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To Live Here, You Have to Fight

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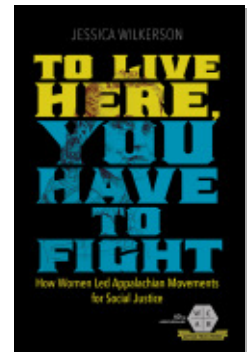
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Introduction

In 1962, Frances “Granny” Hager rushed to the Appalachian Hospital in Harlan, Kentucky. There she met her husband Ab Hager, who was having “a real bad spell,” she later recalled. Ab had worked forty-eight years in the coalmines. His body had been “mashed” and his lungs had filled with coal dust, causing coalminers’ pneumoconiosis, or black lung disease. The doctor told Granny that Ab’s lungs looked “like concrete.” A midwife by training, Granny had nursed her ailing spouse over the years, as his breathing became labored, his organs hardened, and his body weakened. But her ability to care for her loved one had become more difficult in recent months. The Hagers had lost their health insurance when the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), Ab’s union, restructured its retirement policies, leaving many retired coalminers and their families without health care. The hospital turned the Hagers away, citing their inability to pay a fifty-dollar deposit. Granny Hager took Ab home and “sat right there by him for three weeks and watched him slowly die.”¹

Months after Ab’s death, Granny Hager—who first joined union picket lines in the 1930s—partnered with retired miner Ashford Thomas to organize what they called “roving pickets.” Widows and retired miners traveled from mine to mine urging workers to strike and force the coal companies to improve working conditions. A few years later, Hager met antipoverty workers who helped miners and widows, like her, to force the federal government and the coal industry to recognize the existence of black lung disease. Together, they successfully lobbied for the Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969. In subsequent years, Hager and others participated in protests, marches, and



Figure 1. Frances "Granny" Hager. Courtesy of Berea College Special Collections and Archives; Berea, Kentucky.

public hearings to improve compensation for sick miners and their families, and Hager went door-to-door to inform people of their rights as workers.

Ten years after Ab's death, Granny Hager was known around the region for her activism. In June 1972, she spoke at a union rally for Miners for Democracy, a grassroots movement of rank-and-file coalminers to reform the UMWA. The rally took place at the site of a 1931 labor skirmish in Harlan County dubbed the Battle of Evarts. Hager had been there, yards from where one man was shot and killed for his pro-union stance. Now she sought to inspire the uprising of miners in Harlan County and across eastern Kentucky as they spearheaded a new union campaign.²

During her 1972 speech, Hager declared, “People say to me, ‘Well, Granny, why are you out working and doing this when you’ve got no kids, nobody but yourself?’ I said, ‘Yeah, but there’re old people who needs their miners’ retirement pension, there’re old people who need their Social Security, there’re fathers who has died and left their little children, they need their black lung [benefits]. And if I can help one person that really needs it to get something to live on, buddy I think it’s worth all these here forty years that I’ve been on the job.’”³ Central to her “job” of forty years was a commitment to helping working-class men and women understand and take advantage of their citizenship rights.

Granny Hager’s life and activism exemplifies the fusion of an *ethic of care* with an ethos of citizenship. Hager was part of a tradition of Appalachian women’s activism that linked the daily acts of sustaining life to democratic participation. Charting the life histories and activism of Hager and others like her, this book argues that caring labor is fundamental to understanding the limitations and successes of social and political movements that sought to expand democracy and citizenship rights.



This book tells the story of women in the Appalachian South who joined and led progressive movements in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ Most of the historical actors in this story are white women who lived and worked in poor and working-class communities, and who became part of an unfolding drama. It featured conservative and liberal politicians with whom they sparred over antipoverty funding; black and white civil rights activists they joined in poor people’s campaigns; striking miners with whom they marched on picket lines; and welfare rights and feminist activists with whom they united to fight for fairness and equality. Their story thus enables us to understand the region, the nation, and the time period from new perspectives.

