ORWELL'S WIGAN PIER AND DAISYTOWN: 
THE MINE TOWN AS A STRANDED LANDSCAPE

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With few exceptions, both American and British writers have decried the social and physical landscape of modern industrialism. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century novelists and essayists such as Charles Dickens, John Ruskin, Herman Melville, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane wrote disparagingly about the social and aesthetic cost of industrial civilization. While British and American writers seemingly aimed their barbs most vengefully at industrial cities such as London, Liverpool, Boston, and New York, plentiful evidence exists that social commentators were equally appalled by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century offspring of industrialism, the mine town.1

Among twentieth-century British writers, George Orwell, most famous for his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, authored perhaps the strongest indictment of mining civilization. In his The Road to Wigan Pier, Orwell portrayed the mine-town conditions of North England as a melange of filth and grinding poverty. In much the same way, American writers constructed an equally grim portrait of the American mine town between 1900 and 1945.2

Like many of the American treatises on mine-town civilization, Orwell's study of Wigan Pier had been commissioned. Mindful that in 1933 Orwell had published a Dickensesque account of poverty and
wretchedness among the "down and out" of London and Paris, in 1936 Victor Gollancz of Britain's Left Book Club engaged Orwell to explore unemployment and poverty in the mining and manufacturing towns of North England. For two months in 1936 Orwell lived among the miners of Wigan, Barnsley, and Stepney. Most of Orwell's tour guides through the English mine towns were members of the Socialist International Labor party and the National Unemployed Miners Union; therefore, according to Orwell's biographer, Bernard Crick, the author scavenged for description the grimmest and grimiest working-class living conditions. As Crick has observed, however, Orwell seemed more moved by the human and physical ugliness of the industrial landscape than by the political persuasion of his Socialist patrons. Ultimately, as his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four revealed, Orwell became a stern critic of socialism.  

Orwell's vivid descriptions of Wigan Pier, Coatbridge, Barnsley, Sheffield, Stepney, and the other industrial communities of North England beg comparison with the views offered by American writers of the bituminous mining landscape of such places as Vestaburg and Isabella in Washington and Fayette counties, Pennsylvania, and Scotts Run or Chiefton in West Virginia. Clearly, differences existed in the literary rendering of twentieth-century American and British mining towns. Usually as thickly encrusted with tradition as with grime and coal dust, England's aging but sturdily built brick and stone mine towns breathed permanence and stability in contrast to the usual tackiness and impermanence of American coal patches. In fact, Orwell complained not about their tawdriness, but about the pitiful maintenance and lack of basic sanitary facilities that characterized Wigan's gray stone tenements; he also condemned England's grievous housing shortage which forced mine-town families to crowd into sparse lodgings. Yet, Orwell joined American critics of the industrial landscape who deplored the human degradation associated with the industrial environment. "There is the misery of the leaking roofs and oozing walls," bemoaned the Etonian Orwell after visiting Wigan Pier. "There are the bugs. . . . There are the windows that will not open. . . ." And children there grow up, lamented Orwell, "in back alleys where [their] gaze is bounded by a row of lavatories and a wall." Elsewhere in Wigan Pier Orwell encountered the "skull-like" face belonging to a woman "who lived in a dreadful pigsty [and who struggled] to keep her large brood of children clean." According to

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3 Crick, Orwell, 277-312; George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (New York, 1961).
Orwell, "she felt as [he] should feel if [he] were coated all over with dung." 4

As for Orwell in 1937, so for the American writers and investigators whose words form the grist for this study; life in America's bituminous coal towns unfolded as a grim, surrealistic landscape, portraying unmitigated misery and oppression. In this respect at least, twentieth-century company mining towns loomed in the journalistic and investigative mind as quintessentially Orwellian.

