

**Naming the Successes of Mountain People: Remembering the Rural Past for a
Rural Future**
by Marie Cirillo

I. ISSUES

The United States of America began an adventuresome life as a rural society followed by a hyper exciting life building cities. We became both a popular and politically powerful nation until we began to age. Now, at the same time that our urban infrastructures are deteriorating, our rural resources are dramatically diminishing.

A. WHY THINGS DON'T WORK RIGHT IN CENTRAL APPALACHIA

The professional world, for the most part, believes enough in mainstream systems to think that mountain communities cannot get what they want except through the systems that exist. This is where the flow of money conforms to laws, policies and appropriations. Professionals recommend that communities work through the established systems - town, county, state, or federal - when engaged in development. What professionals don't understand is the extent to which unincorporated communities in coal field regions are marginalized -- disconnected from the systems. When the systems were set up, the needs of mountain people were not considered. This is probably because few understood who would land at the bottom of the system or what the bottom would look like. Therefore, very few measures were included to secure the interests of these people. Later, solutions like the welfare system were manipulated to serve various crises in this nation. Knowing four generations in people in this community, I saw how the Clinton administration's welfare reform became one of many terrible choices an economic transition can have on the rural, hinterland people of Central Appalachia. Did any drafter of the legislation realize all that it would take for mountain people, out of reach of many of the available jobs, to travel more miles than their old cars would carry them so that they could fill out the required job applications? This decision is one of many that remain an insult to this and other coal mining communities. Considering all the things former and current welfare recipients could be doing to heal the Earth, it is clear to me that few people understand what this nation is wasting when it does not engage the poor to participate in change. My experience tells me that the indigenous people of some of the poorest communities in Central Appalachia, when treated equitably by government, have the capacity to sustain Americas' image as a creative, energetic, and generous society.

B. URBAN AND RURAL DISCONNECTS

Hampering Central Appalachia's future are three conspicuous disconnects:

1. Financial Systems and Natural Systems: The dependency of urban communities on cash and the rural community's work with natural resources to lessen their dependency on cash.

2. Pollution and Exploitation: The consumption and resulting pollution in cities and the demise of rural resources due to exploitation.
3. Limits to Our Understanding of a Healthy Economy. The popular understanding of economics limits our capacity to find real solutions to a multifaceted problem.

1. Financial Systems and Natural Systems

During the early 19th century industrialization, the nation's transition to urbanization and newer forms of technology began to move the whole world to a new kind of work and a new pattern of thinking. Today, a new consciousness has emerged that warns us about global warming and pleads with a global economy to know and act differently lest nature might, once more, control us. As a growing population is being systematically directed to settle in urban centers it is imperative that planners, simultaneously, direct rural systems to be counted on to support the needs of an urban society. Without this, the man made fears of war, terrorism, unemployment and homelessness will continue to spook us out of our comfort zone. Stimulating new excitement about the future is a better option for dealing with contemporary issues. We need to break up the multiple systems that have disconnected critical rural-urban economies. Rich or poor, rural or urban, everyone seeks security of shelter, food, and a strong local economy. Place based communities, where interpersonal relationships reflect qualities of generosity, gratitude and stewardship, carry both the financial and natural wealth of a community in ways not measured by existing economic systems. It is important to understand the capacity of rural people to draw on the green infrastructures of their community, namely land, water, air and energy to support a rural place based economy. The internal economic activity of a community, when supported by appropriate actions of government officials, is the kind of government for which we, in the hinterlands of Central Appalachia, yearn for. The scarcity of our primary natural resources is becoming our top priority. If indigenous people from hinterland and small town communities had more usage rights and shared ownership rights, government officials would do more to allow the poor and indigenous Appalachians a larger role in grounding a transitional economy for Central Appalachia. When Earth itself is unable to yield to our every wish, the nature of how an economy functions can change. A growing population faced with dwindling natural resources as well as faulty financial structures, falsely understood as our economic security, is forcing our wasteful and consumer life style to change. For those who are seeing more clearly how this combination has generated and supported a culture of violence, we must believe that transitioning into a new economic philosophy will also move America to a culture of peace.

