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# ZOMBIE MINERS: LIFE, DEATH, AND REANIMATION IN THE WIDE RURAL RUST BELT

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JOSEPH DAVID SCHILLER
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ZOMBIE MINERS: LIFE, DEATH, AND REANIMATION IN THE WIDE RURAL RUST BELT

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Kathleen Brosnan, Chair

Dr. Jennifer Holland

Dr. Traci Brynne Voyles

Dr. David Wrobel

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, activists and mining historians have used the concept of zombie mines to show that extractive sites have social and environmental afterlives that beckon after closure. They manifest in toxic water, air, and soil, and often in the bodies of humans and nonhuman animals long after mines' productive lives. In this history of the Picher Field and subsequent Tar Creek Superfund site in northeastern Oklahoma, I argue that the zombie miner was an equally powerful social force. In the early twentieth century, mine operators leased Quapaw tribal land and white, native-born miners excluded Quapaw people, Black Americans, and especially immigrant labor radicals from their camps and workforce. Under "the poor man's camp" ideal of upward mobility from worker to owner, these miners opposed labor unions and their demands for environmental and safety regulations. Guarding the "poor man's camp," they made a "white man's camp." And they suffered nation-leading rates of silicosis and tuberculosis. This foundation informs how this place in what I call the wide rural Rust Belt experienced the end of its industry and pursued permanence after midcentury. The memory of idealized white, hardy miners influenced how the community imagined permanence and enacted remediation of dangerous mine waste. Zombie mines and zombie miners awakened together in deindustrialization. This history moves beyond a notion that deindustrialization has a region—the Rust Belt—instead revealing a process that deeply influenced many sites of rural industry across the twentieth-century United States. This process points to the many scales at which these communities experienced deindustrialization, from bodies to the region, nation-state, and globe. An environmental history of race and labor, "Zombie Miners" illustrates the hollowness of racial exclusion as a bulwark against the ecological and economic calamities of deindustrialization.

# INTRODUCTION: FROM HARDY MINERS TO CHAT RATS IN THE WIDE AMERICAN RUST BELT

The lock snapped with all the fanfare of a community celebration, a great reveal. On a sweltering June day in 1982, residents of Picher, Oklahoma, and surrounding areas gathered to witness the opening of a vault at the former home of the Tri-State Zinc and Lead Ore Producers Association (OPA). The mining-industry lobbying group, by then defunct, had recently donated its building and files to the Picher Mining District Reunion Committee. The organization had already opened a museum based on the OPA collections plus the community's donations of machines and mementos to commemorate the district's mining days. Mining was more than twenty years gone by the time the locksmith did the honors on the lock whose combination eluded living memory. The committee was preparing its third annual mining district reunion, expecting its biggest crowd yet, maybe as high as ten thousand from nearly every state and several foreign countries. Maybe the vault contained interesting items for display at the museum, onlookers hoped as local newspaper reporters and a photographer lined up to record the big moment. By the time they went to press, however, much of the thrill had worn off. "Apparently the primary use of the safe was a storage space for x-ray plate films," Picher's *Tri-State Tribune* reported.[1]

The past, present, and future collided in the anticlimactic vault opening. Failing to find the history they sought, the reunion committee instead set it in motion. The closed mines had recently reawakened, manifesting what activists and scholars have more recently called "zombie mines," "sites that continue to exert some sort of malevolent effect during their afterlife."[2] In

[1] "Mining Museum is 'Growing'," *Tri-State Tribune* (Picher, OK), June 10, 1982; Quote: "Vault Opening Reveals Old Records," *Tri-State Tribune* (Picher, OK), June 17, 1982.
[2] Quotation: John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, "Zombie Mines and the (Over)burden of History," *The Solutions Journal* 4, no. 3 (June 2013), no page. Anti-nuclear activists seem to have begun using the term around the same time as Sandlos and Keeling's more academic application. See Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of*

Picher's case the mines came undead by overflowing acidic mine water into local waterways. Now the x-rays were set to enliven the people who had made those zombie mines. The process began with the mining reunions, but the x-rays presented new questions about the miners' very bodies. The plates were evidence of how the celebrated industry had perforated the human containers holding all that vaunted muscle and sinew, intelligence and courage.

Although they drew scant excitement from the onlookers that day, the x-rays pulled the past and present into close relief by attracting the attention of the Oklahoma State Department of Health. The department swiftly filed court proceedings to "take possession" of the chest x-rays and other medical records created between 1927 and 1932 and stored at the OPA office-turned mining museum. Public health officials hoped to use the records in a multi-state study of environmental health in their own day, into the high incidence of cancer mortality in Ottawa County, Oklahoma; Cherokee County, Kansas; and Jasper County, Missouri, all pockmarked by the Tri-State's mines. James Graves, Reunion Committee chairman, was "perturbed over the court action," saying he "could not understand why the health department simply did not ask for the records. Our meetings are open to the public."[3] A county Health Department official asserted that the state took court action on a rumor that the Reunion Committee planned to destroy the x-rays and other medical records. The committee denied that charge, assuring citizens that if it could help public health in the present, the committee would comply with the Health Department's request for these records from the past. The committee even made the records' eventual loan to the health department conditional on their safe return.[4]

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*Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 215; Grand Canyon Trust, "Zombie Mines on the Colorado Plateau," Oct. 31, 2013, https://www.grandcanyontrust.org/blog/zombie-mines-colorado-plateau.

[3] "Health Department Petitions for Old X-Ray Films," *Tri-State Tribune* (Picher, OK), July 22, 1982.

[4] "State Health Department Gets Medical Records," *Tri-State Tribune* (Picher, OK), July 29, 1982.

Why would such a rumor emerge about the committee's designs? If it bore any shred of truth, why would the reunion organizers have considered destroying the records that might have advanced the public health? And wouldn't the x-rays help interpret the mining experience for museum goers? Contests over questions like these are the subject of this project: about the relationships between a complicated history and uncritical celebrations of it; about how commemorations of an idealized past are wielded to address present tensions, where both past and present were bound in anxieties over race, class, rurality, gender, and nationality; and about how the paired economic and environmental collapses of deindustrialization raised the stakes of who held the power to interpret the meaning of the mining past, to judge the people who made that history. Instead of revealing the kitsch and lore of the mining past, the vault opening tugged at present worries about what it had meant to live and work in the mining district.

The zombie mine is a rather straightforward proposition: abandoned mines everywhere "are haunted with toxic legacies that simply cannot be remediated," according to the historians John Sandlos and Arn Keeling.[5] Waste piles erode or leach their heavy metals. Some substances persist in the atmosphere or soil and water long after their disposal. Once shuttered, zombie mines' toxic potential sits and waits for changing environmental or economic conditions to bring them back to life. In some cases that is a passive process, such as the Picher Field's rising water table that burbled from mine shafts and bore holes onto the surface. In other cases, certain actors press the zombies back into service. Most uses of the term show fear of zombie mines for their potential to come undead when new technologies make production viable again, or market conditions make production profitable once more under old technologies and outdated, insufficient environmental vetting.[6]

[5] Sandlos and Keeling, "Zombie Mines."
[6] Colorado Plateau anti-uranium mining activists illustrate this fear. Grand Canyon Trust, "Zombie Mines."

Zombie mines are scary, but I argue that the more ominous, more consequential force in rural deindustrialization was the zombie miners born in those zombie mines. As Keeling and Sandlos relate, "zombie mines not only stalk future generations and their use of the land, but also reproduce or reawaken historical conflicts."[7] Mines as zombies take on some sentience. But it is people and their undead forms who do the stalking in this story. If zombie mines can be understood simply as technical challenges, zombie miners reveal the full social, political, and cultural barriers to solving the problems that zombie mines present.

This is the history of how zombie mines and zombie miners were made together in rural industry and its collapse across the twentieth century in the United States. In the Picher Field, white, burly miners—living, dead, and revivified—silenced dissenting voices and constrained possible futures for the land and for the Quapaw Nation citizens who call the mining district their homelands. This story searches for the zombies' origin to understand how their undeath in mine remembrances called up only incomplete portraits of the actual miners. There were real men digging and milling ore, blasting rock faces, and pumping water from the underground, but simplified, homogenized creatures stalked Picher memories of what miners had been. This, in turn, influenced how or whether the mining landscape should be redeemed.

In Picher, instead of reawakening historical conflicts over mining, the zombie miner's function was to mute those conflicts. The zombies glossed the real diversity of (dis)ability and ideology among the historic workers and voided whatever class consciousness there had been in the field in favor of a cross-class consensus around whiteness. Certain real miners, mine operators, and company lackeys played this role in the productive years of mining, but long after mine closures, the zombie staggered forth to support old myths that still exercised a hold on the

[7] Sandlos and Keeling, "Zombie Mines."

era of mine remediation. His social power inflected how local people understood their post-mining community and he narrowed the community's horizons as it negotiated with state and federal agencies to enact remediation. The zombie miner helped Picherites to question whether the mine landscape even constituted a dangerous problem worth solving.

As the Department of Health's petition indicates, the x-rays and the contests over them brought environmental history and working-class history together in the bodies of lead and zinc miners in the middle of the continent. So-called pioneer miners established the industry as the Joplin or Southwest Missouri District in the 1850s. They were a Jacksonian lot, American-born "white men who identified their interests with the acquisitive market functions of capitalism and the social and political privileges of their race, nativity, and gender," as their best chronicler, the labor historian Jarod Roll, has described them.[8] The district's working-class culture never outran this foundational ideal that poor white men could "share the national prosperity through hard work and in turn uphold manly paternal responsibilities."[9] It led them to violently rebuff labor unions and government regulations toward environmental and worker health throughout their history. It opened them to physical risks and their communities to crises in the effort to reproduce their society. I follow Roll by taking the story of these men beyond where his study ends. And I echo him and other new labor history by foregrounding this history as it was, instead of as many labor historians *wish* it had been. In other words, I take seriously that workers chose individualism and eschewed solidarity as expressions of their interests. "Labor history is mostly tragedy," according to Jefferson Cowie, if we look only for radicalism and resistance to

[8] Jared Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune: White Working-Class Conservatism in American Metal Mining, 1850-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 4. The other volumes on the Tri-State district's history informing this brief sketch are: Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); and George G. Suggs, *Union Busting in the Tri-State: The Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri Metal Workers' Strike of 1935* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986).
[9] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 4.

exploitation. This is history about "what workers did, rather than why they did not do something that they were supposed to," namely, organize more completely and unproblematically.[10] The men who came undead in mining reunions were conservative, pro-capitalist, and intensely jingoistic and nationalist, just like many white workers in this country who have mostly evaded study by labor historians.

Their district expanded in pursuit of new ores, first into Kansas in 1876 and then into the Indian Territory during the 1890s. The workers' brash, individualistic outlook met its match where operators—the local term for company owners—struck their richest ores in 1913. The most productive lead and zinc mines in the world were under land leased from members of the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma. Peak production in the 1920s coincided with the arrival of new technologies and growing companies which produced ore more efficiently, with the knock-on effect of raising more dust into the lungs of working men, more "chat" onto waste piles above ground, and more toxic wastewater into growing mill ponds.[11] Named for the milling magnate who leveraged Quapaw leases into a global minerals-industry conglomerate, Picher became the capitol of what has since been known as the Tri-State district.

That deeper history of this rural white workingman in the United States is part of a wider story. That singular form—"workingman"—hints at these workers' symbolic importance as a political emblem distinct from their material reality as complicated humans of aching flesh and bone with dreams realized and crushed. In that symbolic form, and in contrast to the diverse, youthful, service-industry and care-economy movements for worker dignity today, the forgotten white worker has moved again to the center of American political discourse. This history of the

[10] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 4. Jefferson Cowie, "Red History, Blue Mood: Labor History and Solidarity in an Age of Fragmentation," *Labor* 16, no. 4 (Dec. 2019): 35-47 (quotation from Gregory Kealey, 47).
[11] David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Occupational Disease in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 142-3.

actual people informs the uses to which they have been put by political elites. It follows the rise and fall of mining and milling in settler towns, and what it all meant to them in the making of their own history across the twentieth century.