Although the Orwellian imagery and its consequences affected contemporary attitudes toward mine towns, another reality underlies how we view the fabric of mine patch existence. That is, in contrast to the pallor and misery overwhelming the journalistic imagery of industrial landscapes, modern social historians, geographers, and anthropologists have constructed a more balanced and sensitive portrait of American mine and mill towns. Company domination still emerges as an inescapable fact inscribing the social, economic, and political boundaries of mine-town life; nevertheless, in contrast to the gulag view of the industrial community, modern scholars have discovered that Croatian, Slovak, Italian, and Ruthenian families adapted to the realities of their Western surroundings and actively participated in shaping a distinctive and functional community life. Deryck Holdsworth, for one example, found that the housing design of coal towns in Vancouver, British Columbia, was adapted to the cultural needs of a rural work force. 5 Likewise, in America, Polish, Hungarian, Croatian, French-Canadian, and Italian workers often molded seemingly intractable company institutions to suit their heritages as well as their needs. Although unaesthetic and isolated, the company town allowed miners, textile operatives, and steelworkers to preserve ethnic traditions, garden, educate their children, and in other ways adapt their European traditions to the industrial setting. 6

Notwithstanding this more poignant view of coal patch America, it is important to focus on the way writers and other investigators

blended their own theories concerning the social realities of mine-town life with observations about the mine town’s physical appearance to produce a distinctively negative image in the years before George Orwell’s study.

Unlike the British and American paintings of the nineteenth-century industrial landscape — tinctured with Romanticism — nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literary images of the industrial landscape were conditioned by Progressive attitudes toward social reform. Progressivism, as Richard Hofstadter observed, evolved from a Darwinian environmentalism and a pragmatic faith in the instrumental value of knowledge. According to the Progressive critique, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a physical environment was measured by its performance in sustaining human life. Sweatshops were unsafe as human environments because the hard facts of the number of deaths and accidents in such workplaces condemned them. Likewise, slum housing took its human toll in fire, tuberculosis, and typhoid. Then, in a tautological tour-de-force, Progressives equated social and sanitary efficiency with civic efficiency; that is, good environments produced good people, and bad environments did not. Clearly, these Progressive arguments dwelt on physical and political oppression while ignoring the evidence of surviving and viable ethnic institutions. Significantly, after 1930, Progressive legislators embedded their negative impressions of America's mine-town civilization into policies that have affected the future of these industrial regions and have contributed to the relative economic stagnation characterizing the mine-town regions in the post-World War II era.9

Most company-owned coal mine towns dated only from the turn of the century when the rising demand for steel, and for coal-generated power, and the horizontal and vertical integration of steel pro-

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7 For a discussion of the romantic image of the industrial landscape, see Bender, Toward an Urban Vision, 73-95; Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston, 1964), passim.


duction forced companies to dig coal in more and more isolated terrains where existing housing was either inaccessible or nonexis-
tent. For example, in 1901 the Vesta Mining Division of the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company opened Vesta Four, a coal mine deep in the hollows branching off the Monongahela River in Washington County. To house its work force at Vesta Four, which by 1901 numbered 1,279 men, Jones and Laughlin erected Daisytown. Platted in the typical grid design, the town consisted of thirty-four barrack-
type structures regimented in parallel rows of five or six units. A church building, an elementary school, and a building for the Pitts-
burough Mercantile Company, the company store, completed the de-
velopment of the site.

Towns such as Daisytown, Isabella, Vestaburg, Chiefton, or Scotts Run enjoyed the springtime of their existence in 1907 and 1908, the years when Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont and his team of investigators arrived. Dillingham headed a commis-
sion to study American immigration patterns and to discover whether the moral, intellectual, and physical "condition" of Southern Italian and Eastern European immigrants impeded the hallowed process of assimilation and posed a threat to the fabric of American society. Since thousands of the so-called new immigrants had settled in places such as Daisytown and Isabella, the commission closely scrutinized living conditions in these communities. From the Progressive viewpoint shared by the commission members, conditions in these towns were appalling. Their utter disdain for the mine-town civilization exuded from the pages of the commission's report. To the commis-
ioners the towns' unsightliness, lack of sanitation, overcrowding, and the universal presence of large numbers of boarders militated against the development of an American standard of living.