A yearning to understand Appalachian women activists’ political motivations, desires, and relationships inspired this study. Many of the women whose stories follow have been memorialized in story, film, music, and images. Indeed, it was through these mediums that I first learned about them. Yet I was mystified when I read histories of the region that, with few exceptions, rarely considered these women in any depth or as primary historical actors. I wanted to know: Who were women activists before the political campaigns, labor strikes, and protests? How did those dramatic moments change their lives? How did they make history? What visions did they have for themselves, their children, and their communities? If they made only fleeting appearances in Appalachian history, they have been virtually invisible in

twentieth-century American history. Yet their stories help us rethink major debates in American history and about poverty, social movements, capitalism, feminism, and more. One of the primary goals of *To Live Here, You Have to Fight* is to position Appalachian women as political actors who were part of social movements, joined in ideological debates, offered fresh visions of democratic participation, and faced sometimes-crippling political struggles.⁵

The women at the center of this history participated in what scholars have called the “grassroots war on poverty”—the mobilization of poor communities across the nation. Building on the foundations of the federal War on Poverty, they developed community-run organizations, helped to implement new antipoverty legislation, and mounted democratic campaigns in the second half of the twentieth century.⁶ When President Lyndon B. Johnson announced a War on Poverty, Appalachia became its main stage. As antipoverty programs emerged in mountain communities, local women joined and shaped them to respond to the daily and entrenched problems that they observed. And as Johnson’s Great Society legislation expanded the welfare state, women helped implement its policies in their communities. Most scholars date the top-down, federal War on Poverty from 1964 to 1968, but the grassroots war on poverty reverberated for over a decade. Its legacies continue into the present.

White women in the Appalachian South sustained antipoverty programs, which came under increasing attack in the late 1960s. This book shows how, in subsequent years, they continued the work of implementing and improving federal legislation in their communities, and they also mounted an array of democratic campaigns addressing the complex ways that class and gender disparity played out in the region. Galvanized by the War on Poverty and inspired by the civil rights movement, women fostered diverse coalitions and crisscrossed 1960s and 1970s social movements. They became leaders and foot soldiers in a regional poor people’s movement, the welfare rights movement, a community health movement, environmental justice protests, unionization campaigns, and a grassroots women’s movement.

Caregiving defines the central and consistent theme in these women’s lives and activism, something that becomes clear only when we foreground women’s participation in 1960s social movements and examine policy campaigns in the Mountain South through the lens of gender. Antipoverty activism in eastern Kentucky, the primary site of this study, initially addressed daily challenges of living in the coalfields, where the coal industry had dominated politics since the late nineteenth century and had amassed huge quantities of wealth on the backs of working people. Historically, male employment was inconsistent, and the single-industry economy offered few labor

opportunities for women. To make matters worse, coalmining wreaked havoc on miners' bodies. Many suffered from crippling disabilities, including broken bones and crushed backs. Coalminers' pneumoconiosis led to premature aging and death. This crisis in workers' health only compounded the health and psychological impacts of environmental destruction as the coal industry altered the landscape, polluted waterways, and dumped waste down mountainsides. Caregiving became the unifying thread for women who tended to disabled fathers, husbands, and sons; struggled to nourish children in toxic environments; managed household budgets; handled state-sponsored social provisioning; and assisted other men and women in their trials and tribulations.

Activists drew on their social positions as caregivers as they articulated the goals of a multitude of grassroots campaigns. They exposed the harsh realities of life under coalfield capitalism—characterized by the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of mine owners, investors, and corporate coal's executives. To make sense of Appalachian women's gendered and class-conscious activism that challenged this system, I turned to the interdisciplinary scholarship on caregiving and reproductive labor. Sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn describes social reproduction as the “array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally.”⁷ These activities include raising and socializing children, caring for the elderly and disabled, caring for oneself, preparing food, cleaning living quarters, buying consumer goods, and maintaining ties of family and kin. The majority of this labor—both paid and unpaid—has historically fallen to women.⁸

Feminist philosophers have outlined how caring work—who does it and how society values it—brings up questions of social responsibility and political will. As Eva Feder Kittay posits, caregiving and the human dependency that it reveals is central to how we understand equality and citizenship, typically in the sense that we erase it from consideration altogether. Kittay offers a “dependency critique of equality.” She calls into question the idea that it is possible for humans to function as free and equal citizens because humans depend on the care of another human at least several points in life.⁹ In the history recounted here, women performed life-sustaining labor and provided end-of-life care. They did so without adequate resources, setting in relief the limitations of arguments for rights and equality that ignored the necessity of caregiving.

