous industrialists relied heavily on exporting natural resources and failed to create a home market for the region’s coal. Instead, coal operators and business leaders sponsored legislation that was good for the extractive industry but harmful to north-central West Virginia’s economic future.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Harry Caudill, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area*, (Little, Brown, and Company, 1964), David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coalfields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1930*, (Knoxville, TN: the University of Tennessee Press, 1981), and John Alexander Williams, *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry*, (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1976). For more information about Appalachian scholarship, see Kenneth Noe, “Appalachia before Mr. Peabody: Some Recent Literature on the Southern Mountain Region,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 110, no. 1 (2002): 5-34.

<sup>14</sup> “Good Morning!,” *Fairmont Times*, January 8, 1926, cited in Marion County Historical Society, Inc. *Marion County Centennial Yearbook* (Fairmont, WV: Fairmont Printing Company, 1963): 64-9. Ironically, Ned Smith blamed outside industrialists for ravaging Marion County, and yet he invested in Consol and vacationed with C.W. Watson.

<sup>15</sup> Clyde Johnson to Randolph Stalnaker, copy to A.B. Fleming, May 28, 1903; Copy of a telegram sent from W.P. Hubbard to A.B. White, August 21, 1903; William A. Ohey to A.B. Fleming, October 7,



More recently, historian Ken Fones-Wolf has questioned if indigenous operators acted any differently from outside coal companies in “pursuing a political economy that favored a balanced and self-sustaining growth over a path that emphasized natural resource exports.” The region’s capitalists continued to invest in Marion County’s infrastructure whereas enticing outside capital. Ultimately, capitalists, such as A. B. Fleming, aimed at securing their economic and political interests and chose to limit labor’s political voice and hindered the growth of other viable industries. Fones-Wolf explains that while rural industrialists in north-central West Virginia overcame many obstacles to expand the coal industry, these capitalists rested on a single industry economy and “never fostered a fully-developed region.”<sup>16</sup>

Historical monographs that follow the “culture of poverty” model tended to victimize the working class. By placing the blame on outside firms, Appalachian scholars deny miners a role in the region’s economic development. Coal operators with political connections worked to block mine workers from allying with farmers against industrialists. Additionally, even though rural industrialists controlled the region’s political economy, coal miners were not entirely indebted to the companies. Mine workers in Marion County could use the trolley system funded by rural industrialists to travel to other stores rather than only shopping at the company store. Moreover, some companies preferred not to pay their workers with scrip because the miners could

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1903; F. P. Moats to A.B. Fleming, March 1, 1904; J. St. Clair to A.B. Fleming, October 15, 1906; A.B. Fleming to C.W. Swisher, January 25, 1907; Telegram from Z.T. Vinson to A.B. Fleming, February 23, 1907; Fleming Papers, Boxes 82 and 86, West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University, Morgantown, West Virginia (Hereafter, WVRHC). For more information, see chapter one of this thesis. Ken Fones-Wolf “A House Re-Divided: From Sectionalism to Political Economy in Post-Emancipation West Virginia” in *Echoes of War: The Civil War’s Aftermath in Appalachia*, ed. by Andrew L. Slap (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 237-268.

<sup>16</sup> Fones-Wolf, “A House-Redivided” 268.