"As a rule," the commission reported, "below the village in a narrow, smoke filled valley, rise the iron stacks of an engine house and the steel frame of a coal tipple. Along the opposite base and 'in bank' along the valley floor are the long lines of coke ovens, every


12 Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, Ethnic Americans, 2nd edition (New York, 1982), 58; U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Immig-
alternate oven sending forth flames together with a column of heavy, brown smoke. . . . From the smoke come the incessant rattle and screech of coke-drawing machines as they empty the oven and load the coke into the big 'bird cage' or car on the sidetrack. The wind rolls the heavy smoke steadily up the slope through the town. It drifts through streets and alleys, yards and houses and on across the hills, smudging everything in its path.” 11

Not only was this mine scene foul, but in the commission’s words it was blatantly unsanitary. Village streets were sometimes paved with coke ash or slate; too many streets, however, which were originally clay, “are [now] mere mud and water. The gutters are open, shallow ditches . . . and are always a place of deposit for rubbish, household garbage, and discarded articles. Such articles, however, are not confined to the gutter, but litter the streets and alleys and yards as well.” 14

Boardinghouses were universally condemned by Progressives as contributing to both immorality and uncleanness.15 Yet, they seemed particularly opprobrious in the patch setting. The Dillingham Commission assailed mine-town boardinghouses as too numerous and invariably too untidy. “The dirt and disorder,” complained the commission, “increase[d] with the number of boarders. . . . One room is frequently used as a combination kitchen, dining room, and bathroom. When the men come in from their work in the evening a tub containing a few inches of water is placed on the floor, and, stripped to the waist, each man kneels over the tub and washes himself. As many as 8 or 10 men will wash in the same water.” 16

In one mine patch where Croatian and Slovak families congregated, the commission found a boardinghouse where the boarding boss and his wife and daughter slept in the kitchen; three lodgers occupied the dining room, two in a bed and one on a cot; seven were in another room in two beds; and eight in a fourth room slept in three beds. The windows were all closed on account of the cold weather, the only ventilation being furnished by a large open fireplace in the dining room. According to the commission report: “The houses occupied by

14 Ibid., 323.
the Magyars and other races were a little better than those of the Croati ans and Slovaks. . . . They are a little more modern in type, but at best very undesirable. There is but one water pipe for an average of fifty families, and the supply inadequate. The water is unfit for drinking unless boiled, a precaution which the immigrants usually neglect." Unsafe, unsanitary, oppressive, as early as 1908 the mine town (in the same manner as the urban slum) conjured up a surrealistic imagery — mean, stark, and alien.\(^\text{17}\)

If the turn-of-the-century mine towns revealed squalor and foreignness, isolated coal patches in the 1920s evoked in the observer's mind a spectacle of social inefficiency compounded by the imminent presence of radicalism. Following a major coal strike in 1922, President Warren G. Harding appointed the United States Coal Commission to undertake a thorough investigation of the economics of the coal industry and to recommend procedures for the industry's reorganization. The commission examined every aspect of mining including the company-owned towns of southwestern Pennsylvania and West Virginia. The commission's final report bulged with statistics about mine patch conditions; unlike the Dillingham Commission, however, the United States Coal Commission focused less upon the mine community's ethnic composition than upon its cultural isolation and the decrepit, inefficient environment produced by the unenlightened policies of the mine operators. The report especially underlined the mine towns' physical isolation. For three-quarters of the miners living in company housing, the nearest towns were places of 2,500 people or fewer. Consequently, "community facilities or family and group life depended on the coal operator and reflected the standards he set up for the coal miner and his family; such standards were both meagre and spartan." Moreover, the commission assailed such conditions as equally repressive and un-American. Within the 713 company-controlled towns studied by the commission, 95 percent of the 71,000 family housing units were wooden and averaged three to five rooms each. Most patch houses were plain weatherboarded structures, the boards nailed directly to the frame and roofed with composition paper. Only 3 percent of the housing units enjoyed bathtubs or showers; that same 3 percent had flush toilets.\(^\text{18}\)

Like the earlier Dillingham findings, the 1922 United States


Coal Commission report dealt harshly with the insanitation and oppressive house rental policies that prevailed in the company-owned towns. The Coal Commission also condemned the "general backwardness of the bituminous coal patch as regards methods of disposing of human excrement," and it noted furthermore "that the importance of the subject is but partially realized." The commission ascribed the lack of proper sewage disposal methods "to careless planning, [and] a failure to enlist the services of experts. The fact that manure is a fly breeding material of first importance is practically unrecognized in the 713 company towns surveyed. . . ." And, "control of disease carriers and communicable disease contacts appears to be an unknown art." 19