As women became activists, they exposed the ways in which unpaid caregiving labor was—and is—among capitalism's “background conditions of possibility” at the same time that it is devalued and destabilized.¹⁰

Caregiving labor did what industrial capitalism could not—it sustained life. Yet, paradoxically, capitalist accumulation strained and threatened social reproduction; it created conditions in which caregiving labor became difficult if not impossible to perform. When we center women’s caregiving as a political activity and as a motivation for democratic campaigns, we raise the question: what would it mean to imagine the average American not as a citizen worker, as has been the case in modern U.S. political history, but as a citizen caregiver?¹¹

To do so should not negate the fact that many of the women whose lives are examined here were also paid workers. Many took great pleasure in fighting hard against sexist barriers to gain access to employment, or “public work.” They also stood on the frontlines of labor struggles and fought for the collective bargaining rights of all working people. This has been the case even as Appalachian women have often been reduced to simple gender identities, as in the common phrases “coalminer’s wife” and “coalminer’s daughter.” For example, journalists portrayed women who joined miners on picket lines in the 1970s as “miners’ wives,” even as many of them also worked for wages and others used affirmative action to secure jobs in the mines for themselves. Others claimed identities as mothers, daughters, and wives, but they also yearned for the independence entailed in earning wages. Consider Eula Hall, for whom paid employment was one necessary step in divorcing her violent husband. Some, like Edith Easterling, did not particularly enjoy housekeeping. She sought employment that satiated her interest in politics and that improved the quality of life in her community.

To refer to the central figures in this study as “citizen caregivers” is to acknowledge the fact that women in the Appalachian South—indeed, working-class and poor women in the United States—bore responsibility for caregiving in their families and in their communities. They did so not because women are inherently more caring or nurturing than men, but because they lived in a society that assigned them that social position through institutions, culture, and laws. As they became activists, they infused social and political movements with those experiences of taking care of parents, husbands, children, and neighbors in the hostile environment created by coalfield capitalism.

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Understanding white women’s activism in Appalachia is impossible without attending to the history of race in America. The women about whom I write lived in harsh places filled with difficult challenges. Nonetheless, gendered white privilege often served as a cornerstone to their lives. They lived

in communities where laws, ordinances, customs, and racial violence had driven out many, but not all, African Americans. Working-class white communities benefited from that process, even when they also faced economic and environmental injustices.¹²

Racial privilege was not gender-neutral, however. In coalmining communities, white women experienced racial privilege that was mediated through gender in three primary ways.¹³ First, they gained a tenuous economic security through wages, housing, and land through their male kin, who were the first hired for relatively well-paying jobs or who inherited or were able to buy property freely. Access to economic stability came as an exchange: women committed to relationships of economic dependence, in which they would trade reproductive labor for largely male-controlled property and wealth.

Second, while working-class white women faced barriers to employment in male-dominated industry, they had a wider range of work opportunities than black women. For instance, some found employment in factories, restaurants, schools, and hospitals. Others moved to cities to work, as some did during World War II, when they were employed in factories that refused to hire black women.¹⁴

Last, married white women had greater access to the welfare state than people of color and single white women. The state tied the most generous social provisions—those designated as entitlements—to specific kinds of employment, to which white, able-bodied men had exclusive access. It deemed entitlements such as the Social Security program for retired workers the right of white male citizens and their families. Policy makers excluded many single mothers, African Americans, and other nonwhite people from entitlement programs and channeled them into needs-based programs or left them out entirely. In Appalachia, the racial contours of these programs persisted into the 1960s. Federal and regional policy makers imagined the region as white, and they designed and implemented 1960s-era antipoverty policies in such a way that targeted poor white communities.¹⁵

These and other benefits of racist structures did not equal privilege in the sense that poor and working-class whites in the Mountain South had discernible access to power, rank, or wealth. And it is in part for that reason—the knotty intersection of class and race—that leftist activists in the 1960s looked to the region to build progressive, interracial social movements. By the spring and summer of 1964, white civil rights activists who had worked alongside black activists in the Deep South turned their attention to white working-class communities. They drew explicit links between the civil rights movement and the War on Poverty.¹⁶ Many young white activists joined the antipoverty programs in the Appalachian South, where they hoped to build

on a legacy of union activism and contribute to an “Appalachian Movement” that would contribute to a multiracial movement for economic fairness.¹⁷