2. Pollution and Exploitation

There are limits to development. Urban areas suffer because large-scale consumption in cities is not in proportion with what the Earth can absorb in a healthy way. On the flip side, rural areas suffer because the endless capacity of machines to extract resources is far too great for the Earth to heal itself. It is the consumption, not the extraction of fossil fuels that is being blamed for most of the global warming. Large

populations, living within a very limited portion of Earth's green infrastructure, do not have the free resources of Earth's ability to digest waste in a productive manner. Hence, the financial efficiency of developing and maintaining gray infrastructures can be questioned. While the idea of carbon credits, which allow rural places to clean the excesses of urban consumer related pollution might work on paper and within the existing systems of land ownership, those of us in places like Appalachia, the Delta, Indian Reservations and the Colonies, can't help but wonder if such a solution to urban pollution will keep us trapped at the bottom of the system for another century. While global warming has caught the imagination of most of the world, the quiet demise of a healthy life is also happening around the shortages of water. Many residents of the coalfields still have a memory of free water brought into their homes in buckets. Today, we pay for the convenience of having water piped into their homes. However, some impoverished residents can't afford this service and wish the springs were still there for them. Most coalfield communities lack adequate water and sewer systems.

3. Limits to Our Understanding of a Healthy Economy

The work nature performs, for the most part, is beyond what humans can control. The Earth is more powerful than we are. Science is important, but is not the miracle that can solve today's economic problems. Perhaps, it would be more effective to invest a portion of government money allocated to science, into Appalachian people with knowledge gained from living. How about a public education system that includes the natural world as central to a healthy economy? How about including ways for every household and every community to do what they can to preserve their place-based economy by retaining nature's capacity to regenerate its vital resources? For this, people would have to feel secure about their ownership of the place that they are investing their life in. Is this not similar to a savings account, and could that not be placed in a locally owned bank? The more communities engage in the transition of an economy, the more a democracy can feed vital information to those governing cities, counties and nation.

My 62 years living within Appalachian Communities, with 42 of those years being a resident of the Clearfork Valley, has allowed me some insights about the natural world that is so familiar to the local people who have spent generations hunting and gathering, planting and harvesting and working for corporate land-dependent industries. They know much of what students of geology, biology and environment learn, but from a different reference point. Central Appalachia's future depends on team work. I feel the hurt brought on by absentee ownership of these mountains. It does me little good to be consumed by an economic crisis that centers on Wall Street, banks, lenders and the other participants in a cash centered economy. I can better understand the economics of wars. In addition to the money dedicated to salaries, products and the living expenses of warriors, there are other costs. I can imagine the numbers of dead, maimed and mentally disturbed returning from a war zone and wonder how we put a value on that loss. I imagine the percentage of natural resources lost when building the tools for wars that could better be dedicated to the millions of poor. I imagine the loss of natural resources destroyed as bombs and other instruments of war are directed to destroying the enemy where more people and more land are ruined.