In 1927, the tattered edifice of mine-town civilization collapsed. Following the mine operators' violation of the 1924 Jacksonville Agreement, a wage stabilization pact worked out by John L. Lewis, the United Mine Workers of America chief, and Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, a long and bitter strike began. The mine towns and patches of southwestern Pennsylvania and West Virginia were transformed into battlegrounds at best, and, at worst, into nightmarish gulags, more repressive to some eyewitnesses than the camps of Soviet Russia. 20

 Strikes, violent death, cruel evictions, and police brutality dominated everyday life. As early as 1911 thirty-two strikes had closed mining camps in Pennsylvania's bituminous fields; a year before, 501 Pennsylvania soft coal miners had died in mine accidents and 3,696 miners had suffered nonfatal accidents. 21 What distinguished 1927 from these earlier years, however, was the apocalyptic nature of the disorder. Witnesses believed the world of bituminous coal mining could not survive the paroxysms of violence. The few trappings of civilization that once preserved the delicate fabric of mine-town life seemed shorn away by the strike-borne chaos.

Throughout the stricken coalfields reporters and official ob-

19 Ibid., 146.
20 Muriel Earley Sheppard, Cloud by Day: The Story of Coal and Coke and People (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1947), 112; Melvin Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, John L. Lewis: A Biography (New York, 1977), 105-8; Margaret Woodbridge (Lauren) Gilfillan, I Went to Pit College (New York, 1934), passim; see also James P. Johnson's excellent chapter on "From Riches to Rags," in his The Politics of Soft Coal: The Bituminous Industry from World War I through the New Deal (Urbana, Ill., 1979), 95-134.
servers beheld the awful countenance of battle-scarred and desolate mining camps. Houses were boarded up; some were gutted by fire. Just beyond the barbed wire perimeter of the company town, evicted mine families huddled in tents or rough barracks-type buildings hurriedly pitched together by the United Mine Workers. Barracks families were crowded into these twelve-foot-square cubicles. A single outside toilet accommodated three to five families. At the Terminal Mine No. 8 at Coverdale, in Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, striking workers wallowed through two to three inches of mud to reach their makeshift quarters. At the same time, the company barracks that sheltered black strikebreakers and the miserable armies of company-hired Coal and Iron Police were equally if not more abominable. An official report castigated them as flimsy, poorly ventilated bunk rooms, "filthy, unsanitary, and infected with vermin and hardly fit to house beasts much less human beings who are employed in the mines all day where the sun's rays never penetrate." 22

Newspaper writers compared the abject poverty they discovered in Pennsylvania mine towns in 1927 to serf villages of the middle ages. 23 Having labeled the havoc he saw there as "Hell in Pennsylvania," journalist Lowell Limpus wrote that it seemed "impossible to think that [he was] in modern civilized America. Thousands of women and children literally starved to death"; according to a horrified Limpus, "people lived in crudely constructed bare-board shacks, and the system of despotic tyranny" that prevailed reminded him of "Czar-ridden Siberia at its worst." He described "police brutality and industrial slavery . . . [and] the weirdest flock of injunctions that ever descended from American temples of justice." Along with other reporters, Limpus unearthed evidence of "terrorism, of mob beatings and near lynchings, of dishonesty, graft and tear gas bombs prepared to back up the ready rifles that want to crush any rebellion of hunger crazed men." 24

New Yorker Fannie Hurst, just back from a trip to Soviet Russia, painted an equally lurid picture of coal patch America. By comparison, she found greater ruthlessness and ugliness in these American mine towns than anywhere she had traveled in Soviet Russia. According to Hurst, these mine-town families were entombed in ugliness; "every aspect of their lives is ugly and unaesthetic." 22

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23 Ibid., 973.
24 Ibid., 938.
Hurst told of mine families of seven or eight members living like animals in the cramped shanties. She described babies born under these horrendous conditions, “just as you would expect a cat to have kittens.” These people “are living in shambles,” she remonstrated. “Children were reared under conditions that are shocking beyond description . . . where human beings are living under conditions that generate hate, you can see that seeds of revolt are being sown . . . I saw the seeds sprouting among children who at an early and formative age were learning discord and learning hate and learning revolution.”