Many local whites identified the importance of class stratification in their lives and the series of barriers to upward mobility. Some went on to identify common class goals and join interracial alliances in poor people’s campaigns and the welfare rights movement. The activism of working-class whites fell along a spectrum: some saw the practicality of interracial movements, others were sincerely devoted to cross-racial solidarity, and some, the minority of the activists represented here, practiced antiracism. The latter group actively sought to challenge systems of American racism. I have made a point of highlighting these moments of interracial coalitions to counteract the narrative of Appalachia as “white” and to gesture toward the spirit of cooperation and the range of activism that emerged as communities came together to improve policies combating poverty.¹⁸

Yet Appalachia was not a place of white racial innocence. Like the rest of the United States, the Mountain South has a long history of ethnic and racial oppression. White settlers forced removal of Native Americans, and many owned and traded enslaved African Americans. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whites led campaigns of violence and terror against freedmen. White-controlled state and local governments passed laws and ordinances that prevented the settlement of African Americans and impeded their occupational mobility, patterns that existed well into the twentieth century. These and other factors led to black outmigration, giving the appearance of a white Appalachia by the mid-twentieth century. As sociologist Barbara Ellen Smith argues, the myth of white racial innocence strengthened in the 1960s and 1970s because Appalachia saw relatively little in the way of civil rights protests, and white activists in the region tended to focus on the actions of corporate and government outsiders rather than internal systems of white supremacy. She writes that in much of the literature, “The contemporary predominance of whites in Appalachia becomes a benign demographic fact, rather than a product of active practices characterized in part by persistent white supremacy.”¹⁹

The activists I write about varied in their consciousness of and their responses to racial ideas about the Mountain South. Many participated in processes that reinforced the idea of Appalachia as a white enclave absent of racism, for instance, when they identified with the struggles of black civil rights activists, but avoided discussion of racial discrimination or the legacy of racial violence in their own communities. Other activists, black and white, countered images of Appalachia as a mythic white space. They did so by casting regional campaigns as part of broader, national struggles that saw racism,

poverty, and oppression as interwoven. By tracing activist campaigns, but also by contextualizing activism within the racial and political history of the United States, I show how movements in Appalachia produced, responded to, and sometimes countered racial myths.

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In the 1930s, Kentucky folksinger Sarah Ogan Gunning composed the song “I Hate the Capitalist System.” She described a life of hardship brought on by corporate greed and class divisions. “They call this the land of plenty / To them I guess it’s true,” she sang. “But that’s to the company bosses / Not workers like me an’ you.”²⁰ Drawing on the stories of women like Gunning, Chapter One foregrounds women and gender, along with race and class, in the development of the Appalachian coal economy. In the early twentieth century, farming declined and industry expanded. Mountain communities felt the effects of single-industry economies, from timbering to coalmining. Private industry built towns, amassed huge quantities of land, controlled resources, and circumscribed access to political power, creating deep social divisions as wealth concentrated in the hands of a few and flowed out of the region.

In the first half of the twentieth century, extractive industries overwhelmed the region; communities experienced tolls in the form of workplace death and disability; workers organized into unions and faced corporate backlash; and by the 1950s, mechanization again transformed industry and unemployment rates soon rose. Women’s caregiving transformed alongside industry, as male workers faced injury and death, and poverty crept around the edges of the boom-and-bust economy. Women activists emerged in these early years. They testified about corporate domination, protested environmental destruction, and organized for worker rights, often connecting their protest to the caregiving labor they performed. They provided the cultural and intellectual foundations for future waves of activism. Chapter One places the passage of War on Poverty legislation in 1964 within these decades of social unrest in the Mountain South. It then examines the racial and gender contours of federal policies in the region and how, despite limitations, the notion of “community action” at the heart of the War on Poverty held promise for many poor and working-class people and their allies.