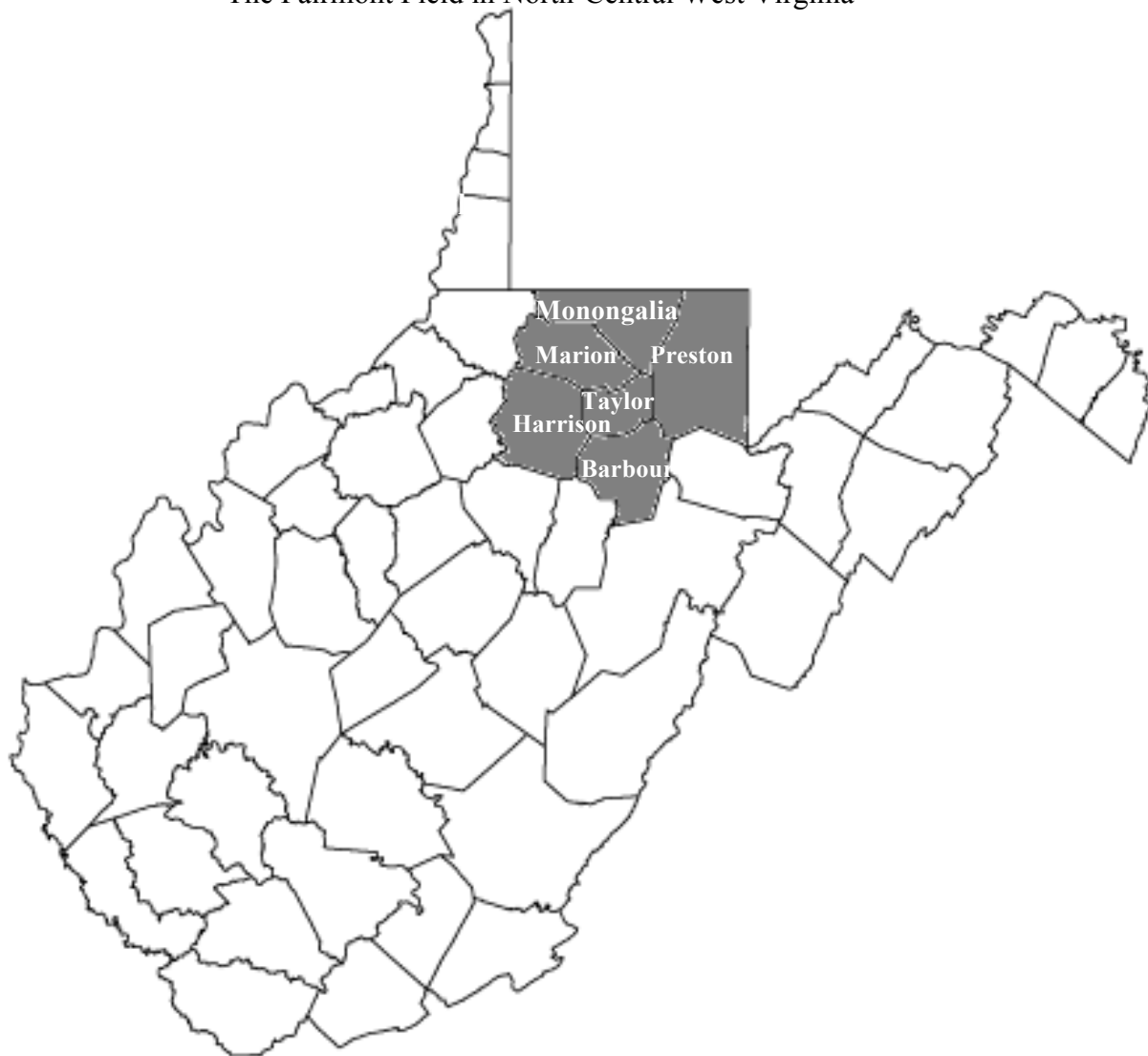
abandon their job, leaving without paying their debt. Historian Price Fishback's research illustrates that some coal miners owned their own homes, refuting the image of the domineering mine operators.<sup>17</sup>

The northern West Virginia coalfields continue to provide fertile ground for historic inquiry. This study of Marion County builds upon the works of Appalachian Revisionists and new labor historians to express the ways mine workers asserted their class consciousness during periods of labor-management unrest. Religion was just one important response from the Fairmont Field's mine workers to the rapid social, economic and political change, and it deserves further research. Spiritual expression provided the miners not only an emotional outlet but a support system to combat the coal operators' opposition to unionism. Reflecting on Marion County's religious expressions, both pro-labor and anti-union, tells an important story about Appalachia's industrial and cultural past.