For Burton K. Wheeler, Robert Wagner, Cyrus Eaton, and the other members of the Senate committee investigating the 1927 strike Hurst’s warning reinforced their fears about radicalism. Agents of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and the Communist party-backed Pennsylvania and Ohio Relief Committee freely roamed the coalfields urging the violation of injunctions and advocating mass picketing. However, as much as the congressmen and local officials dreaded radicalism, they were equally concerned about the anachronistic economic and social policies of the mineowners. Hurst’s 1928 testimony articulated the sentiments shared by the committee members. “It seems to me,” she explained, “that the coal industry as it exists in this country today is a worn-out structure. That all these years we have been about patching it up, putting newspapers into the leaky windows, enduring the old plumbing. The building is out of date. We are in an old-fashioned, rickety structure, and the operators, for reasons that I cannot understand, psychologically are clinging to that old structure.”

Hurst’s description of the mine industry as worn out and destined to collapse eventually characterized the whole edifice of mine-town civilization. During the 1930s New Deal bureaucrats and technocrats regarded coal mining as a sick industry requiring radical — even collectivistic — measures to depress competition, regulate production, and control prices and wages. Almost every analysis of the mining industry in the 1930s bemoaned its inefficiency and expressly con-


demoned the thousands of festering mining towns clustered about aging tipples and antiquated equipment. Therefore, in the 1930s the mining patch civilization seemed to be a necessary casualty of modernization. 27

Writers, reporters, and other observers of the bituminous coalfields during the 1930s ordinarily portrayed the towns as “stranded.” Just out of college, Margaret Woodbridge Gilfillan (who published works under the first name Lauren) served her journalistic apprenticeship as a “participant-observer” studying miner poverty and miner radicalism in “Avelonia,” Pennsylvania. Like earlier observers, Gilfillan seemed revolted by the slag heaps that “reared from the earth like a miniature gray mountain,” and the “monotony of the huddles of black huts lining thread-like lanes which wriggle up the hill like old worms. One mine, two, three. Mine tipples, all alike — black skeletons with square heads.” As in Orwell’s Wigan Pier, the pall of human degradation infused every line of Gilfillan’s story. The smoky haze she described overhanging the Avelonia slag heaps, the bleakness of the town’s omnipresent tipple, and the tattered but fervent cell of communist faithful all comprised Gilfillan’s memorial to a vitiated society. 28

Lorena Hickok, one of Federal Emergency Relief (FERA) Administrator Harry Hopkins’s principal social reporters, shared Gilfillan’s impression of mine-town civilization. “The soft coal industry is dying on its feet,” she wrote in 1933. “It’s obviously unprofitable and senseless to operate these mines.” 29 Similarly, FERA’s Henry Francis portrayed Chiefton as “a stranded community, encompassing a buckled railroad platform of rotted planks, a closed company store with a window display of cobwebs and a forbidding cluster of 83 company houses, enclosed between hills of garbage strewn slag in the shadow of rusty runway and an old fashioned tipple.” 30 Driving along U. S. Route 50 in Logan County, West Virginia, Francis discovered twenty-three such stranded communities which had operated as mining camps a few years ago, but now were idle. Gloomily he pronounced over half the county’s 800 families living in these towns to be “per-

28 Gilfillan, I Went to Pit College, passim.
30 Francis to Hopkins, Dec. 1, 1934, ibid.
manently displaced — most of them too aged and disabled to ever work again.” 31

Francis’s itinerary led him into the heart of West Virginia’s Harvey District. Viewing the abandoned mines, demolished houses, and rotted railroad stations, Francis conjured up an image of the dead civilization of Pompeii. “Thousands had left with the abandonment of industrial activity — all the better and more prosperous families. But 9,500 people remain, mostly the mountaineer type. Their shacks are unspeakable, crowded beyond belief. Clothing is lacking. Sickness and disease prevalent. . . . They have no hope.” 32

The unrelenting poverty and squalor of the mine town in the 1930s greatly strengthened the image of its strandedness. In Fayette County, Pennsylvania, where 75,000 of the county’s 120,000 miners were jobless in 1934, conditions everywhere verged on savagery. Sixty homeless miners lived in coke ovens; three kept house in local caves; and eight families occupied stables. Patch dwellers fared little better. Towns such as Bobtown and Isabella presented a depressing picture. In Bobtown families of eight to ten children “draped in tattered clothes” eked out an existence on a fare of bread and gravy. Conditions were equally woeful at Isabella. Thirteen people slept in one three-room house amid filth. Three adults in one bed was common. Sanitation was terrible. “People might clean up a little better,” one welfare inspector told Francis, “but they’ve lost heart.” 33