Among the women who took advantage of War on Poverty legislation, Edith Easterling reminisced in later years that becoming politically active and speaking out against injustice made one “feel like a free person.”²¹ Born in 1925 to a mountain family, Easterling was among the first in her community to participate in federal antipoverty programs. She made an ideal leader

with her local connections, abiding interest in community improvement, and charisma. She had long been active in local politics in Pike County, Kentucky, one of the heaviest coal-producing counties in the country. She considered herself among the “self-educated” people who joined local antipoverty efforts, in her case the Appalachian Volunteers funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity, created by the signature legislation of the War on Poverty.²² Chapter Two traces Edith Easterling’s path to the Appalachian Volunteers and her efforts, alongside allies, to organize her community, provide for the needs of poor people, and expose the reasons why entrenched poverty existed in the first place. She also joined efforts to challenge corporate control of the land and to make a case for welfare as an entitlement of American citizenship, campaigns that countered the long-held assumption that blamed Appalachians for poverty. Those campaigns quickly thrust her into a wider world of southern social justice activists. The history of community action in Pike County reveals how federal resources opened up new opportunities to attack antidemocratic politics and power imbalances in the coalfields.²³

The story of Edith, her family, and their relationships with activists from across the country calls into question the insider/outsider framework that has been widely accepted in the study of the Appalachian War on Poverty.²⁴ Appalachian studies scholars have long concentrated on a legacy of missionary work in Appalachia, dating to the early twentieth century, in which outsider reformers and missionaries characterized mountain dwellers as “yesterday’s people” who were poor in part because they refused to adjust to modern society.²⁵ Scholars have lumped these missionaries together with the antipoverty workers of the 1960s and 1970s. By doing so they have suggested that mountaineers never trusted the War on Poverty or the outsiders and that cultural insensitivity on the part of outsiders undermined the antipoverty programs. That framework has obscured the ways that Appalachian women leaders helped to build a multidimensional movement that relied on strong alliances, traversed boundaries, and forged both regional and national connections that were crucial to sustaining their activism.²⁶

Centering insider/outsider relationships and the internal conflicts that they wrought, some historians concluded that, by the end of the 1960s, organizations had failed due to political infighting. Yet this is not the whole story. As Chapter Three shows, antipoverty programs came under sustained attack by local and state officials. They organized quickly to stop the expanding grassroots war on poverty.²⁷ In Kentucky, a state-funded red-baiting campaign called the Kentucky Un-American Activities Committee targeted white antipoverty workers in eastern Kentucky, including Edith Easterling. The committee used racist appeals to undermine community organizing in Pike

County and across Kentucky. A close examination of those hearings reveals how the Appalachian movement's intersection with civil rights organizers, along with its pointed indictment of coalfield politics, posed a serious threat to Kentucky elites.

The backlash weakened the Appalachian Volunteers, but it did not hamper the resolve of people in the mountains who looked for new avenues to organize for the expansion of democracy. Building on the ideas of the civil rights movement, in particular the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Poor People's Campaign, white and black Appalachians joined together to make more militant calls for economic justice in the United States. They carried those ideas into the oldest social reform organization in the region, the Council of the Southern Mountains. As they transformed the Council, they also developed a progressive Appalachian identity, one that connected them to the multiracial movements of poor people, rejected stereotypes of backward and lazy hillbillies, and proved a foundation for more militant activism that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Local activists and their allies who picked up the mantle of poor people's rights soon joined together in regional welfare rights organizations, the subject of Chapter Four. Among the local activists was Eula Hall, a white, middle-aged mother of four stuck in an abusive relationship. Eula Hall first saw the chance to change her life when she met Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) workers in the Mud Creek community of Floyd County and learned of the War on Poverty. She had grown up poor and "knew what it's like. If it's cold, I've been there. If it's hunger, I've been there. If it was bare without clothes or shoes to wear to school, I knew." But she also had an abiding interest in social justice and often dreamed of ways to make life better for herself and her neighbors. The college students who moved to Appalachia to work in VISTA programs had resources that she knew could help her and her community, so she got involved. Together they "would organize groups, testify and march, picket, or whatever it took to try and get something done to make a difference in our living standards."²⁸ Access to welfare became one of the central issues in her community, where she and others led the Eastern Kentucky Welfare Rights Organization. Calls for "welfare rights" connected white Appalachian activists to the national welfare rights movement, spearheaded by black women, and led to a regional variation of welfare rights organizing. Chapter Four uncovers a wing of the welfare rights movement that neither scholars of Appalachia nor welfare have recognized.²⁹