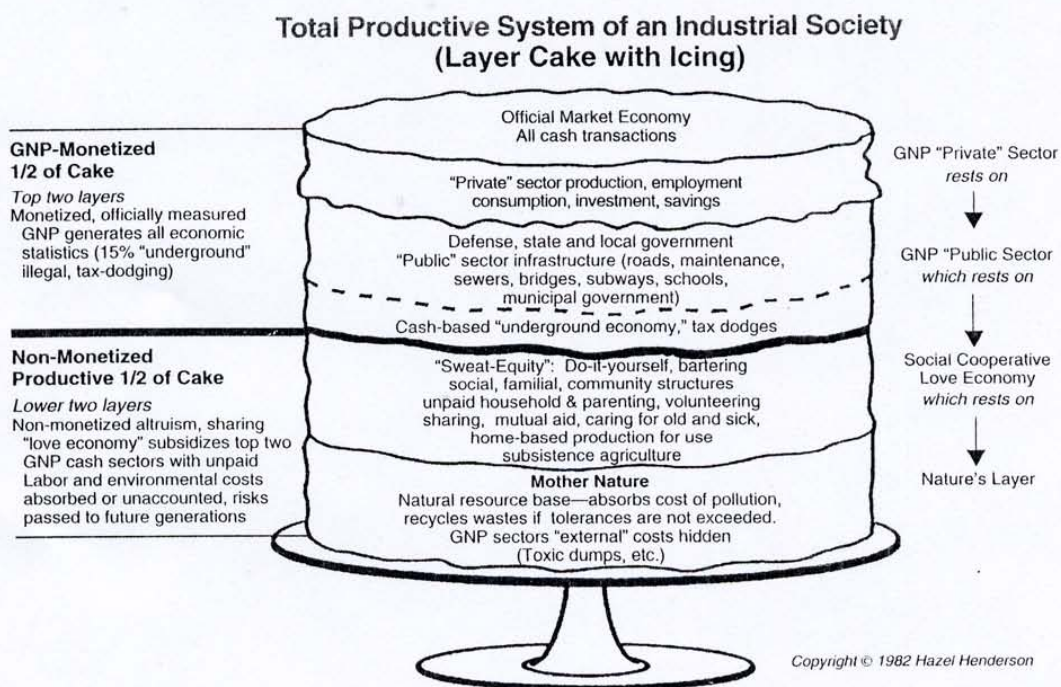
How all of that fits into a new vision from which to develop a transition in Central Appalachia's economic condition is bewildering. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that it is essential to engage marginalized communities in shaping the vision and developing the plan. They know so much but the 'other' world has talked for so long that these key participants hardly know how to articulate what is deep within their being. Mainstream systems of government, industries, education and religion are built around the experiences and education to which the majority of people, now urban, are exposed. Marginalized rural communities live differently. Their experiences and education are functional for them but are considered misfits by the mainstream. To engage this tremendous regional resource in economic transition, mainline institutions would have to make room for flexibility within their structures, fluidity in negotiations, and explorations into some unknowns. This might require a special partnership between key community development leaders and key institutional leaders. It could take several decades to balance cash, investment, loans and credit with the economics of natural resources, labor and the spirit-culture of community.

The Gross National Product (GNP) is a misleading theory for measuring the health of a national or community economy. In order for all sectors of society to be engaged in dialogue around new concepts for the kind of economy citizens would choose for the region, it is critical to get new words, numbers and symbols beyond the dollar sign (\$) and images beyond idyllic nature scenes and romantic urban developments. In local workshops and conversations, Hazel Henderson's image of the cake adequately explains economics as they know it and Joe Holland's image of the time clock makes us wonder if an industrial society is only the beginning of another civilization.

IMAGES THAT ARE HELPFUL TO LOCAL PEOPLE

THE CAKE

What appears to be true, says economist Hazel Henderson, is what we see as the first sector of an economy. She likens this to the first thing we see on a cake -- its icing. But everything rests on the last or bottom layer.



THE CLOCK

If every minute on a clock represented a thousand years, this clock suggests the recorded time that humans lived as hunter gatherer, says Joe Holland, professor at St. Thomas College in Florida. Changes in a civilization take hundreds and perhaps thousands of years that people live through the transition. Our industrial civilization has not gone a thousand years and we are wondering how long it will last and into what we might be transitioning.



II. CARRYING MEMORY'S WISDOM TO MAKE TODAY'S CHOICES

Mountain communities that make a name for themselves do so, for the most part, because they do it alone. The down side is that they get little money to support their efforts so it takes 20 years to do what other, more mainline, communities might do in 2 years. The up side is that the things done are often creative, on the cutting edge, and different enough to be noticed once they live through the test of endurance. What the Clearfork Communities have accomplished are noteworthy, but it should not have had to take over 40 years to get a clinic, a child care center, a library, a public meeting space, a land trust, two development corporations and more. Endurance is the single most important quality of leaders in the poorest communities. No policy from any mainline institution seems willing to subsidize a community person their work as a community development.

I remember the Clearfork Valley in the sixties. The aftermath of the great migration resulted in weekends back home. Highways were filled with cars as families from Cincinnati, Detroit, Chicago and other places of migration came home to visit parents and siblings. I remember a video done by Appalachian migrants in Cincinnati talking about what would happen when their community became gentrified. Granted, the government would see that they were placed elsewhere, but for sure they would not remain with the same neighbors. The story of what it meant to be neighbors took the form of a barter economy, one family doing a service for another - like watching a neighbor's children when the neighbor went shopping. The people said it at public hearings but no one heard it as an important economic component for cash poor neighborhoods.