Despite occasional evidence of mine-sponsored self-help projects in Belle Vernon, Pennsylvania, and garden cooperatives in West Virginia, travelers to mine-town America in the 1930s stubbornly clung to their verdict that the patch civilization was irredeemably stranded. Such writers as Malcolm Ross bemoaned that barren mine towns in West Virginia suffered from “stricken imaginations.” The old instinct for beauty, wrote Ross, “expressed itself in songs and in the telling of mountain sagas, but the minetown child of the 1930s had little touch with these things. Filth and hardship form his impressions in the house. Out-of-doors, his playground is a gob pile.” 34

Neither Homer Morris, an economist, nor Malcolm Ross saw any possibility of reprieve for the bituminous mine town. For Ross the

31 Francis to Hopkins, Dec. 7, 1934, ibid. It is interesting to compare Hickok’s and Francis’s descriptions of poverty and strandedness in southwestern Pennsylvania and West Virginia with the stark picture of miner poverty and despair portrayed in Jack Conroy’s classic novel of the 1930s, The Disinherited (New York, 1933).
32 Francis to Hopkins, Dec. 7, 1934, Hopkins Papers, FDRL.
33 Francis to Hopkins, Nov. 10, 1934, ibid.
34 Malcolm Ross, Machine Age in the Hills (New York, 1934), 87-88.
persistence of the idea that the patches were temporary shelters for roving workmen placed towns and men beyond redemption; for Morris, however, the patch's fate was mortared into the very organization of the company-owned town, which rendered the miners unfit to meet the problems of readjustment. Miners, explained Morris, "were removed from the mainstream of [modern] life pulsating through a normal diversified industrial community." Consistent with the stranded mine-town image, Morris decried the patch as artificial, "deprived of the stimulation coming from contacts with other industrial groups. [The miners'] limited social experiences and opportunities did not accustom them to meet new social situations. . . . Their initiative is thwarted by the impossibility of owning their home. . . . They can feel no sense of security in the community. Their utter dependence upon the company for both employment and continuance of residence in the community develops an attitude of submission and servitude which determines their confidence and self-reliance." 35

Statement followed statement, impression reinforced impression — some truth, some exaggeration, some fiction — nevertheless, after forty years in the creation, an unshakable image emerged of the mine towns as a stranded civilization. Moreover, this image influenced political decisions. It was not entirely coincidental that the New Deal launched its subsistence homestead program in the Appalachian coalfields. The rural homestead idea could be traced in part to New Dealers such as Rexford Tugwell and M. L. Wilson and their belief that the Great Depression marked the close of America's age of industrialism. In this view bituminous coal miners joined textile and shoe industry workers as the chaff of the old order. Tugwell, like Eleanor Roosevelt one of the staunch supporters of the homestead idea, believed that in planned communities the displaced work force — both urban and rural — could combine subsistence agriculture with a simple craft economy and recreate a strong, healthy small-town society. 36

The New Deal built two subsistence homesteads in the region, Arthurdale in Preston County, West Virginia, and Norvelt in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania (the latter a play on the names of both Eleanor and Franklin Delano Roosevelt). Both planned towns featured simple but attractive white-frame Cape Cod cottages that were arranged on lots spacious enough to accommodate sizable gardens. Both communities boasted modern plumbing, community halls, health

35 Morris, Plight of the Bituminous Miner, 96.
36 Sternsher, Rexford Tugwell, passim; Eleanor Roosevelt, This I Remember (New York, 1949), 130-32.
clinics, and good schools. Finally, the inclusion of a small manufacturing establishment such as Arthurdale's furniture shop provided the towns a modest, albeit tenuous, economic base.  