While this history is focused on the Picher Field, a roughly forty square mile plain in the middle of the continent, a place marred by mountains of chat, subsiding into its former mines, and veined by toxic orange creeks, it also a larger tale with implications for the country and world at large. The story focuses on white working-class communities, environmental disaster, and what scholars began calling—almost exactly when the lock snapped in Picher—deindustrialization. These community experiences foreshadowed what was coming in many other parts of the country and, indeed, the world. Coming to this project in the fall of 2016 and writing from beyond that pivotal year, I maintain that deindustrialization is the most formative political and economic experience in the United States since the second half of the twentieth century. It is a large factor in the growing economic inequality that has manifested in diminished legitimacy for established political institutions during our own age. This history cautions against one particular response to such disjuncture: I link environmental history and working-class history to reveal the bankruptcy of settler colonial exclusion, extraction, and commemoration as bulwarks against the environmental and economic crises of deindustrialization. This shows how race and racism are made not in heads or hearts so much as in land and labor, not in attitudes so much as material nature and relationships of power. It shows how scapegoating Black Americans and immigrants or a perceived alliance of the federal government and Native people has not been a helpful route through economic crisis for white working communities.

I began with a simple question. When I arrived in Oklahoma in 2016 and learned of this magnificent, maligned landscape, I marveled at how few lifelong Oklahomans seemed to know

about it. How could this be? I learned about the end of the story first, the Superfund period, which I won't spoil here yet. Following a historian's impulses back through time, I turned to wider, more analytical questions. How did deindustrialization affect the rural United States? If the chat mountains and toxic water were a result, how else was rural deindustrialization lived as an environmental phenomenon? What did those chat piles mean to the people who made them, lived among them, and remembered them now that the towns were gone? How did people make, and then narrate, the overwhelming whiteness of the settler mining towns? What is environmental justice, and for whom, at the end of extraction on Quapaw land? What did it mean to be complicit, ideologically and materially, in their own economic and environmental undoing? Or, perhaps better, what is the relationship of exploitation by, and complicity with, the industry that made this landscape?

The answers require both environmental and labor history. These are two fields that long have spoken in different registers about a shared concept, alienation. Labor history has usually only approached nature insofar as the thing from which a worker was alienated by wage labor, according to Marx. Wage work alienated the worker from the nature within his own body and that outside the door of the shop, from which the resources of industrial production came (I use the male here intentionally, of course). Class relations then played out upon that static background. Environmental history's founding motivation, on the other hand, was to center the alienation of "mankind" from nature and reconnect the two. It sought to reveal man's place in a dynamic nature and in turn to reveal nonhuman nature's influential place in more conventional fields of human history. Initially, these efforts seldom took work into account, but once they did, attention to labor manifested in a flattening effect in which all humans in a given society seemed to have *equal* relationships tying their work back to the nonhuman world. Social class difference

was merely secondary to other intellectual agendas. Environmental historians succeeded in their effort to tie humanity and nature back together, but the victory elided critical differences of responsibility for—and vulnerability to—environmental changes.[12]

Excavating those differences of cause and consequence gains urgency as the notion of the "Anthropocene" comes to define scholarly and, increasingly, popular environmental thought. A new geological age "in which human actions overshadow the quiet persistence of microbes and the endless wobbles and eccentricities in the Earth's orbit, affecting the governing systems of the Earth," as J.R. McNeil and Peter Engelke define it, the Anthropocene similarly risks allotting equal blame to all people for climate crisis.[13] From comfortable seats in high-consumption countries in the Global North, purveyors of the Anthropocene employ the majestic plural (the "royal 'we'") to say *Look what we've done to the planet!* Doing so, they fail to account for the different relationships people have to the systems that structure environmental destruction. To

[12] Gunther Peck, "The Nature of Labor: Fault Lines and Common Ground in Environmental and Labor History," *Environmental History* 11, no. 2 (April 2006): 212-38. Examples of the flattening of environmental relationships into a singular humanity, in otherwise insightful and critical works, include: Richard White, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996): 171-85; Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995); Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003). An excellent early exception is Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Hurley used environmental history's cross-fertilization with the sciences to take up ecology's insight that environments are not static but chaotic, always changing and not in search of equilibrium. Thus, they are not a baseline against which historical environmental change can be judged good or bad. Rather, he argued, historians can measure environmental change socially, tracking who benefits and who loses when various human and nonhuman actors interact in environmental change. For excellent examples linking work and environmental history, see also: Mart A. Stewart, *"What Nature Suffers to Groe": Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Thomas Andrews, *Killing for Coal: America's Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Monica Perales, *Smeltertown: Making and Remembering a Southwest Border Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Brett L. Walker, *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2010); Jon T. Coleman, *Here Lies Hugh Glass: A Mountain Man, A Bear, and the Rise of the American Nation* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012);

[13] J.R. McNeil and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 2.

understand both the past and the future, histories need to mind the differential relationships to environmental harm and cause.

Marking those differences demands wedding labor and environmental history to map what Gunther Peck has called "geographies of labor," "comprising the spatial, material, and cultural connections between nature and labor."[14] This takes differential power relations seriously. It moves labor history beyond the shop floor to trace its ecological connections far beyond, and alerts labor historians to the diversity of labor through time: paid and unpaid; free and unfree; productive and reproductive; privileged and degraded; racialized and gendered.[15] I would add to these pairings, through this history of the Picher Field, work coded "industrial" and that which proponents deem postindustrial and, supposedly, environmentally benign. Instead of being united in the ways labor connects people to nature, as the early environmental historians claimed, labor history should show how work—yes, always bound up in nature—also divides people.[16] In the wider Rust Belt, deindustrialization unsettled and restructured industrial capital, race, gender, and work, with conflict at every node.

The gendering of labor history in the last generation has led in another fruitful direction for its union with environmental history.[17] Discussion of nature and labor in the past has tended toward questions of human nature, biological difference, and the fitness of raced and gendered bodies for different forms of labor. The body, a category central to feminist theory, has become a useful one in working-class history. At the same time, the exploration of the body's porosity to toxins enriches environmental history.[18] The Picher worker x-rays hint at the importance of

[14] Peck, "Nature of Labor," 214.
[15] Peck, "Nature of Labor," 222.
[16] Peck, "Nature of Labor," 220.
[17] Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
[18] Ava Baron and Eileen Boris, "'The Body' as a Useful Category for Working-Class History," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History* 4, no. 2 (2007): 23-43. On the body in environmental history more specifically: Nancy

"following the bodies," as Ava Baron and Eileen Boris put it, in the wider Rust Belt. It is through feminist thinkers that following even the bodies of male workers has become analytically critical to understanding the meanings of deindustrialization. In the ever-present *absence* of mining and milling, venerating one version of historical white male body—the hardy miner—became a (re)productive obsession in the face of a sickly modern reality, the young Chat Rat growing up in the 1980s and 1990s. Further, men and their work were not the only labor at issue in the Picher Field. Bodies tie together past and present in the mining district, from early miners' lungs to the aborted fetuses of these towns that were never allowed to be postindustrial because they had zombie mines in their neighborhoods.

Running silently beneath the public quibbling over the x-rays' use in 1982 was that the creation of zombie mines and miners in the wider rural Rust Belt was shaped by race. This, more than anything, is why the history of contests over Superfund cleanup and mining history celebration in the late twentieth century require a deeper dive into the early twentieth-century history that made Picher so overwhelmingly white. There is nothing natural or inevitable about the demographic makeup of a community, especially in such a place as this, where those boundaries had been so expressly policed.

Changing emphases in environmental history scholarship help put these histories of labor, gender, and race in fruitful dialog with one another. At the same time the lock snapped on a public health crisis in Picher, the same year Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison coined the term deindustrialization, a diverse coalition of Black civil rights leaders and white environmentalists locked arms against dump trucks loaded with toxins set to enter a primarily

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Langston, *Toxic Bodies: Hormone Disruptors and the Legacy of DES* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

Black neighborhood in Warren County, North Carolina.[19] This was the conventionally recognized birth of what has come to be called the environmental justice (EJ) movement, something that even Picher advocates eventually claimed to be a part of. Among other things, EJ movements, often visibly led by women as mothers with moral authority over children and reproduction, contested the environmental regulatory regimes that sited toxic waste disposal and factory pollution overwhelmingly in non-white neighborhoods. Environmentalism's regulatory successes helped create environmental inequalities. That is why this interdisciplinary, activist, and contemporary movement with immediate political and economic goals has been antagonistic to what activists call "mainstream environmentalism" or "white environmentalism."[20] EJ movements have not only been reactive, however, or so simply defined by women as mothers. EJ's roots were deeper, and its motivations wider, than just toxic waste disposal. EJ confronted broader inequalities in the postwar mass production systems, the mass consumption economies they created, and how space—for living, working, and playing, as their credo went—was allocated and differentially accessible by race, class, and gender.[21] Historians have begun to push the insights of EJ back in time to understand historical contests over environmental

[19] On the coining of "deindustrialization": Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2003), 3-4.
[20] On "environmentalism and the meanings we attribute to the environment [being] grounded in history, race, gender, and culture": Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014) (quotation, 3).
[21] On EJ's wide consideration of quality-of-life issues, its focus on justice beyond toxics, and women's motivation to take up activism outside of motherhood: Nancy C. Unger, "The Modern Environmental Justice Movement," in *Beyond Nature's Housekeepers: American Women in Environmental History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 187-214; Tracy E. Perkins, "Women's Pathways Into Activism: Rethinking the Women's Environmental Justice Narrative in California's San Joaquin Valley," *Organization & Environment* 25, no. 1 (Mar. 2012): 76-94; David N. Pellow, "Toward a Critical Environmental Justice Studies: Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge," *DuBois Review* 13, no. 2 (2016): 221-236; Christopher W. Wells, ed. *Environmental Justice in Postwar America: A Documentary Reader* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018); Giovanna Di Chiro, "Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environment and Social Justice," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 298-320.

inequalities.[22] I bring these insights to the wide, rural Rust Belt because deindustrialization is always an environmental justice story, beset by the paired economic and environmental calamities of disinvestment.

In the United States, but especially in the American West and Indian Country, environmental injustice runs on more than a black-white binary. Here, "the primary axes of racial power and privilege," writes Traci Brynne Voyles, "have been … anti-immigrant … and/or settler colonial."[23] Voyles reminds us that histories of environmental injustice in North America need always to be seen through settler colonialism, and the most insightful recent ruminations on the structure are about its malleability in racializing and excluding groups other than Native people.[24] As Tiffany Lethabo King contends, seeing settler pursuit of Indigenous *land* as the only driver of historical action is limited (indeed, another recent direction in histories of settler

[22] On environmental history's slowness to incorporate race as a critical category: Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (July 2003): 380-394; Kathleen Brosnan, "The Lifting Fog: Race, Work, and the Environment," *Environmental History* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 2019): 9-24. On the history of environmentalism and wilderness preservation's racism, elitism, and social construction: William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1 (Jan. 1996): 7-28; Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, "Imagining Nature and Erasing class and Race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the Construction of Wilderness," *Environmental History* 6, no. 4 (Oct. 2001): 541-560. The earliest history I know of that clearly took the insights of EJ and pushed them back in time is: Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In: An Archaeology of Environmental Racism in Chicago, 1865-1954* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005). Other influential early histories of race and environment include: Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities*; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London and New York: Verso, 2001); Dianne D. Glave and Mark Stoll, eds., "*To Love the Wind and the Rain": African Americans and Environmental History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Elizabeth D. Blum, *Love Canal Revisited: Race, Class, and Gender in Environmental Activism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Marsha Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Connie Y. Chiang, "Imprisoned Nature: Toward an Environmental History of the World War II Japanese American Incarceration," *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (April 2010): 236-267. Voyles makes this move explicit. Voyles, *The Settler Sea: California's Salton Sea and the Consequences of Colonialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 15. The critical success of recent titles indicates a new appreciation in the wider profession: Brian McCammack, *Landscapes of Hope: Nature and the Great Migration in Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[23] "Comments by Traci Brynne Voyles, Loyola Marymount University," in "H-Environment Roundtable Review of Finney's *Black Faces, White Spaces*, and Zimring's *Clean and White*," *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* 7, no. 1 (2017), 23.