Undaunted by corporate control of land, and the consequent lack of opportunities for entrepreneurship, poor women in the region started international peer exchanges. I remember the opportunity this community had to host 25 international grassroots women. When they saw our second hand clothing store we immediately struck up a bargain. We would mail them second hand clothes to sell in their community and they would mail us crafts that we could sell along with ours. They sent us their crafts while our clothes never left U.S. ports. It was not allowed unless we were registered as a charity organization that would give clothes away. That was not our intent. We were developing our economy.

I remember our attempt at forming two small groups for entrepreneurs. One started a loan fund and the other a savings club - both modeled on the Gramine Bank ideas of Mohammed Unis. Why do they work in India and not in the USA? Now this community is building an economic environment through hours of volunteer activity. The living-learning center engages local young adults in volunteer work that meets local expectations for local development. A modest cash stipend with the addition of Community Investment Certificates (CIC) is given to these Volunteers in Partnership (VIP's) who work with college service-learning students.

Once we had land, people in the community started building permanent homes. I remember some of the first houses built by the local community land trust. The difficulties in getting mortgage financing were close to impossible. The group finally started building houses made out of native materials. This is what cash poor people knew how to do. The Woodland Community Land Trust believed it could glean a best practice from many who had built from local material like lumber, rock and sand, local skills from family and neighbors, volunteer labor and trading skills from the community -- all to

satisfy the mission of the organization and the security of a family. Furthermore, the Land Trust believed it was on a right track because the UN Habitat people were convinced that the best way to provide housing for the poor was to build from materials found locally. But to build from local materials in a sustainable way requires more control over and knowledge about the growth of trees within our forested lands. To grow a forest takes generations and if we cut trees to build houses faster than new trees can grow, we cannot sustain houses built from native materials. Our local community land trust, with its 450 acres has asked but never answered the question: "how much forest land do we need to build two or three houses a year?" One of the land trust founders had some sense of this because he remembered when his dad planted a certain tree. The son left the region but eventually returned. He saw how his father's trees grew. This man started planting poplar trees on trust lands about 20 years ago, and though he has passed away, some of the residents who assisted in the planting still check the progress of these trees.

People in this community have the will and know-how to develop new jobs. They believed they could start a company and hire local people. I remember the difficulties the Model Valley Development Corporation had in getting land for an industrial site, how they fell into an unusual situation that brought a rural economist to their service, how they struggled to fill all the requirements of the government for a profit making business, how they got investors and loans from small towns surrounding them, and how local stockholders came to understand what it meant to have a voice in a business. The Clairfield Pallet Factory was the result of their efforts. It had all the structural pieces, and according to research, there was a good supply of hardwood trees in the forested lands of our community to make a high grade line of industrial pallets. What the group was not prepared for was the refusal of the absentee land company to give the factory access to their trees - even when the companies were throwing them over the mountain to get at the coal. The good news is that their search for land yielded them a 40 acre parcel that they zoned for a 3 acre village square, 5 acres for an industrial site where a public utility now stands, and the remaining land with 28 homes with buffer woodlands.

More access to land brought out more and more local leadership. I remember when the community land trust began to acquire land and settle people on the land. Many residents began to get ideas about what to do with the forested lands that were not suitable for housing. There were exciting roles for local men as builders and foresters. Women had better home space for their crafts. It is not hard to imagine how a community land trust in every unincorporated community could be the place to ground any transition. Free the land and people to drive the creative, entrepreneurial spirit of the mountaineer, and a plan will emerge.

I remember Appalachian migrants in Chicago saying that the reason nothing could happen in their own community back home was because companies owned all the land. When I came to the area in 1967, four Post Offices and four grade schools were the significant presence of government in the Clearfork Valley. Though the nonprofit structure has its inadequacies, it was and remains the best structure to use to move on an agenda for self directed development. Within my first 8 years the communities making up the Clearfork Valley created 4 independent clinics, 2 independent development corporations, a craft group and a children's center. It was spirit more than money that caused all of these hopes to become reality. What conspicuously held every group back was finding the land to build their facilities. Each group has their own story to tell about

how they eventually were on secure ground in a secure building and with some security of staff. What mountain people know is that the natural world is not manmade but is now being destroyed by man, and the destruction comes because there exists no love between owners and inhabitants, and because of this we forget skills of stewardship and shared equity. Mountain people have what it takes to make a plan work.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

My position is that rural communities are so important to urban society that the interdependency of a secure economy developed through collective citizen initiatives between rural-urban relationships is critical to the success of a global economy designed by heads of states. Samples of any such best practices should help frame a new kind of economic theory. Education in public schools must begin to teach this along with new perspectives on economics as they emerge. Appalachia has powerful lessons from which to identify and move. Central Appalachia has shaped the nearby larger cities like Knoxville, Lexington, and Charleston in significant ways. Whatever actions we take need to be in relationship to these cities. We must then take actions in Central Appalachia that can attract media where stereotypes can change, connections can be made and life can get a new start because of the way we have matured in our understanding of economics.