These communities, however, failed as models; that is, they did not inspire further developments of village alternatives to mine towns. They exist and to the middle-class Progressive eye they are more attractive than mine towns, but most of the mine towns also continue to exist and all that exist are much more attractive than they were when investigated in the 1930s. Viewed in this way Norvelt and Arthurdale stand as monuments to their founders' deep-seated conviction that America's mining civilization was defunct. In a sense, New Deal communitarians such as Tugwell and Eleanor Roosevelt erred by uncritically accepting the Progressives' maledictions and too hastily assuming that mine towns had no future.  

The Great Depression did not depopulate the patches. Instead, by foreclosing job opportunities elsewhere, by promoting centralized public welfare, and by consolidating the power of the United Mine Workers, the Depression actually slowed migration from the patches and fostered population stability. Even though Congress forced mine-owners to divest themselves of town ownership and even though post-war collective bargaining, federal social programs, improved transportation, and modern communications eroded the thicker "cake of minetown tradition," many ethnic groups continued to live in patches. Over time, they sided their clapboard company houses with Insull Brick, installed interior plumbing, added kitchen ells, and in other ways embellished the appearance of their homes. Independent merchants replaced the company store, churches flourished, and, together with veterans' and ethnic clubs, they strengthened the organizational fabric of towns that only a decade earlier had been decried as cesspools of human degradation and oppression.  

Nevertheless, it was neither the New Deal vision of nevva communitas nor the manifestations of traditional ethnic pride that most profoundly influenced the destiny of the bituminous mining region; rather, in the post-World War II era a deeply etched conviction emerged that the bituminous coal region was an economic waste-

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38 A conclusion based on an extensive series of oral interviews, many conducted by the author, which were made between Mar. and July 1975 as part of the California State College Oral History Project. Copies of these interviews are available at California University of Pennsylvania and at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg.
land unfit for investment. Other than a modest spurt of economic growth visible in Washington County in the 1960s, southwestern Pennsylvania failed to experience the postwar economic boom that planted manufacturing, research and development, and electronics firms along the major transportation corridors running out from and around most American cities. As before the war, glass, basic steel, and coal mining persisted as the mainstays of the region's economy. Although these industries were capital and labor intensive, before the 1960s disinvestment and a pattern of work force reduction were common to all three. The economy of southwestern Pennsylvania generated fewer and fewer manufacturing jobs. Employment in Washington County, for instance, fell from under 31,000 jobs in 1947 to under 26,000 jobs in 1967.

A separate look at Fayette County data reveals even harsher realities. Capital investment in manufacturing declined, sputtering from two million dollars in 1947 to only one and a half million dollars in 1954. While capital investment rose to $6.4 million in 1967, that amount represents a negligible improvement to the county's economy. More important was the decline in county-wide employment from 9,568 manufacturing jobs in 1947 to less than 8,000 manufacturing jobs in 1967.19

Behind these data lurk the hundreds of individual decisions by businessmen and industrialists not to locate plant facilities in the region. Electronics firms, the aerospace industry, drug manufacturing, data processing, and the other bellwethers of the postindustrial economy shunned southwestern Pennsylvania as a plant-site location. There is no way of accurately assessing whether or not these locational decisions rested significantly on the lingering negative images of mine-town civilization. But, Appalachia's reputation for harboring a deeply embedded tradition-oriented industrial culture, coupled with the problematical nature of coal as an energy resource, cast a dark shadow of uncertainty over the region's economy.

The work force represented by the mine-town population enjoyed few job opportunities outside coal and steel. It was and continues to be dependent upon this sector of the economy for its well-being; therefore, economic downturns such as the region experienced in the early 1980s particularly victimized this population. Bright young people who spent their youth in these patches and attended such schools as California University of Pennsylvania frequently left the

region in order to utilize their newfound technical and business skills. Tragically, then, the Progressive logic that historically branded these villages as socially inadequate, prevailed and insidiously operated to keep the coal town out of the economic mainstream. Francis's and Gilfillan's grim images of Western Pennsylvania, like Orwell's mauve rendering of North England, remained deeply rooted in the consciousness of Englishmen and Americans. Therefore, in the 1970s and 1980s as America, like England, adjusted to a postindustrial, highly technological economy, southwestern Pennsylvania, like much of England's old industrial regions, still mirrored the old industrialism. Although miles away in time and space from Orwell's *Wigan Pier* or Gilfillan's "Avelonia," these regions still evoked the stranded and surrealistic image of the paleotechnic era.