[24] Voyles, *Settler Sea*, 11-12.

colonialism is toward watery environments).[25] Moving offshore, King argues that making land the defining feature of settler colonialism runs the risk of missing genocide and conquest, as well as the potential for intersectional and coalitional politics between Black and Indigenous people. It misses that settler colonialism's equally important thrust is to exchange Indigenous *relations* for settler ones. Those settler relations move in many directions, including toward nonhuman animals and other life.[26] Picher was a noted "sundown town" whose workers and elite power structure excluded Black workers; white workers violently deported ethnic European immigrants; and it was all undergirded by settler colonial access to Quapaw land, although in a paradoxical way: Picher Field operators used the paternalistic logic of settler colonial "Indian Affairs" to profit without taking full legal possession of Quapaw lands. Similar to King, Iyko Day argues that the disposability of the immigrant, dealt with through restriction, and *indisposability* of Black Americans, managed by segregation, share "an overarching economic rationale of settler colonialism." Mixed with Indigenous land, racialized, exploitable, and deportable labor made white property and capital.[27] In Picher's case it was these other relations that mattered more than the exclusion of Quapaw people from the land, although in settler colonial fashion, Quapaw people continue to reap the whirlwind of foreclosed futures on chat-covered land.

When Keeling and Sandlos describe zombie mines as stalking "future generations and their use of the land," they might as well be describing settler colonialism. Mining history helps show why it is no wonder that scholars of Native American and Indigenous Studies have given

[25] See, for example, Joshua Reid, *The Sea is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs, an Indigenous Borderlands People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), and Voyles, *Settler Sea*.
[26] Voyles, *Settler Sea*, 13; Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 7-8.
[27] Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 31-2.

the Anthropocene little credence; for Native people, colonization has always produced the sorts of apocalyptic environmental changes that comfortable scholars in the Global North are lately coming to terms with by defining the Anthropocene. Many Native people have always contested the terms of settler colonial extraction and cared for the ecological health of their homelands, even as others, such as a minority of Quapaw people, occasionally have accommodated extraction to navigate narrow paths toward economic survival. The labor and environmental history of the Picher Field help answer Voyles's question: "What are the relationships between antiblackness, settler colonialism, and anti-immigrant Orientalism in shaping the environmental history of the U.S.?"[28] Picher miners tightly bound those relationships together in their working years, and after the mine closures the boosters for a permanent Picher summoned the zombie miner to do the same.

Rust has been the icon of deindustrialization, and points to the scalar nature of Peck's "geographies of labor." We have a whole region named for it: The Rust Belt. And rust, if nothing else, is an environmental process, the oxidation of iron in contact with water and air. It is the result of the abandonment of capital fixed in place as machinery, and a telltale sign that the political economy has shifted its gaze and investment elsewhere. Workers and their communities tend to be keenly aware of that gaze and its new directions. Thus, the environmental history of rural deindustrialization requires thinking about the scales at which people experienced it. Deindustrialization—like industrialization—manifested in worker bodies, at the level of geopolitics, and all points in between. In a grand narrative of U.S history, the Rust Belt's loss was the Sunbelt's gain. In fact, it was the Sunbelt's origin story. Federal policies during the New Deal and industry preferences for unorganized, cheap labor combined to usher United States

[28] "Comments by Traci Brynne Voyles," 23.

industry from northeast to southwest. But if the Tri-State district was at times the Southwest, the Midwest, the West, and other regions that contemporaries used to place it, and it deindustrialized so painfully, where, on earth, was this place?

I call Picher's place the wider rural Rust Belt. Its imperfect fit in either the commonly accepted Rust Belt or the Sunbelt helps illustrate the metropolitan focus of so much twentieth-century U.S. history and emphasizes the need to look beyond those spaces. The Rust Belt is an urban agglomeration encompassing parts of the Great Lakes, the Midwest, and mid-Atlantic, characterized by large and mid-sized industrial cities. The Sunbelt, its historians argue, has been equally metropolitan. In fact, some argue that it is less a coherent region than an urban development strategy. Metropolitan boosters in a southerly arc from places as different as Virginia, the Deep South, Texas, the Southwest, and California capitalized on the "metropolitan preferences" of policy and industry to forward a postindustrial, high-technology growth model for the future, predicated on low taxes, cheap labor, and recreational amenities in warm climes.[29] The Picher Field became only an outdated backwater and distant hinterland to that Sunbelt development.

I choose the wider rural Rust Belt for its associations with deindustrialization but highlight that the name makes sense only if we admit the Rust Belt as a process, instead of only a place. The Rust Belt in scholarly and popular vernacular is far too narrow in both time and space. Deindustrialization is not captured by singular places like Flint or Youngstown, or isolated only

[29] Quotation: Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). On the making of the Sunbelt: Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, eds. *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 4-16. On the question of the Sunbelt as region or development strategy (it's both!), see Needham, "Sunbelt Imperialism: Boosters, Navajos, and Energy Development in the Metropolitan Southwest," in Nickerson and Dochuk, *Sunbelt Rising*, 240. "The metropolitan answer [Sunbelt as metropolitan growth strategy] is more seductive…. In largely ignoring region, however, these metropolitan histories miss key elements of Sunbelt growth that reached beyond metropolitan borders."

to the 1980s, according to Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott, labor historians who recognized this but whose insights have not traveled very widely in the twenty years since. "It was a much broader, more fundamental, historical transformation." What came to be called deindustrialization as it happened so visibly in the 1980s crisis in steel and related heavy industries "turned out to be a more socially complicated, historically deep, geographically diverse, and politically perplexing phenomenon than previously thought."[30] Robert O. Self goes so far as to discard "deindustrialization" entirely, in favor of "the spatial dynamics of industrial restructuring."[31] He emphasizes that the United States remains a deeply industrial society, because the country has maintained its real numbers of manufacturing workers and because it still depends upon industrial modes of producing the stuff of life, wherever that production happens. While I appreciate the intellectual precision of "the spatial dynamics of industrial restructuring" and my story listens to the ways Picherites gauged their place in the world on those terms, I will not make you read that phrase perhaps dozens of times in the pages that follow. Instead, I use deindustrialization. It, too, is a clunky term, turning a noun (industry) into a verb (industrialize), into another noun (deindustrialization) in the way only academics can. Compared with "the spatial dynamics of industrial restructuring," however, deindustrialization wins on brevity. The sense of losing their industry was how Picherites experienced it. Industrial production that used to happen *here* now happens elsewhere, and there are others to blame.

Regardless, this study is of the local, regional, national, and global scales at which Picherites viewed what the geographer David Harvey has called "uneven geographical

[30] Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins*, 2.
[31] Robert O. Self, "California's Industrial Garden: Oakland and the East Bay in the Age of Deindustrialization," in Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins*, 160.

development" under the shifting investment patterns of global capitalism.[32] They were variously the vanguard of western progress bringing capitalist industrialization to Quapaw lands; "backward" people left behind by postwar affluence (the mid-century welfare state notwithstanding); and the ideological forebears of the United States' push out into global power after World War II. The history likewise follows the historian Jeffrey Manuel to see mining as an illustrative industry for watching deindustrialization. Mining represents the leading edge of deindustrialization because the search for finite ores in nature is performed with depletion on the horizon.[33] Mining always embodied the reality only confronted by American industry writ large in the 1980s: that deindustrialization wasn't a period or a place, but instead a "process," to quote Cowie and Heathcott again, "a historical transformation that marks not just a quantitative change in employment, but a fundamental change in the social fabric on a par with industrialization itself."[34] In mining districts, deindustrialization beckons from the beginning. While usually that has meant the straightforward movement of mining activity from one hole to the next, one district to another, the Picher Field shows in stark relief the unravelling of U.S. mining entirely, as it decamped offshore, predicting the fate of industries to follow.

I organize "Zombie Miners" to use history's insights to understand rural deindustrialization. In the Picher Field, efforts to nurse the ailing industry and to commemorate the mining past in the years of deindustrialization cannot be understood apart from the racial homogeneity established in the district's formative years. Likewise, its deindustrializing travails cannot be separated from the environment created by that industry. In Chapter 1, "The Poor

[32] David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2019).
[33] Jeffrey Manuel, *Taconite Dreams: The Struggle to Sustain Mining on Minnesota's Iron Range, 1915-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), xxvi. See also: Brian James Leech, *The City that Ate Itself: Butte, Montana and Its Expanding Berkeley Pit* (Reno & Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2018).
[34] Cowie and Heathcott, *Beyond the Ruins*, 5-6.

Man's Camp, The White Man's Camp, and Nature," I describe how racial exclusion and class-based exploitation formed together in the Picher Field on place-based, industry-organizing ideas about nature from "discovery" to the silicosis and tuberculosis crises of the district's boom years in the 1920s. At the nadir of this first public health crisis, the Great Depression and the New Deal's support for organized labor culminated in a protracted strike, a national media blitz decrying Tri-State environmental conditions, congressional investigation, and a national silicosis conference in the district by the early 1940s, the subjects of chapter two, "The Last Stand of the Poor man's Camp." Those titular "camps"—of the poor man and the white man—were oft-cited explanations for the district's development, binding inextricably the histories of race, labor, manhood, and nature in the Tri-State district.

The third chapter, "Mickey Mantle's Clean White Ass Escapes the Mine at Midcentury," describes two post-World War II icons: the eventual Baseball Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle, who grew up in Commerce, Oklahoma, the son of a miner; and postwar U.S. power radiating outward into the world. Both cases reveal larger forces tilting away from the Tri-State and its rough primary industry. By moving from common shoveler to ground boss, and willing his son out of the district via baseball, Mantle's father, Mutt, fit Carl Zimring's conception of racial status as derived from one's distance from the dirt.[35] Yet the postwar extension of a settler vision for white management of nonwhite peoples and landscapes around the world led to national policies that both affirmed Tri-Staters' vision for (white) American greatness, and bounced back against them by flooding metals markets with cheaply produced, rich foreign ores that critically injured the domestic mining industry. In Cold War minerals policy, onlookers foresaw the end for many western American metal mines. They were correct.

[35] Carl Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2015).

Chapters 4 and 5 describe Picher's pursuit of permanence. Chapter 4, "The Miner's Diaspora, a New Region, and the Labor-Leisure Divide," follows the Picherites who left and the merchants and civic leaders who remained from the 1950s to 1970s. It describes three related processes that accompanied the end of mining: first, what I call "the miner's diaspora," the Picherites pushed from the district by industrial decline to take similarly dangerous, dirty work in other mining camps; second, the pursuit, by those who remained in Picher, of federal funding to support what feminist theorists term "social reproduction," the work of making the right kind of people to sustain a society; and third, the reorientation of the Tri-State mining district to new regional allegiances surrounding Grand Lake, the reservoir made downstream of the mines. Chapter 5, "Ghost Creatures, Zombie Miners, and the Return of the Poor Man's Camp," returns to Picher to explore how residents searched for permanence from the 1980s to the twenty-first century. One version of permanence lived in the memories of mining days past. Celebrations of that past, however, ran headlong into another search for permanence by state and federal agencies working to remediate toxic mine water and waste. Fittingly, Picherites opened their mining museum, inaugurated annual mining reunions, and generally waxed nostalgic about their mining history—and the type of white man who had done the work—at the same time as the federal Environmental Protection Agency redefined the district as a dangerous place.

The epilogue, "'Picher May be Gone, but it Never Will be Dead," re-centers the Quapaw people in the district's history as the settler mining towns faced final, existential threats. With the towns' disappearance, the potential for zombie miners to influence remediation policy diminished. This leaves the Quapaws, locked in long-running relationships with agencies of the state, to ensure that zombie mines will also stay quiet.

Taking, at the same time, a wider and more focused view of rural America in the twentieth century offers some important insights. The wider Rust Belt informs what has become the most ready-at-hand explanation of contemporary American politics: the metropolitan versus rural divide. The environmental history of the wider Rust Belt is critical to taking seriously the real, material reasons for that perceived divergence. It also illustrates how conservative rural spaces are a caricature of a more complicated, ideologically diverse past and present in the white, working-class United States. This corner of Oklahoma, ultraconservative in most respects, was also among the very last to turn for Republicans in the late twentieth century. As this history will show, over the long term, northeastern Oklahoma was rife with dissension from the top-down political narratives that elites told, including both the populist mine operators in the early part of the century and area newspaper publishers throughout the century.