Actions particularly appropriate for Hinterland areas include:

1. Explore various ways of returning the land to the people. Community Land Trusts are one option. Struggling hinterland and small town communities in Central Appalachia have tried different approaches to their recovery from out-migration. Small towns gave up looking for conventional industries as the 21st century was drawing near. With the nonprofit mechanism, as are found in this community, many things began to happen and connections with other regional and national movements made. In the 1960's Bob Swan's model for organizing a Community Land Trust took hold in Georgia, gaining 6000 acres for rural African Americans. By 1977, a handful of people from within the Clearfork Valley organized the Woodland Community Land Trust (WCLT). This was the 11th nonprofit to be organized by local people who were desperate and determined to breathe new life into a community that had lost 27,000 of its 30,000 people over a fifteen year period between the '50s and '60s. Mountain people knew the value of land to their people before and during the days of coal mining. Plans and actions begun by the informal network of local nonprofits and their loyal partners/ supporters, continually enhance the capacity of the Clearfork Valley Community to serve the region well when the coal is gone.
2. Provide intergenerational education appropriate to the task. Clearfork Community Institute (CCI) is trying this as one of three living-learning centers in the United States. We are the rural experiment with urban experiments in NYC and St. Louis. By 1997 women of the Clearfork Valley were ready to put a new face on their educational efforts. They obtained the last of the valley's coal camp schools, located in Eagan, Tennessee on

two acres of an eight acre plot belonging to Woodland Community Land Trust. CCI owns the building and has a life time renewable lease on Woodland's eroding two acres of waterfront. The women are still fixing rooms and generating educational programs to reflect the knowledge, spirit-culture and economic capacity of the community and loyal partners, to fill the void for a meaningful education about place based community development.

3. Engage residents in assessing damages while considering ways to heal what is damaged, and produce from productive lands will require a new way of managing time and economics. Locally, this community has spent 40 years initiating nonprofit and informal groups to attend to surviving in a damaged earth taking small steps and having big thoughts about healing and transitioning. The local living-learning center has initiated research with GIS mapping and cultural history. The information is gleaned primarily from local elders and conducted primarily by young volunteers. The community has brought together AmeriCorps volunteers (4) together with local young volunteers (6) and college service-learning students (in groups from of 6 to 15).

4. Develop a plan that starts with indigenous people with knowledge of the Earth that has been passed down through families living and learning over many generations. Let them learn from experts who also want to learn from them.

5. Central Appalachia's transition into a new economy will be tied to right relationships with its nearest urban centers. Those of us living in this part of East Tennessee look no further than Knoxville and Oak Ridge and recognize how dependent they were on us to get their start. We also know that it was the mining communities that created the economy of the small surrounding towns and how the automation of mining and bigger corporate investors eliminated their need for our small towns. The truths of science and technology and the truths of community life are many.

6. Hinterland communities with their new settlement patterns, labor and technology, education and cultural needs calls for a recognizable form of local government that can interface with neighboring small towns and have a voice in their rural county government. They need to be represented on county planning commissions to do more than approve developments in the incorporated towns and cities. Local people should take the lead in the zoning required before establishing new settlement patterns.

7. There needs to be at least one university in the region that can offer a degree in Rural Planning. Some of their fieldwork should be in the hinterlands that hopefully will impact the growth of nearby towns. There should be strong partnerships between rural planners hired by the state and county planning commissions, to include indigenous people who know the land in ways other than what a traditional education often gives a professional.

8. An entrepreneurial imagination needs to be developed and the benefits of private ownership, cooperatives, and corporations need to be part of a community education.

9. For elements of natural healing to happen with the land and people most damaged today, mining communities need accommodating laws and regulations. Inhabitants of the land, especially indigenous people can exercise long term, extended governance over healing and development processes. Those sustaining the memory of a seedling becoming a tree that is transformed into a home are less likely to waste or overconsume. Knowing the difference between living things and man-made products puts a special outlook on life that changes everything.