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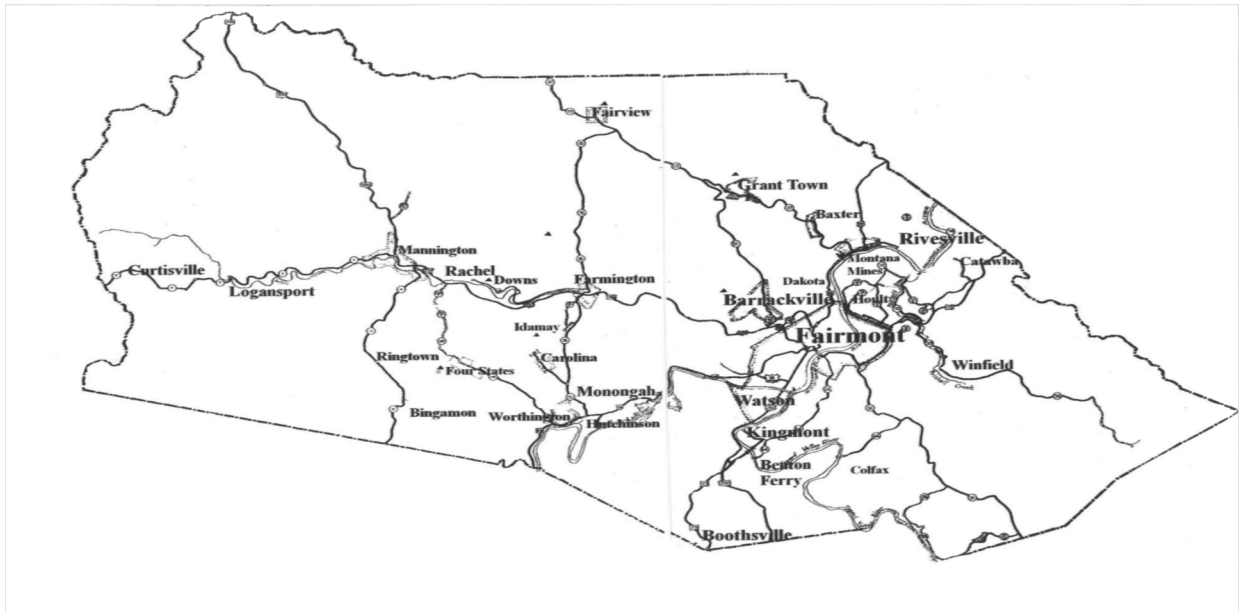
<sup>17</sup> Price Fishback, "Did Coal Miners 'Owe Their Souls to the Company Store'? Theory and Evidence from the Early 1900s" *Journal of Economic History* 46 (December 1986), 1011-29.

**Appendix 1.1**  
The Fairmont Field in North-Central West Virginia



## Appendix 1.2

### Marion County, West Virginia



Map created by author from drawing of Marion County by Eleanor Hawkins Baret. For original map, see Marion County Historical Society, Inc., *Marion County Centennial Yearbook* (Fairmont, WV: Fairmont Printing Co., 1963), 56-7.

### Appendix 1.3

#### White

Elmer Stiffler  
 T. R. DeHart  
 Callie Alstead  
 Charles Osborn  
 Claude Wells  
 Hayes Perkins  
 Arthur Woody  
 Tom Day  
 Harold Evans  
 Lloyd Wilson  
 A.C. Brake  
 Curtis Kennedy  
 J. A. Cosner  
 Burt Marshall  
 Leonard Saunder  
 W. H. Kittle  
 J. C. Steele  
 G. W. Knotts  
 A. J. Harper  
 J. W. Baggert

#### Black

James Taylor  
 Hobart Waldon  
 Walter Thompson  
 Willie Robinson  
 Willie Alston  
 J. H. Butler

#### Eastern European

Walter Mordas  
 John Ambros  
 Bernard Ammer  
 William Sanick  
 Walter Richter

#### Italian

Pete Tempest

#### British

Harry Marston

#### Two Unidentified

Total: 35 miners

Source: "Men May Be Alive" *Fairmont Times*, March 18, 1925.

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