This history also bears important lessons for contemporary environmental and labor politics in an age of climate crisis. Cross-class solidarity in whiteness, over the long run in the Tri-State district, produced fleeting benefits for white workers. Aligning with mine operators because they saw their manliness and American nativity as the natural beneficiaries of American capitalism, workers placed a trust in owners that, underneath the outward show of concern, was not warranted once the industry faced its deepest crises. The exclusion of Black and immigrant workers in the early days under the banner of white masculine breadwinning and mastery should inform the recent rise of white nationalism and, indeed, outright fascism. White nationalism in the age of America's rising empire undergirded Tri-State whiteness, an assertive, boisterous racial identity aligning white workers with their capitalist bosses because, as native-born white Americans, they stood to demand certain spoils.

The resurgent white nationalism of the present, on the other hand, is better understood as the death knell of American empire, what the historian Greg Grandin calls "the end of the myth."[36] Those spoils of the past are gone. From the myth of continual frontier renewal by lurching outward, the United States has turned inward to build a wall. The promises of expansion—peace and progress—have come up empty. While most liberal commentators perceive a threat in the transnational right-wing movement's climate change science denialism, watching their policy goals might alert us to a more dire conclusion that they accept the realities of climate change.[37] Their exclusionary policy responses, then, form something we might call ecofascism. Ecofascism mixes the authoritarian politics of the far right with a brand of conservationist or environmentalist concerns to claim that certain people belong to a certain space whose resources belong to only those chosen people. Like the Picher Field's foundational articulation of whiteness, it is a theory that gazes around the world, is worried about demographic change in a given bounded space, is and intensely protectionist.[38] Taking these rural white workers and their communities seriously means reckoning with what a truly just transition away from extraction might look like, which would incorporate populations of all sorts that have come to feel like surplus, unattached to the financialized modern economy.

Again, as with the past, in this rapidly changing climate poor and working-class people of color bear the heaviest burdens. Most of them are in the Global South, to be sure, but we already have ample evidence of the disparate outcomes of climate-change-inflected disasters in the

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[36] Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019).
[37] Jedediah Purdy, *This Land is Our Land: The Struggle for a New Commonwealth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), xxi.
[38] Ecofascism has motivated several recent mass shootings in the United States and elsewhere: Kathryn Joyce, "What is 'Ecofascism'—and What Does it Have to do with the Buffalo Shooting?" *Salon*, May 18, 2022, accessed Nov. 11, 2022, https://www.salon.com/2022/05/18/what-is-ecofascism--and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-the-buffalo-shooting/.

United States. We also can predict the class-based response to their specter: to ensure the viability of the human species, many elites can sooner imagine the colonization of Mars than the dismantling of an extractive economic order that has so quickly rendered this planet nearly unlivable. This is the history of racial and ethnic exclusion in a small corner of the United States and the persistence of its mythology beyond the end of its material rewards. It shows how limited were those rewards, and how intensive were their costs. We might see in this a lesson at many scales, from our embodied selves, to our nation-states, to our atmospheres.

As Oklahoma's greatest historian, Angie Debo, wrote in 1949, the state is not just another state, but "a lens in which the long rays of time are focused into the brightest of light." Thus clarified, the looker can see "dim facets of the American character" brilliantly revealed. "For in Oklahoma all the experiences that went into the making of the nation have been speeded up. Here all the American traits have been intensified. The one who can interpret Oklahoma can grasp the meaning of America in the modern world."[39] Here's to trying, on both counts.

[39] Angie Debo, *Oklahoma: Foot-Loose and Fancy-Free* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), vii.

# 1. THE POOR MAN'S CAMP, THE WHITE MAN'S CAMP, AND NATURE

In 1913 and 1914 the heir to a Gilded Age milling fortune from the old Joplin District leased tracts in northeastern Oklahoma to explore for lead and zinc ores. Oliver S. Picher paid landowners a five percent royalty on the ore taken from beneath their property. Soon he made subleases on those same lands to smaller mine operators. From them he would receive seventeen-and-a-half percent in royalties.[1] In the meantime the Eagle White Lead Company of Cincinnati approached Picher, leading to a merger that made him president of a mining and milling fiefdom over the town that took his name: Picher, Oklahoma.[2]

Others were similarly turning leases into subleases, including the very same people to whom these original partnerships leased. On a given property the paper relationships formed a great pyramid of subleases, on down to a small partnership who actually dug the ore and eked out something of a living in the new Picher Field.[3] Those shovelers dreamed of following their lessors into the ranks of the mine operators, collecting royalties instead of bending their backs and hoisting ore. This was "the poor man's camp." In industry jargon it meant the domination of

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[1] "Agreement," O.S. Picher and Velie Mines Corporation, June 1, 1919. National Archives and Records Administration Record Group 75, R675-CCF, Book 93, Page 290, 1919. *Quapaw Agency*, *OKLA*. Hereafter NARA RG 75. Accessed at: Gary Anderson Collection, Box 5, Folder 13. Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma Libraries, Norman, Oklahoma. Hereafter cited Anderson Collection, WHC. The collection includes research materials Anderson collected from other archives, including National Archives and Records Administration branches at College Park, MD, and Fort Worth, TX. Thus, I will cite the Anderson Collection with identifying information for both repositories.

[2] Tri-State Survey Committee, *A Preliminary Report on Living, Working, and Health Conditions in the Tri-State Mining Area, Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas*, 1939, 43. Picher Mining Collection, Box 151, Pittsburg State University Special Collections, Pittsburg, Kansas. The Picher Mining Collection was developed and held at the Picher Mining Museum until its closure in 2007, whereupon it moved to the Baxter Springs Heritage Center and Museum. The museum has since loaned most of the collection to Pittsburg State University's Special Collections, where it remains unprocessed. It comprises 168 boxes, many lacking folders or any system of organization. The archive holds a rough "finding aid" with varying levels of detail (or none at all!) about the contents of each box. Thus, my citations are frequently incomplete, but include whatever level of detail was available, usually only box numbers.

[3] Arrell Morgan Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma* (Norman, 1972), 147. Miami, Oklahoma, real estate men James F. Robinson and C.M. Harvey, together with their well-drilling partners George L. and A.E. Coleman, were the most prominent and successful in doing the same as Oliver S. Picher. Soon they chartered their partnership as the Commerce Mining and Royalty Company. Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, 42.

a district's production by small, independent operators.[4] In the Tri-State it was also a vision of upward mobility. From working for wages in the lease of another man, to working for one's self and moving into the operator class, the district belonged to the poor man, not the robber baron, at least in theory and in the early practice of the district established in the 1850s near Joplin, Missouri.

The land above this new strike in Oklahoma, however, belonged mostly to Quapaw people, a small Native nation removed to this sliver of northeast Indian Territory in 1834. Mining fortunes, but not landownership, awaited some settler-miners in the Picher Field.[5] In this straightforward way, in dusty documents so near one another in an archive, mine operators made their relationships of differential power mediated by race and social class, in the pursuit of remunerative nature. This was racial capitalism. Miners almost entirely excluded Quapaw people from their former homelands, white men with money quickly made more, and white men without money quickly got sore, all while chat piles mounted on what remained Quapaw homelands.

This being the United States of America, however, such a snapshot of Picher Field class formation greatly simplifies things. In a settler colonial nation-state, race never happens on one axis only. Typically, scholars assert, the settler colonial schema is a triangle of colonial expansion built on Native American exclusion and the forced inclusion of African Americans for

[4] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, 39.
[5] The only full-length history of the district is Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza*. As his title indicates, it hardly had a place for Quapaw people, but does cover the leasing system before mostly moving them from the stage. The following examples, all including the same lot near the eventual site of Picher, Oklahoma, suitably illustrate the arrangements by which agents of the eventual Commerce Mining and Royalty Company and Oliver S. Picher were imbricated in a network of leases from Quapaw people and to one another: "Mining or Business Lease," Lucy Lotson Beaver and Alex Lewis Beaver to J.F. Robinson, Jan. 28, 1915. NARA RG 75-CCF, Book 42, page unknown. Anderson Collection Box 5, Folder 9, WHC; "Mining Lease," Lucy Lotson Beaver to C.M. Harvey, Nov. 3, 1913. RG 75-CCF, Book 37, no page. "Assignment of Mining Leases," George W. Beck, Jr. to S.C. Fullerton, June 30, 1914 NARA RG 75-CCF, book 38, Page 641 and Anderson Collection Box 5, Folder 9, WHC; "Mining Lease," S.C. Fullerton to O.S. Picher, June 30, 1914. NARA RG 75-CCF, book 38, page 302, and Anderson Collection Box 5, Folder 9, WHC.

the purposes of domination and subjugation.[6] Locally, however, district laborers and operators excluded African Americans. And, as in other parts of the Great Southwest, the West, Midwest, or any number of various regional identifiers contemporaries used for the district, the area's settlers proved their whiteness through immigrant exclusion as well.[7]

It was largely in the relationship between native-born and immigrant whites that Tri-State racial formation bore critically on class formation. Asked in 1920 why the district's laborers had never chosen to organize in a union, an early miner answered, "I reckon 'cause we want this to be a white man's camp. We don't want no Bolos or I.W.W.'s or labor grafters who steal the pot before the draw." The previous fall they had run "some dirty Austrians and hunkies" out of town for seeking work while a strike shut down the Pittsburg, Kansas, coal field from whence they had come.[8] By asserting that maintenance of the white man's camp depended on barring Austrians, Hungarians, Bolsheviks, and members of the International Workers of the World, the miner illustrated how Tri-State whiteness was about the exclusion of labor radicals and their organizations as much as Quapaw landowners or African Americans. At this crossroads of the South, the Midwest, and the West, they didn't need a union to push labor radicals out of the area, for they were agreed that their manly white American independence could accomplish the task.[9]

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[6] "Comments by Traci Brynne Voyles," 23. As Voyles writes, Yen Le Espiritu's concept of "differential inclusion" is useful here: Espiritu, "Managing Urban Diversity through Differential Inclusion in Singapore," *Society and Space* 35 (2017): 1033-1052. For a foundational account of the triangular process of settler colonial racialization, see Patrick Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 866-905.

[7] "Comments by Traci Brynne Voyles," 23.

[8] Alex Mac[_____], quoted in George G. Suggs, *Union Busting in the Tri-State: The Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri Metal Workers' Strike of 1935* (Norman, 1986), 11.

[9] The Tri-State was far from the only place that claimed to be a "white man's camp," but it diverged from most mining areas on this issue of organized labor, illustrating a point that Elizabeth Jameson has made about how differently workers used the word "white" across the West and through time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At Cripple Creek, Colorado, another camp with high percentages of "white," American-born miners, the boundaries excluded Asians, southern and eastern Europeans, and Mexican Americans, but not Black Americans, who lived in the camp and performed menial labor. These exclusions were *not* based in anti-union sentiment, either, as Cripple Creek was among the most heavily unionized places in the United States from 1894-

If the poor man's camp and the white man's camp seem at odds, one being a class-based identification and the other a cross-class alliance in whiteness, in the Tri-State they went together like the pickhandle in the miners' palm. The poor man's camp ideal did not mean that poor men were antagonistic to their socioeconomic betters. Rather, the white working-class conservatism of the Tri-State showed quite the opposite. Poor men were capitalists in waiting, white men ready to be rewarded with a share of the country's prosperity for their devotion to market principles, their American nativity, and their manly ideals. In reality, as the labor historian Jarod Roll has shown, from their district's founding in the 1850s, this tradition of white working-class conservatism "encouraged working-class white men, particularly the native born, to pursue narrowing economic opportunities through reckless physical action and often violent assertions of racial and nativist advantage."[10] At times white nationalism made good on these promises, but the upward mobility promised by the poor man's camp was less a fact than an aspiration by the late nineteenth century. Rather than a timeless reality, it was a historically contingent, fleeting moment in the early development of an industrial district. It offered the promises of Republican free labor ideology in miniature. Its occasional reality made the poor man's camp, as aspiration, especially durable. Large economic forces influenced it, and economic elites leveraged the poor man's camp tradition, but by and large the workers "acted consciously and consistently for decades according to their own interests—as they understood them, past, present, and future."[11]

The limited reality of the poor man's camp depended upon maintaining the white man's camp, an anti-organized labor stance that placed the operator at the end of a white worker's

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1904. See: Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 140-160.