10. Be in dialogue with other rural regions that show the same connection between absentee land ownership and rural poverty, a condition that is now worsened by miles of a degraded natural environment. The Delta Region, Indian Reservations and the Colonies all identify absentee land ownership, as an economic problem for residents. What solutions are they taking?

11. Act local, think global. The erosion of America's green infrastructures is similar but more fundamental, to the gray infrastructures falling apart in America's cities. We can't fix one without the other. Hence, I give you one more remembrance that moves me from local action to global thinking about our failure to educate the public about nature's fundamental role in a sustainable economy.

I remember in 1965 my residency in Uptown Chicago with Appalachian migrants. I was visited by three missionaries who had just returned from Central America. They returned because the people there told them it would be more helpful if they went home and tried to fix the problems that our country had created. Because the peoples' problems were and remain similar to ours, I wondered if absentee corporate land ownership had anything to do with what these missionaries were commissioned to do by the people. Years later, I received a call from someone asking me to call my congressmen with a petition to not vote for NAFTA. I called a friend for advice since I had not kept up with the bigger picture. I was told that it was too late. The United States had already intervened to see that Mexico changed the land laws that protected indigenous peoples' land. So now when I hear Americans arguing about ways to deal with illegal immigrants from Mexico, I can't help but believe that the immigrants in question are running for the same reason Appalachians ran during the 1950's and '60s, and I certainly remember my four years in Uptown Chicago where I lived with recent Appalachian migrants. Had we not been part of the same country Chicagoans would have done more than complain about these different people breaking into their sacred space. The corporate machines have swept all the land into their workspace, removing people and all other interferences. Money has been the bottom line for too long. Planners have to discover ways to talk about other elements of an economy that are so important to this region's culture. Educators have to present the complexities of sustaining both rural and urban society. The good life can be sustained only by eliminating the disconnect between urban and rural economies. We can't be waiting for big brother and big sister to take care of us. We have to do more than complain about what they are doing wrong and think about how to initiate things from a community partnership point of view. Something new will come out of the negotiations. At this time in history negotiations will be more important than confrontations.

12. Making popular words, symbols and images important to an economic transition.

IV. IDENTIFICATION OF WHERE RESPONSIBILITY IS, OR COULD BE

Some that might not be obvious:

- o Universities might start teaching different economic courses.
- o The press might balance the counting of the daily dead with presentations on creative energies among the living.
- o Consider how the government gave up on their War on Poverty rather quickly when power began to shift, and churches, through the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, sustained itself for only four decades. It is the local and regional organizations that were built on church and government attempts that are still actively engaged within hinterlands and small towns that should, in my opinion, be allowed a voice in the design of an economic transition. They will be there when most of us are into other things.
- o Funders could direct major grants to the purchase of land and the establishment of an endowment for intergenerational living-learning centers.
- o State and regional housing groups that provide low income home ownership should be involved as well as groups that provide low interest loans.
- o Government should give welfare recipients a head start on this journey. Community Development leadership could come from today's underutilized Americans with peer exchanges, classes, volunteer civic engagement work hours and leadership support groups. Government should, similarly, fund drug rehabilitation programs that engage the addicts in meaningful work and clear signs of how their investment in the community will satisfy their need for a meaningful life. Government could back loans that, at first glance, will be viewed as high risk since borrowers, like others, are among the risk takers contributing to the transition of Central Appalachia.
- o Local banks could be revived now that small community banks have proven their worth amongst all the big bank scandals. Many people wish for a local credit union.
- o Groups like the Schumacher Society, the National Community Land Trust Network, the National Congress of Neighborhood Women, the East Tennessee Community Design Center and Just Connections (a regional group of college and community leaders) have been important to this community for decades and could lend support to the upstarts of this generation.
- o Regional, self-directed, young adult groups dealing with issues, arts and alternative jobs will give spirit, flexibility and balance to the professionals steeped in research, analysis, science, technology and economics.

All of these possibilities are opportunities for engagement that would bring more balance among young and old, rich and poor, black and white, university-taught and community-taught, rural and urban, scientific and spirit-centered individuals and groups. Central Appalachia's economic transition could bring added benefits at this moment of crisis for industrialization.