The welfare rights movement brought together single mothers, disabled miners, and elderly people, who, along with fighting for school lunch programs, food stamps, and fair treatment by social workers, identified access

to health care as a primary factor in poverty. Chapter Five charts how Eula Hall and her allies helped to build a community health movement, calling for health care as a human right. Influenced by the Medical Committee for Human Rights, an organization that formed in response to health disparities in African American communities in the Deep South, health activists opened community-controlled medical clinics and connected them to a host of other community issues, including women's health concerns and local struggles for environmental justice. They argued that health patterns, employment, gender, and the environment were interrelated, and all played a part in a community's health outcomes.

Appalachian women activists helped to implement antipoverty programs in their communities and used them to ignite campaigns for welfare rights, health care, and environmental justice. Even when not central to a particular campaign, the relationship between capital and labor was always the backdrop to progressive activism in eastern Kentucky, in particular the labor struggles of coalminers. In 1973 miners in Harlan County went on strike for the right to unionize. They saw their campaign as an opening volley in the battle to unionize mines across the Mountain South. Women soon joined the picket lines. They also formed the Brookside Women's Club to support striking miners and their families. Chapter Six explores how they drew on the language that had circulated for a decade, calling not only for the right to join a union but also making a case for how unionized workplaces would benefit working-class families, with the concerns of women—in particular the challenges of social reproduction in the coalfields—a key theme of their protests. As they gave voice to their specific concerns as women, they also gave rise to a feminist consciousness in the coalfields.

In the mid-1970s women's rights exploded onto the scene. Although previous women's activism in the mountains was feminist in nature, in the sense that it promoted women's equality, an explicitly, self-identified feminist movement emerged during and after the Brookside Strike. White antipoverty and working-class activists incorporated the lessons of the War on Poverty and the labor struggle into their quest for women's rights.³⁰ Chapter Seven shows how their struggles against corporate abuse led to a regionally specific form of feminism, as some white mountain women connected their gendered positions—as mothers, workers, wives, and caregivers—to their class experiences of living and working in the coalfields.³¹ Others fought for access to mining jobs, traditionally restricted to men, and changed the workplace once there.

Yet, as Chapter Seven shows, white, working-class women's understanding of feminism sometimes clashed with the ideas of middle-class feminists who shaped policy decisions. For instance, when the Appalachian Women's Rights



Figure 2. Map of eastern Kentucky. Courtesy of INCasellc.

Organization debated elite white women who were part of the governor-appointed Commission on Women in Kentucky, they encountered limited conceptions of women's rights that failed to integrate the concerns of rural, working-class, and poor women.³² Women in the Mountain South did not simply give up on the women's movement, however. They continued to push for changes in their workplaces and communities that would benefit a greater number of women and the working-class communities where they lived.³³

The activists whose stories follow were based in eastern Kentucky, where they were concentrated in predominantly white, working-class communities. Many of them lived in coal-producing counties Harlan, Floyd, and Pike, as well as Knott and Letcher. Residents in these places witnessed a large influx of activists and resources in the 1960s and 1970s, and a handful of women became especially prominent activists.

Telling their stories required creativity and a willingness to cast a wide net, as the perspectives of working-class and poor women rarely appear with any consistency in institutional records. I conducted oral history interviews with activists and their allies, and I also drew upon interviews conducted in the last three decades by documentarians and former antipoverty activists, invested in preserving memories of the 1960s. Captivating film footage and

photographs preserved at regional cultural and media arts centers helped me imagine the period: the facial expressions of protesters, the timbre of women's voices, the landscape. All of these sources in combination with national and regional manuscript collections and print publications allowed me to trace women's activism across time and place and to stitch a multilayered, dynamic history of gender and social movements in the Mountain South.