[10] Jarod Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune: White Working-Class Conservatism in American Metal Mining, 1850-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 4.

[11] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 4.

expenditure of intelligence and pluck. The goal of a poor man's camp disciple—the manly independence of working for ones' self, owing tribute to no union—was bound inextricably with the exclusion of nonwhite labor radicals, a wide category in those days, including eastern and southern Europeans, mostly Catholic and Jewish. These complementary explanations for Tri-State labor organization are utmost for understanding the rise, fall, and commemoration of mining industries in the Picher Field, the making of zombie mines and zombie miners.

The explanation for a small partnership's ability to strike it rich—the essence of the poor man's camp—was nature. The ore's "shallow depth … and the relative ease with which the rock is worked make it possible to prospect and even to open a mine with a limited amount of capital," a 1912 Oklahoma Geological Survey publication claimed. These "geological conditions" that gave the Tri-State its reputation as a poor man's camp, the report asserted, were "unique among the important mining regions of the world." In addition to the shallow depth of the ores, the deposits were also "discontinuous or 'pockety'," making it "not feasible to erect large central concentrating plants as is the case in most mining districts." Instead, it was "more economical to concentrate the ores in small mills which can be easily moved." Further, "the low grade" of many of the upper ores "prohibits the shipping of these ores to a centrally located concentrating plant." Instead, each mine—on small plots of usually just forty acres, justified by similar geological determinism—had its own mill, a condition of most mining leases.[12] To these interpreters and many in the communities they built, nature herself created the poor man's camp by making uneconomical the heavy investment of fixed capital in place.

What contemporaries saw as a geologically determined industrial order ramified broadly in Tri-State social and economic life. It placed the district in an especially unstable position

[12] L.C. Snider, "Preliminary Report on the Lead and Zinc of Oklahoma," (Norman: Oklahoma Geological Survey, 1912), 15.

relative to global mineral markets, where the increasing production of richer, more cheaply produced foreign ores always threatened to undercut the district. That position put Tri-Staters' sense of their American independence up against the apparent need for tariff protection. They justified that dependence, in part, on the racial inferiority of those foreign ores "produced by the peon labor of Mexico." When American mining was not suitably insulated from those peon ores, many southwestern Missouri miners had been "thrown out of employment" in the first decade of the century.[13] Such protection by federal fiat was not a contradiction; it was the return on an investment in their white American nativity.[14]

The "low grade" of Tri-State ores relative to other lead-zinc districts also meant lots of waste rock, or chat. Only about six percent of the material taken from the ground had a life beyond the mill.[15] The high silica content allowed chat's deadly dust to blow on the wind. The small mills meant that rather than the accumulation of chat at a central mill, the district experienced a wide dispersal of chat across the camps even while they sloughed off their boomtown character and became more settled communities. As public health and social reformers would come to emphasize, the industrial hazard did not only belong to miners. It was a social problem. It threatened communities.

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[13] *Tarriff Hearings Before the Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives, Sixtieth Congress, 1908-1909* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 2355. The quotations come from a Joplin *Globe-Democrat* editorial of November 18, 1908, read into the congressional record. For a later example, see also J.D. Conover, "A Survey of Zinc Producing Districts," *Joplin Globe 1929 Magazine*, Jan. 1929, 13. Box 2, Folder 081 NARA FW. "The large tonnage of Mexican zinc concentrates would unquestionably be shipped to the retort smelters of the United States, displacing about one-half of our present Tri-State production, if it were not for the zinc tariff."

[14] I borrow this phrasing from George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, 2006).

[15] E.C. Warkentin and R.B. Ady, *A Study of the Dust and Related Factors in the Zinc and Lead Mining Industry of Oklahoma* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma State Health Department, 1940), 6. Box 61 PSU. This figure is for the Picher Field, the portion of the wider Tri-State District with the richest ores.

These problems of silica-laden chat only worsened as the district expanded into the Indian Territory and, after 1907, Oklahoma. The social and industrial order—small mine leases, scattered small mills, miner dwellings shadowed by chat piles, and an overriding sense of possibility for upward social mobility—abided in the new Picher Field of the 1910s. Some of their geological justifications did not. The industrial order was changing, too. As the Eagle-Picher and Commerce companies' systematic prospecting programs indicated, the area that became the Picher Field did not possess such "pockety" ores close to the grassroots. Instead, the new mines were deeper, richer. While geology alone hadn't determined the Joplin District's social arrangement—indeed it was comparison on a global market that made "low grade" or "pockety" ores and thus what operations were profitable—the miners' encounter with new geological conditions might have encouraged them to change course.

The ideal of the poor man's camp, however, militated against such adaptability.[16] In material reality, mine lease pyramiding and miner dependence on "paying partners" belied the reality of a poor man's camp tradition as early as the 1870s. The small lease, more than anything else, sustained it.[17] The Picher Field developed amid a boom in industrial metals production for World War I. Small, independent operators continued to gain hold of leases, if, perhaps, not joining Oliver Picher as barons of companies like Eagle-Picher. A brief "depression" after the war—notably, the period of the miners' expulsion of European ethnic labor radicals from the district—hardly squelched that optimism. The Tri-State District, with the Picher Field producing about 90 percent of its ores, hit peak production in the mid-1920s. When district operators

[16] William James Cassidy, "The Tri-State Zinc-Lead Mining Region: Growth, Problems and Prospects," Ph.D. Diss. University of Pittsburgh, 1955. Cassidy's argument was essentially that geological, industrial, and social structures in the Tri-State promoted what we might call "path dependence."
[17] Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza*, 147.

formed a lobbying group in 1924, it had about sixty members, representing approximately half of the field's output of lead and zinc.[18]

That organization, the Tri-State Zinc and Lead Ore Producers Association (OPA), is critical to understanding the making of race, class, and nature in the Picher Field. Its members embodied the poor man's camp (and, not coincidentally, of the less frequently cited white man's camp). They had been miners. They would go on calling themselves miners. The OPA formed with the purposes to "collect, compile and disseminate" statistical data about their industry; to "study problems affecting the business of the district as a whole," among them "casualties, working conditions, health of employes [sic], insurance, taxation, power and freight rates"; to keep contact with legislative and administrative departments in their three states dealing with laws and regulations of mining, as well as the federal Department of Commerce, Bureau of Mines, Geological Survey, and Office of Indian Affairs; and finally, "to increase the consumption of zinc by advertising and to lend its support to research looking toward the discovery of new uses of this metal and general expansion of the market for zinc products."[19] In practice, the statistical work was usually easy for members to agree on, studying business problems took up much of its institutional capacity, and cooperating with government meant, frequently, its reverse, with government following the OPA to help make advantageous rules for district operators.

Early in the OPA's existence, a couple of issues soon dominated those "interests" the OPA set out to protect. As with other industry groups in the early twentieth century, such as oil,

[18] Julian Conover to Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., April 14, 1924. Box 165 PSU.
[19] Conover to Department of Commerce; Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, 10. This later study and other OPA documents list their purposes slightly differently: first, to promote the interests of its members; second, to collect, compile, and record data concerning their industry for the informed use of its members; and third, to cooperate with authorities of government in administering the laws affecting lead and zinc mining in the Tri-State District, whenever requested.

overproduction and its attendant low prices came to the fore. More critically and longer lasting, however, operators realized how their cooperation with one another and with government could help them avoid costly lawsuits from workers disabled by laboring in their dusty industry and living in cramped quarters. In 1927 the OPA opened what came to be called the Picher Clinic, site of its most tangible work as arbiter of race, class, and environment in the Tri-State. From concept to closure, the Picher Clinic protected employers by collecting and controlling information about the Picher Field's environment and the bodies that shaped it.

Having gotten hold of land through Indian leases and one another by organizing the OPA, the operators' quest to control the environment was a longer challenge. Here again the making of an archive is instructive: in the OPA's collection are scrapbooks filled with newspaper clippings. Among stories about metals markets and price fluctuations, those marking the progress of mine dewatering efforts outnumber all others, "'cause underground this land is wet," as an early miner put it.[20] Water courses through the history of the mining district, and if the archive is any indication, its removal from mine workings was as celebrated an achievement as the finding of ore. It's one reason people such as Oliver Picher could gain a Quapaw lease at five percent royalty and turn it around at seventeen-and-a-half percent. Negotiating with friendly Indian Affairs officials, early operators justified that low first lease royalty rate on the grounds that they were working in unproven territory and mine development was costly.[21] A large part of that expense went to "beating the water" that obsessed operators and industry onlookers.[22] Its abundance on the surface, compared to other western mining sites, was actually another positive

[20] "Mr. Z" quoted in Tri-State Survey Committee, "Preliminary Report, Appendix B," 17.
[21] Illegible to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 22, 1922. NARA RG 75-CCF, Quapaw 1907-1939, and Anderson Collection, Box 5, Folder 16, WHC. The signatories represented Quapaw landholders challenging the pyramided leasing structure in 1922, demanding that the Indian Bureau cut out lucrative intermediate leases that skimmed royalties from Quapaw lessors and reduced the amount that should also go to competent miners performing the work.
[22] "Evans Beating Water at Old No. 8 Lease," *Miami News-Record*, April 26, 1936.

environmental determinant of the district's success.[23] Nearly any mine site had ready access to clean water. However, that same abundance gave the Picher Field a flood problem. Just west of the Ozark Plateau, western Ottawa County was flat and low-lying, drained by meandering Tar and Lytle creeks on their way south to Spring River at Miami.[24] Yet in the same mining season, spring floods were followed within weeks by droughts that ground mills to a halt for the lack of fresh water.[25] Water, not silica dust, was the operators' first problem.

Battling this problem, more than the work of extraction alone, made the Tri-State a landscape of intensification, an assembly of infrastructural feedback loops that collectively transformed the country's energy use.[26] Surface floods, human-made water wells near mines, and water utility infrastructure corroded by acidic mine water all sent their flow into mine workings, causing operators to redouble pumping efforts.[27] Brought to the surface, that water in turn polluted the once "sweet" creeks and rivers of the Picher Field.[28] Getting water out of mines, and keeping it out, necessitated reshaping waterways above ground.[29] These fluid interactions and the human efforts to change them helped create a landscape of intensification as animal muscle

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[23] "De-Sliming and Water in Mills," *Miami News-Record*, Mar. 8, 1925.
[24] No author, "Living Conditions," n.d. (ca. 1920s), 8. National Archives and Records Administration RG 70, Bureau of Mines Health and Safety Branch, Records of the Pitcher [sic], OK Clinic 1927-32, Box 2, Folder 081. Hereafter NARA FW.
[25] For example, in 1934. "Shortage of Water Keeps a Mill Idle," *Joplin Globe*, March 18, 1934. "Drouth Drying Up Mine Water Supply," *Joplin Globe*, July 22, 1934; "Drouth Keeps Ten Mills from Running," *Joplin Globe*, Aug. 2, 1934; "Shortage of Water is Becoming Acute," *Joplin Globe*, Aug. 2, 1934; "Drouth Aiding to Curtail Production," *Joplin Globe*, July 15, 1934.
[26] Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 2.
[27] Note these two *Joplin Globe* headlines a week apart: "Water in Oronogo Bottoms is Beaten," *Joplin Globe*, June 2, 1935; and "Rains Raise Water in Oronogo Field," *Joplin Globe*, June 9, 1935; "Wells Plugged in Mine Field," *Miami News-Record*, June 24, 1934; "Artesian Wells Being Plugged," *Miami News-Record*, July 15, 1934; "Find 66 Deep Wells in Old Mine Fields," unknown paper, n.d.; "Find 37 Deep Wells in Webb City Field," *Joplin Globe*, Sept. 6, 1936; "Have Water Battle in Webb City Area," unknown paper, n.d.; "Wells Plugged in Mine Field," *Miami News-Record* June 24, 1934; "Artesian Wells Being Plugged," *Miami News-Record* July 15, 1934.
[28] Handwritten note, undated (ca. 1934-1939), no author. "Dewatering—community job—can't do individ[ually]. … Pollution—need for some poll.[ution] Regul.[ations]." Box 5 PSU.
[29] "Galena Plans to Change Channel of Short Creek to Drain Mines," unknown newspaper, n.d., "70 Men Working on Tar Creek Cut-Off to Shorten Stream," *Miami News-Record*, June 24, 1934; "WPA Employing 286 On Oronogo Drainage," *Miami News-Record*, Jan. 12, 1936.

power—human shovelers and horse-driven hoists—gave way to steam-powered pumps and eventually digging machinery.

Mining is always an energy-intensive endeavor, whether that energy is human muscle, mule muscle, or fuel. Only fossil energy, however, could dewater mines on the growing scale and at the increasing depths that the Tri-State district experienced across the early twentieth century. Oil and gas entrepreneurs from southeastern Kansas hawked their next discovery to Tri-State operators and cities, hoping to gain lucrative contracts supplying the growing demand. The copious energy supplied by the burgeoning Mid-Continent oil and gas field enabled the scale of extraction that created the above-ground extractive landscape that came to define the district: mountainous chat piles and fantastically polluted water. Fossil energy created the mines where shovelers enacted their rugged, independent bona fides. Then it challenged those shovelers' status through mechanization and, after the end of mining, left behind hollow containers for liquid water to fill, dissolve heavy metals, and spill onto the land. As dewatering articles were endemic in local newspapers, so were growing quantities of horsepower and gallons per minute perennial topics of conversation.[30]

Intensification was also a bulwark against deindustrialization. Keeping hope alive for future operations required beating back the water even in abandoned mines.[31] Then, in the extraction of mineral, all mining history is the history of deindustrialization.[32] Despite claims of permanence around large strikes, every actor knows that mining in any one place can only be temporary, so its architects quickly search for technological solutions to make it last. Usually these mean intensification via massive mechanization to increase the "through-put" of marginal

[30] "Water at Oronogo Records Increase," *Joplin Globe*, Mar. 17, 1935; "Dewatering in Old Fields Speeded Up," *Joplin Globe*, Apr. 5, 1936.
[31] "Engineer Examines Drainage Project," *Joplin Globe* Aug. 2, 1934; "Artesian Wells Being Plugged."
[32] Manuel, *Taconite Dreams*, xxvi.

ores to find profit in high volume.[33] Such a process intensifies energy use relative to the quantity of product created in the end. In the Tri-State, one type of technological fix caused a proliferation of intensifications. In 1932 the Eagle-Picher Company opened its Central Mill, the first great capital investment to upset the tradition of small leases and on-site milling. At the same time, the company was beginning to eat up competitors to ensure future volume rolling through their mill and ownership over reserves to justify continued investment. Suddenly it appeared profitable to move ores long distances to a central mill. Just as suddenly, old, closed properties in the Missouri portion of the district appeared profitable again.[34] Despite its tendency toward consolidation, district writers even saw it as sustaining the poor man's camp, allowing "small mining companies … to spring up as but a small investment is necessary to begin mining."[35] This, in 1933, was predictive, and not born out by subsequent events. Operators dewatered old properties anew at greater depths than ever, increasing energy consumption through bigger pumps and, in one case, an expensive eight-month pumping program.[36] New milling technology allowed mining to grow, even while its human workforce stagnated. Mining was a primary *production* industry, sure, but also a growing *consumer* feeding the feedback loops toward a landscape of intensification.

Not least, mining continued to be a consumer of humans. Like nature, the humans were unwieldy in the operators' efforts toward control. The problems created by probing the ground or entering the healthcare provisioning game were not merely industrial or economic, not even just scientific or technical. They were social. The increasing mechanization represented by Eagle-

[33] "Year of Renewed Activity in Mining Field Marked by Improved Methods," *Joplin Globe* Dec. 26, 1937.
[34] "Webb City Field Again Producing," *Joplin Globe*, Nov. 14, 1935; "Webb City Area Is Coming Back," unknown paper, Dec. 15, 1935.
[35] "Central Milling is Gaining Favor," *Joplin Globe* Nov. 4, 1933.
[36] "Galena Project Will be Pushed," *Miami News-Record*, Feb. 9, 1936.

Picher's Central Mill raised another way in which all mining history is deindustrialization history: even while seeming to stave off deindustrialization with technological fixes, the mining workforce fell consistently and with few exceptions from the 1920s until the industry's ultimate demise in the 1950s.[37] Inversely to that decline, those who managed to remain grew increasingly attached to the iconic mining landscape. Operators, in time, not only lost control of that landscape, as when floods deluged their mine workings or silica dust sickened laborers. They also struggled to control the landscape's *meaning*, and the political uses to which people with different interests than their own could put it. In addition to their stated goal of collecting and disseminating data, a central function of the OPA from the start was also to withhold that data from others who might use it against the operators. Just as they struggled to maintain control of their productive landscape and the legal and regulatory structures upholding it, the members of the OPA battled to shape the environmental narrative around their workers' bodies and communities.

Keeping a handle on that narrative proved a challenge that increased through time as the OPA welcomed allies. In establishing the Picher Clinic, the OPA entered into a cooperative agreement with the United States Bureau of Mines and the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York. All were interested in learning about silicosis, tuberculosis, and how they interacted in the working landscape of the Tri-State. The Bureau of Mines also showed strong support of Metropolitan Life and the OPA's interests in labor management and protecting employers from the liability of paying out compensation for worker disability. In a typical report to the OPA, F.V. Meriwether, the Bureau of Mines' Chief Surgeon at the Picher Clinic, indicated

[37] Manuel, *Taconite Dreams*, xxvi. Manuel also emphasizes the longer-term decline in mining employment as evidence for a longer deindustrialization, no matter that production often booms across these periods as technology replaces workers.

the underlying alignment of his ostensibly medical goals and the OPA's desire for labor discipline. Meriwether not only gave a rundown of statistics—the number of miners examined, incidence of silicosis, tuberculosis, and venereal diseases—but also revealed how the district's improving health statistics year-by-year were the result of employer vigilance. Indeed the clinic had no treatment function at all for silicosis and tuberculosis. "The companies that gave careful consideration to the cards last year"—the cards certifying the degree of a worker's health—"show a reduction approximately twice as great as companies giving little attention to the cards." The companies paying no attention to the "rustling cards," as they were known, were responsible for most of the tuberculosis in the year's findings.[38] In other words, rather than indicating how much the researchers were learning about the diseases or the improvement in worker health, Meriwether admitted that health statistics were improving because the operators were doing a good job barring sick men from their mines, and this was a great success for operator profits.

Clearer still, in his recommendations to the operators Meriwether stressed how his work was geared ultimately toward eliminating workers who would be a "compensation risk," the most frequently repeated phrase in his communications with the OPA.[39] He requested a central hiring agency be inaugurated to combat labor turnover in the field, which was expensive and inefficient to the companies' operation (in other contexts he emphasized the challenge labor turnover posed to scientific study, but not when reporting to the OPA). "Some men employed in the district are disturbers," he declared. "Such men not only tend to increase turnover, but create dissatisfaction in other employees." A central hiring agency could streamline hiring and "create a better feeling on the part of the men employed toward the organization employing them."[40] The

[38] F.V. Meriwether to J.D. Conover, Oct. 20, 1928. NARA FW Box 2, Folder 022.
[39] Meriwether to Conover, Oct. 20, 1928.
[40] Meriwether to Conover, Oct. 20, 1928.

OPA does not appear to have seriously considered the recommendation. Meriwether likely knew how difficult such a center would have been, given the number of operators involved. Still, the demand highlighted how Meriwether understood medical study as a route to the OPA's quest for labor control.

Dr. Meriwether's recommendation in pursuit of "better feeling" points up the degree to which Tri-State class relations and nature were shaped at multiple scales by these industry and government representatives. Meriwether understood his role holistically as one to improve labor relations from the perspective of the operators, not only as a medical man. To him, like them, that meant keeping workers efficient and pliant. Internal Bureau documents even claimed "it was the opinion of all parties that by placing the work under" the Bureau of Mines' direction "that there would be less likelihood of labor disturbances." A government outfit underneath the Interior Department and its copious mineral-industry expertise, the Bureau of Mines helped obscure the disciplinary disposition the clinic actually carried.

The cooperative clinic's other member, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, had interests even more in line with those of the OPA. It was the insurance company's influence, in fact, that led to the very idea of a cooperative clinic with mandatory examinations for workers in the district. One social and industrial effect of the poor man's camp was that workers could change jobs easily. The Tri-State had no company towns, and its many small operators were late to offer the kinds of workmen's compensation insurance that grew in popularity across industrial America in the first decades of the twentieth century. That also meant they were late to demand the associated pre-employment physical examinations of workers, which the OPA believed was an attraction to tuberculars from other mining districts, causing the district to "[suffer] from a

considerable influx of physically unfit men" by the early 1920s.[41] So, in the same year as the OPA's formation, 1924, Metropolitan Life introduced group insurance to the district and quickly enrolled the operators that employed almost 75 percent of district mine and mill laborers. Knowing the insurance company's interest and research in industrial health and sanitation, a number of the insured operators approached the insurance company about a cooperative clinic. Such a clinic would expand upon an understaffed, underfunded Bureau of Mines pilot clinic that had been in operation since 1923. Hence, one OPA representative said, the relationship with that government body was logical since they "knew our problems intimately." That clinic's task, in line with operators, had been worker education and research into silicosis and TB, with "no effort … made to coerce or force men to be examined," knowing the "probable labor disturbance that would result from forced examinations."[42] When the clinic grew too busy with voluntary examinations, some thought it might be time to institute mandatory pre-employment and annual examinations for all applicants and employees to OPA member companies. Anthony Lanza, Assistant Director of Industrial Hygiene for Metropolitan Life and a longtime researcher in government and industry, made a "private investigation" and determined the same.[43] The insurer, underwriter of Tri-State compensation policies, determined that a full-fledged diagnostic clinic with powers to bar workers from mining jobs was in the best interests of its policy holders. With the Bureau and Metropolitan Life furnishing $8,000 each, and the operators $16,000, the cooperative agreement gave the OPA strong institutional partners in the project of sustaining

[41] Richard Ageton (OPA Accident Prevention Engineer) to Mr. E.C. Rogers (Chairman, Safety Committee, Grasselli Chemical Company, Cleveland), Oct 14, 1927, Box 1 Folder 012.1 NARA FW; No Author, "Living Conditions," n.d. (ca. late 1920s), Box 2 Folder 081 NARA FW. "The histories of the men show that an increasing number of tuberculars had been coming into the district seeking employment. [Three reasons]: first, the popular idea that the western country offers a more favorable climate; second, the fact that no pre-employment examinations were required in this district; third, life insurance, with disability clause for tuberculosis could be obtained after six months' employment without physical examination" (35).
[42] "Living Conditions," 31 (first quote), 30 (second quote).
[43] "Living Conditions, 31.

labor peace, a central component of the poor man's camp tradition that eschewed contentious labor organizing in favor of white workers' identification with their bosses.