Although I focus on specific women in particular places, whenever possible I illuminate broader themes across the Mountain South and show how activists in eastern Kentucky participated in regional and national organizing efforts. That is not to say that Appalachia is a monolithic place. While there were common themes across communities, like corporate control of land, plenty of places throughout the region were not dominated by the coal industry. Nonetheless, many struggled with entrenched poverty, like in western North Carolina, where debates swirled around federal land use, and agricultural communities in eastern Kentucky and Tennessee.³⁴ People of color in Appalachia were too often passed over by policy makers, who cast the entire region as a white enclave and sent the majority of resources into white communities. Moreover, variations in local politics and union membership influenced the strands of activism that emerged in specific places. Thus, this study is specific to particular communities in eastern Kentucky, but it also recognizes when, how, and why activists forged networks across the region and the nation.

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By ignoring white mountain women, poor and working-class, historians have reinforced the idea that they stand apart or outside of history and politics. This book seeks to correct that misconception. In doing so, it also makes several contributions to our understanding of twentieth-century American history.

First, it reveals how vital the history of caregiving labor is to the histories of labor and capitalism.³⁵ The coalfields of the Mountain South may not be the norm, but the extreme labor conditions there throw into relief the necessity of social reproduction in capitalist production and how the expropriation of caregiving labors (as well as land and natural resources) has been fundamental to capitalist systems. When women politicized their caregiving labor and challenged the extraction of their work, they made their labor visible and generated critiques of capitalist logics.³⁶ Moreover, the history of women in the coalfields shows how caregiving labor is not static but has changed over time, in relation to the economy, federal legislation, and access to social provisions. Poor and working-class women felt changes acutely and fought

for policy changes that grappled with the needs of working-class communities in their entirety. When mountain women joined the picket lines of male workers, organized welfare rights meetings with disabled miners, and brought their life experiences to bear in social justice campaigns, they blurred the lines between productive and reproductive labor in ways that are instructive to how we think about and write history.

Second, it reinforces how the expansion of the welfare state under the Great Society legislation, despite limitations, opened up possibilities for poor and working-class women to redress the worst abuses of capitalism, to chart new paths for themselves, and to address community crises. This is a story in part about how women activists interacted with various levels of government; how their expectations of citizenship were shaped by their caregiving labors; and how they navigated, changed, and were changed by federal power. They entered new jobs, built community institutions, and acquired legal resources to challenge injustices that they witnessed—from how decisions about land-use were made to how their children were treated in school. Historians of the New Deal have shown how the welfare state made vast improvement in many Americans' lives, for instance, by strengthening labor protections and creating Social Security. Yet, in studies of the Appalachian War on Poverty, the positive impact of the welfare state has been more muted. It is more difficult to deny that impact with women and gender at the center of the story. It is equally important to examine how women made policies more effective with their insights and strategies. Although they achieved numerous victories, they also encountered major setbacks, due to political backlash and transformations in the economy. But those setbacks should not eclipse the sense of political possibility that animated the lives of activists at the time.

Last, by tracing women's activism across time and place, this book shows how Appalachian activists stood at the nexus of mid-twentieth-century social movements, compelling us to reconsider the meaning and scope of the American women's movement. As antipoverty and feminist activist Eula Hall put it, "In Appalachia, there is nothing worse than being poor and a woman."³⁷ Yet "second-wave" feminism in the United States has primarily been cast as a middle-class, urban movement that made few real inroads in the South and was virtually nonexistent in the Appalachian South.³⁸ A close analysis of Appalachian women's organizing, however, reveals feminists struggling to define "women's issues" in a way that was capacious and encompassing, what one Appalachian feminist called *grassroots feminism*. This book joins a growing body of scholarship that examines how poor and working-class women and women of color offered alternative and radical visions of feminism that braided together class, race, and gender disparities.³⁹

For working-class caregivers in Appalachia, labor struggles, welfare rights movements, and campaigns against environmental destruction were women's issues just as much as those typically identified as such, like reproductive health care and domestic violence.

In the story that follows, the War on Poverty galvanized women; they built strong alliances across communities; their hard-nosed activism changed the Mountain South; and that activism led many of them to a gender consciousness that influenced a wave of organizing in the South. Women in the Mountain South imagined a society in which interdependence is the defining feature driving political and economic decisions. Their vision allowed for various, overlapping, and productive coalitions. The chapters that follow place working-class caregivers in Appalachia at the center of history, allowing us to see the world through their eyes.