Sometimes the OPA's ostensible allies just didn't know how they might compromise that goal. Having run his report past the OPA, in January 1928 Meriwether published its findings in the annual magazine section of the *Joplin Globe*. He had done so before, to no reaction from the OPA. He meant not to undermine Tri-State operators but to marshal statistics in support of the clinic's success combatting the workers' health scourges. The number of silicotics and tuberculars in the workforce were down significantly after only one year of the clinic's operation. "The most important findings from the standpoint of financial loss to the companies," he had reported to the OPA, "was the prevalence of syphilis in the workmen."[44] Privately the operators took this finding seriously, adding two rooms to the Picher Clinic expressly to diagnose and treat venereal disease.[45] But in the *Joplin Globe* article, in "an edition which is widely read throughout the United States," they did not "appreciate the wide publicity given" to those "venereal statistics," as OPA secretary Julian Conover put it, tattling to Meriwether's boss at the U.S. Public Health Service.[46] Meriwether had unwittingly violated the cooperative agreement between the agencies of the clinic. By presenting his report to the OPA he thought he was clear to publish the information therein, but in fact should have run the final manuscript past them, as well as the other agencies up to and including a signature from the Director of the Bureau of Mines.[47] OPA representatives assured one another and Dr. Meriwether that they

[44] Meriwether to Conover, Oct. 20, 1928.
[45] Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting of January 17, 1929. Box 165 PSU. "Living Conditions," 43.
[46] Julian Conover to R.R. Sayers, Feb. 22, 1929. Box 2, Folder 022 NARA FW.
[47] Sayers to Conover, March 13, 1929. Box 2, Folder 022 NARA FW.

"personally" held "the kindest feelings" toward Meriwether, but only hoped that his "position," his desire for the clinic's data to be publicly known, "should be decisively corrected."[48]

The OPA's demand that Meriwether include more background information about past environmental conditions hints at what was always underlying its resistance to outside interpretations of the landscape. Anyone with senses and experience in the district could readily make conjectures about the risks of living and laboring in the Picher Field, but operators didn't want such knowledge broadcast any wider than necessary. Meriwether kept an undated typescript in his papers titled, "Living Conditions," which actually moved from geology to social and environmental conditions too, as they bore on quality of life issues. When his Bureau arrived in the early 1920s (the document seems to have been created to prepare early Bureau appointees to the district) Picher proper held about 11,000 residents, with 5,000 more in surrounding communities such as Commerce, Cardin, Century, and Hockerville, Oklahoma, and Treece and Monarch, Kansas. During its peak in the World War years, an estimated 25,000 people packed between Picher's growing chat piles.[49] Poor drainage regularly sent floodwaters through the business district, while the ponds created by miners' dams let "[flourish] a dense growth of cat-tails and water grass," adding "greatly to the unsightly appearance of the town." This would seem an ideal breeding place for mosquitoes, the report conjectured, "but apparently the discharge water from the mills and mines contains sufficient chemicals to prevent their breeding."[50] The toxic water kept one potential disease vector, at least, mercifully absent. Most of Picher's streets and sidewalks were surfaced with chat. It was an improvement over the local mud, "but during dry weather and heavy traffic, clouds of dust high in silica content are

[48] Conover to Sayers, Feb 22, 1929. Box 2, Folder 022 NARA FW.
[49] "Living Conditions," 2-7.
[50] "Living Conditions," 8.

produced."[51] Local knowledge, hard-won simply by breathing and performing quotidian housework, revealed to locals a potentially harmful environment, if they wanted to acknowledge it.

The legal-regulatory environment also worked against environmental health and community permanence. The most productive mining land in the Picher Field and a quarter of Picher proper belonged to members of the Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma, leased through the oversight of the Indian agent at Miami with approval all the way up to the secretary of interior. Non-Native miners or merchants could not obtain title to those lands. Thus "surface space" to build a home or business could only be had by monthly lease, and Quapaw lessees needed to give only thirty days' notice to demand their tenants move bodies and abodes off the lot.[52] "The uncertainty of obtaining the land for any length of time makes the erection of permanent, fire-proof, or large costly buildings economically unsound," noted the Bureau of Mines document on "Living Conditions," so some residents spent years in shabby housing and precarity, like those moved off of W.I Bigham's land in 1933. Many of them had lived in the area since Picher's founding about eighteen years prior.[53]

Quapaw landownership also prevented Picher from collecting ad valorem taxes for city functions. A shoestring city budget rendered "sanitation, drainage, sewage disposal, water works and other such measures" insufficient for the population and lackluster compared to other towns of comparable size at the time.[54] Dust permeated private dwellings via doors, windows, and holes, while public provision brought dangerous drinking water systems and frequent floods left behind stagnant storm water. Fortunately for the OPA, Meriwether didn't publicize these facts in

[51] "Living Conditions," 9.
[52] "55 Houses on mining Land Will Be Moved," unknown paper (clipping in Box 5 PSU), Sept. 13, 1934.
[53] "Section of Picher Will Be Vacated," *Miami News-Record* or *Joplin Globe* (clipping Box 5 PSU), Oct. 24, 1933.
[54] "Living Conditions," 11.

his report of the clinic's work. Still, the collaborative work of the OPA, Bureau of Mines, and Metropolitan Life was expanding local experience to people outside of their industry by bringing them to the district to see things for themselves.

Native activists and non-Native allies were likewise drawn to the region. The Picher Field boomed in the 1920s. It was both a period of close alignment between capital and government, and the moment when the initial Quapaw mining leases, which had usually been on ten-year terms, were reaching their end. With restrictions on Quapaw land also set to expire in 1921, Congress extended the arrangement whereby the interior department held final approval powers. The period saw intensified Quapaw exploitation. The secretary of interior putting a final signature on Quapaw leases was Albert Fall. His handling of them was only slightly more scrupulous than at Teapot Dome, for which he eventually achieved infamy (and prison time). Quapaw landowners and allies watched leasing terms turn in favor of the operators. Famed Yankton Dakota activist Zitkala-Ša, with men from the American Indian Defense Association and the Indian Rights Association, responded to this administrative situation by publishing *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians* (1923). Focused on the guardianship system among the Five Tribes and oil wealth, Zitkala-Ša's research in eastern Oklahoma revealed the swindle of one Quapaw's $24,000 estate while he was institutionalized in an asylum.[55] Quapaws fought unsuccessfully within the Bureau of Indian Affairs for higher royalty rates, they tried to have individual leases and sales thrown aside for conflicts of interest and insider dealing by federal officials, and they lost a suit in Federal District Court at Tulsa to recover $30 million in lost lead

[55] A.M. Gibson, "Leasing of Quapaw Mineral Lands," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 35, no. 3 (1957), 342-3; Gertrude Bonnin [Zitkala-Ša], Charles H. Fabens, and Matthew K. Sniffen, *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians: An Orgy of Graft and Exploitation of the Five Civilized Tribes—Legalized Robbery* (Philadelphia: Office of the Indian Rights Association, 1924), 38. Gibson overstated the degree to which *Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians* was focused on Quapaw mineral leasing. I find only the one reference to a Quapaw case in the actual publication, that of Robert Thompson, referred to in the text above, an "incompetent restricted Quapaw Indian."

and zinc ores and concentrates. Their complaint alleged that Secretary Fall had "executed leases over the protests of the Indians, and on a lower basis than other offers at the time, and lower than estimates made by the Department of Interior as to what a fair price would be."[56] In the afterglow of the Progressive Era, Quapaws and friendly social reformers tried to combat the most exploitative aspects of the mine leasing system.

The updated 1921 leasing law also gave the secretary of interior authority to allow the outright sale of Quapaw lands. In the context of Indian Country's history of rapid dispossession since allotment of tribal reservations into individual ownership beginning in the 1880s, the ability to sell land held dire portents for the Quapaw Tribe, small in population and in land area. The Quapaws had shown foresight in protecting their lands by self-allotting them in 1893 (approved by Congress in 1895), before federal allotment by the Dawes Act arrived in their land. They allotted each member 240 acres, a bigger parcel than the Dawes Act would grant. This was designed to leave no surplus available to settlers, which on other reservations had inaugurated the flow of Native land to settler hands, a process that proved difficult to stanch. Nonetheless, the mining boom threatened Quapaw landownership. Prior to 1921, restriction had been intended to protect Quapaws from swindle by mine operators. When Indian agents cared for Quapaw interests, this worked. Less scrupulous agents granted more generous lease terms for operators, but at least Quapaws would not lose their lands entirely while they remained under restriction. That guarantee went away for Quapaws in the mining district with the 1921 law.[57]

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[56] "Mining News," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, CXXII October 9, 1926, quoted in Gibson, "Leasing," 343-44.
[57] Much of this draws on Gibson, "Leasing," 338-42. On "self-allotment," David W. Baird, *The Quapaw Indians: A History of the Downstream People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), cited in Katherine Ellinghaus, "'A Little Home for Myself and Child': The Women of the Quapaw Agency and the Policy of Competency," *Pacific Historical Review* 84, no. 3 (2015), 311.

Land sales, however, could only be approved in cases where Quapaw landowners were deemed "competent" to handle their financial affairs. Historians have focused on its contribution to Native dispossession, an assimilationist tool compounding allotment and separating Native people from homelands under the pretext that competent Indians were better equipped for life in the rising industrial capitalist economy of the era. Competency had that function at the Quapaw Agency, but Quapaws also had long experience leasing their lands for grazing cattle and then, in some cases, reaping windfalls from mining royalties. As the historian Katherine Ellinghaus has shown, gaining competency was much more than victimization and land loss for Quapaw people. Elsie Dardenne Shailer was 27 years old when the Office of Indian affairs granted her competency, removing restrictions on 120 acres of her allotment. A telephone operator in Kansas City, Shailer deeded 80 acres to her 9-year-old son, Raymond Shailer, and sold the rest, using proceeds to cover "living expenses," to pay $3,000 owed her mother, and to start a "small business." Apparently satisfied by the experience, ten years later Elsie again applied for competency to gain control over her remaining land, to sell so that she could "purchase a little home for myself and child." The clerk at the Quapaw Agency was likewise happy to oblige. Shailer was "a woman of fair character and reputation," he wrote. She was educated and had "only a trace of Indian blood." Quapaw people, women perhaps in particular, skillfully proved their competency so they could support their families by selling, leasing, or mortgaging allotments.[58]

Competency was a fraught calculation, both a legal status and a personal attribute. Meant to assess Native people's level of acculturation and business acumen, in practice this calculation measured Native proximity to whiteness and the middle-class ideals of the period. Competency

[58] Ellinghaus, "'A Little Home," 308.

commissions rolled through the Quapaw Agency in 1906 and 1910, staffed by federal agents and local administrators. They interviewed applicants in their homes, inquired with relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors, and checked on the answers to such application demands as degree of Indian blood and references for "two business men who know you well."[59]

Their questions may have been about Quapaws' relationship to the white economy, crediting women applicants for tasteful dress and industriousness as housewives, but administrators' language revealed a deeper concern with their relationship to whiteness itself. Much of their assessment was merely visual, using the pseudo-science of the time to declare who looked like "an Indian" or a "mixed blood." Indeed, the superintendent of the Quapaw Agency, Ira C. Deaver, repeated in successful applications, perhaps more than any other phrase, that the applicant was "practically a white person." To these settler administrators, some Quapaw applicants were "more white than Indian" in Ellinghaus's phrase. One woman who had "not any business experience" sold 40 acres of her "rough land" to purchase a piano. This could have been grounds for denial, but bearing the skills of white middle-class culture, being "quite a good musician," put her in good stead for another competency claim.[60] These racial determinants justified many Quapaws' right to dispense with their piece of the tribal estate (and settlers' right to have it). At the other end of this racial calculation, the system constrained the economic autonomy of Quapaws who remained under restriction. Their every transaction—like their mining leases—needed approval by the agency. Government officials often granted them their money, held in trust, only in small allowances.[61]

[59] Ellinghaus, "A Little Home," 313.
[60] Ellinghaus, "A Little Home," 315-6.
[61] Gibson, "Leasing," 341.

Neither Quapaw people nor white workers alone were exploited by the mining power. Rather, their shared miseries (and triumphs: white workers well satisfied by wages and racial superiority; Quapaws thriving in the settler economy) could not have existed in isolation. The ways operators took control of Quapaw lands and the work environment that resulted for white laborers both illustrate racial capitalism, the political scientist and Black Studies scholar Cedric Robinson's theory of capitalism's emergence alongside a society already deeply racialized through processes of invasion, settlement, expropriation, and slavery.[62] The point is not operators profited by white workers' racism and xenophobia because it led the workers to eschew solidarity with working class people, although capitalist management fomented that in the Tri-State and elsewhere. The point is that, as subjects with a race themselves, a dusty lot of lowly white workers "dispossessed" by circumstance and the leasing structure, Tri-State miners were exploitable for their tenuous hold on certain privileges their bosses possessed free and clear, namely, the first lease on a Quapaw plot. As Robinson wrote, the tendency of capitalism isn't toward homogenization of a proletarian universal subject (as Marx and others had it). Its tendency is "to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, and dialectical differences into 'racial' ones."[63] Many writers have noted this tendency toward racialization of certain rural white people in the United States. Operators cheered the exclusion from the district of immigrants and Black Americans. They adjudicated miner *disability* to root out the unwell, avoid insurance claims, and tamp down unionization risks, while the government made Quapaw *ability*—competency—grounds for separation from their lands. Both processes served operator profits. Both situations also ran the risk, sometimes realized, of attracting bad press from reformers of various persuasions.

[62] Robin D.G. Kelley, "What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?" *Boston Review*, Jan. 12, 2017.
[63] Cedric Robinson quoted in Kelley, "What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?"

The OPA was learning from the Merriwether-*Joplin Globe* affair and Native activism to protect the district's reputation more vigilantly. By tapping into the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's network, the Tri-State operators also had brought their district into a wider industrial hygiene research community. The insurance company maintained a long association with The Saranac Laboratory for the Study of Tuberculosis of The Edward L. Trudeau Foundation at Saranac Lake, New York. Saranac hosted periodic symposia on silicosis, assembling Lanza from Metropolitan Life, Sayers from the U.S. Public Health Service, and others well-schooled in the Tri-State's potential as a research laboratory. The community of researchers, in turn, was versed in the latest research from Australia, the Witwaterstrand mining district in South Africa, and the developing silicosis crisis among subway construction workers in the New York City area during the 1930s.[64]

In 1933 the Saranac Laboratory's assistant director, Donald E. Cummings, analyzed the 1930 data on silicosis mortality among Ottawa County miners in a paper that had gained Sayers' and Lanza's approval, representing two thirds of the Picher Clinic cooperative agreement. The final step, a formality it seemed, was to let the operators read the manuscript before sending it off to the publisher. OPA executive secretary M.D. Harbaugh wrote Sayers to air his uncertainty about allowing publication. "It certainly would be dangerous material in the hands of some persons," he worried, creating "the impression that conditions now are intolerable." Conditions were "far from good," Harbaugh admitted. Yet he saw an escape from operator culpability, demanding that the paper note how a large part of present mortality was a carryover from even worse conditions in the older Joplin District, back before operators had adopted dust control measures. "The nature of the industry must be taken into account," he claimed, as "mining camps

[64] RG 70, Bureau of Mines, Picher Clinic, Box 1, Folder 021, NARA Fort Worth.

are generally temporary affairs."[65] Admitting that the paper was a "fine piece of work" and that the information "should be available to those who can make proper use of it," Harbaugh hoped Cummings might qualify the numbers with some of these complicating factors. "You may not realize what dynamite it contains if it is not used constructively," Harbaugh finally wrote to Cummings, withholding final judgment. "It is too important in its possible consequences, for example, in legislation, to be hastily broadcast."[66] To the OPA, even more than to its cooperative agencies, the quantitative information about the Tri-State environment should be strictly guarded from the wrong people like workers, lawyers, or politicians.

Meanwhile the right people, according to the OPA—distant researchers affecting disinterest and disclaiming political motives—should be allowed to continue their studies so long as their research subjects were disembodied from place. After conferring with counsel, the OPA's stance hardened further. "I am of the firm opinion that in all probability, nothing could be published that would be potentially so damaging to the … operators of this district as the publication of this report," wrote OPA lawyer A. Scott Thompson, of Miami, Oklahoma. He would be glad to discuss the reasons, he wrote OPA leadership, "although I am convinced [they] are clearly apparent to you."[67] Thompson also returned a marked-up copy of the manuscript, wielding his editor's pen with abandon. In Cummings' title Thompson turned "Ottawa County, Oklahoma," to "Certain Mines of the United States." Along the margins of entire paragraphs with any identifying information—the state or county, the OPA and its representatives, the Bureau of Mines or its doctors—Thompson commanded Cummings to "CUT."[68] The OPA's

[65] Harbaugh to Sayers, Jan. 17, 1933. Box 61 PSU.
[66] Harbaugh to Cummings, Jan. 17, 1933. Box 61 PSU.
[67] Thompson to Harbaugh, Jan. 19, 1933. Box 61 PSU.
[68] Donald E. Cummings, "Studies on Silicosis Occurring in The Lead and Zinc Mines of Ottawa County, Oklahoma," typewritten manuscript, 4-5. Box 61 PSU.

eventual consent to publish with all identifying information removed might indicate their good faith in wanting the information available to researchers. However, Thompson also demanded cuts to large swaths of Cummings' description of area living and working conditions, as though they could be detached from the more scientific or statistical evidence.

Thompson also underlined the OPA's wider goals in district labor relations and the desire to drive an interpretation of their history, as opposed to mere worker health issues. He changed wording that indicated an "unwritten law which forbids negroes from the district," to "There are no negroes or foreigners."[69] From a direct, forceful verb—"forbids"—to a passive construction indicating a timeless, frictionless state of being, the OPA's attorney rendered the usually industrious, alert drivers of industrial progress into mere recipients of a natural order in the Tri-State. Tantalizingly, Dr. Meriwether's "Living Conditions" paper, too, included the phrasing, "There is an unwritten law that negroes will not be allowed to work or reside in Ottawa County, Oklahoma."[70] The OPA's cooperative partners, both the Saranac Lake researchers and the Bureau of Mines officials, perhaps, worked from the same understandings of the district, at odds with operators.

The elision of agency in the OPA's preferred description of Picher Field racial and ethnic makeup is critical to understanding the creation of race, class, and nature in the mining district, as well as their undoing after midcentury. In attorney Thompson's editorial moves the OPA's protection of environmental information veered into its larger project to determine the way that district residents and national audiences might perceive the operators and their district, on both racial and environmental grounds. In his defense of the paper, Cummings foreshadowed the OPA's coming troubles in that area, writing to the OPA that they should realize the data he relied

[69] Cummings, "Studies on Silicosis," 5.
[70] "Living Conditions," 7.

on was available to anybody, created "through public agencies over which your organization has little control."[71] It was not a threat, but proved a prescient fact with which operators would come increasingly to contend.

An important part of the OPA's unwritten mission was a desire for its own agents to be translocal actors without inciting reaction from their nativist, xenophobic workforce that could remain merely local.[72] Of course the OPA's engagement with Washington, with transnational industrial hygiene researchers, or mining industry groups was understandably within many workers' interests in a district needing protection from open competition on global markets. District residents rightly recognized how the OPA "boosted" for the district, frequently celebrating their representatives' work in the halls of Congress. Tensions arose—still only latent, perhaps—through the OPA's engagement with outsiders. It was those relationships that heightened some worker awareness of their divergent interests with operators.

The operators often sought their allegiance, the sustenance of the poor man's camp ideal, with their advertising dollars. The primary place to do so was the same *Joplin Globe* publication in which Dr. Meriwether published venereal disease statistics the operators did not "appreciate." The marketing function of that magazine could be precisely why Meriwether's article drew such ire from the operators. The 1929 edition's cover was graced by images of the tallest downtown Joplin buildings, an overhead glimpse of a Tri-State mill—notably composed without capturing the density of chat piles usually depicted in such views—and the words, "Mines, Manufacture, Agriculture." It included "A Survey of Zinc Producing Districts," by the OPA's J.D. Conover,

[71] Cummings to Harbaugh, Feb. 3, 1933. Box 61 PSU.
[72] I am influenced here by: Deborah Cohen, *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). Cohen illustrates how power and privilege operated for southwestern agricultural interests to problematize the Mexican laborers of the Bracero program while they operated unproblematically and transnationally.

and articles on accident and disease prevention. More concisely, the operators sold their vision of Tri-State labor order in their advertisements. "Let's Keep Steering A True Course," suggested the Cortez-King Brand Mines Company. The waters could be rough in their industry, the ad continued, "but capable men are guiding our good ship (Tri-State Prosperity). We have confidence in their judgment." The OPA's own ad commanded, "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," invoking a Church of Christ hymn originally composed in 1904 to spur believers out of idleness and into action for the cause of evangelism.[73] "Mr. Operator! Mr. Workman! Mr. Landowner! Mr. Merchant! Mr. Citizen! Isn't it worth your while to co-operate—to pull and work together for the betterment and prosperity of this great district?" The ads captured the top-down story of the relationship between the district and its industry in a time of trial. "If it's against the district, knock! If it's for the district, boost!"[74] "The district," as always, was a singular body of one mind.

Outside of the *Joplin Globe*'s annual magazine, however, conditions were again threatening to get away from the operators. The Evans-Wallower Lead Company's optimistic ad notwithstanding ("1929 will be a much better year for zinc and the mining industry"), 1929 was, in fact, a bearer of new lows in the mining district. Although the industry had busted plenty since the 1850s, the stock market crash of 1929 put it into a longer and deeper decline than any before. The OPA's invocation of "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel" and its indictment of loafers anticipated a theme of the Depression years, during which many residents collected relief in the absence of mine work. There was a more confrontational reality beneath the decks of "good ship (Tri-State Prosperity)," a complex mining district under the OPA's description of it.

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[73] Jon Toney, "'Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel' Is an Invitation to Engage in the Work of the Gospel," *The Tabernacle Choir Blog*, Jan. 17, 2018, accessed Jan. 28, 2020, https://www.thetabernaclechoir.org/articles/put-your-shoulder-to-the-wheel-history.html.
[74] *Joplin Globe 1929 Magazine*, Jan. 1929. Box 2, Folder 081 NARA FW.

If the poor man's camp appeared doomed in the mine consolidations so visibly symbolized by Eagle-Picher's Central Mill, the development held out at least one final hope. "One of the features" of the mines reopening with massive dewatering campaigns and central milling, wrote one journalist, "is the opportunity for miners to become gougers." The practice of following large companies into worked-out properties to extract leftover ores in walls and pillars, "gouging" allowed miners a final shot at independence, one last job outside of Eagle-Picher. "The gouging is good," assured the paper, "and many miners who are disqualified for work in company mines may earn good wages in working for themselves."[75] The only causes to be disqualified for work in the Tri-State District were to have failed the clinic's examination—that is, to be sick with venereal disease or silicosis, tuberculosis, or both—or to have suspect ideas about labor unions. Oftentimes the one led to the other; workers claimed to have been wrongly given a failing card in retaliation for their pro-union sentiments. Indeed the clinic's agents admitted that one avenue to a "C" card, the lowest employable rating, was to be a "malingerer" or to have too frequently gone "on compensation."[76]

Other workers took up labor organizing in retaliation against the arbitrary grading system that kept them from work.[77] So while the material reality of moving into the operator class may have been gone by the mid-1930s, the spirit of working for one's self was not. More and more the clinic was an institutional symbol of that desire's unlikelihood of fulfillment. The clinic kept men out of sustained employment with the most stable (and growing) companies. It threw them to gouging until, sometimes quite literally, the roof caved in. This last vestige of a poor man's camp remained important in the Tri-State's most trying moments, which were, incredibly, still to

[75] "Webb City Area is Coming Back."
[76] "Living Conditions," 56.
[77] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, Appendix B, 27.

come. In the spirit of gouging dwelled the Tri-State district's oldest ideals: self-employment and resistance to organized labor, health and safety regulations, with a simultaneous commitment to the diminishing returns on an investment in industrious whiteness and its claims on future capitalist success.

## 2. THE LAST STAND OF THE POOR MAN'S CAMP

Amid consolidating mines, centralized milling, and tightening control over workingmen, the operators' oldest human foe, the prospect of laborers organizing themselves, redoubled its challenges to operator prerogatives. Gouging did not, as its champions suggested, sustain many workers in manly independence. The struggle exposed growing numbers of Tri-State workers to new definitions of manhood and work: stand up to bosses and prove your worth; demand better conditions for yourselves, your wives, and your children.

Notwithstanding operator narratives that the district always had labor peace, a minority of workers had long answered to unions' redefinition and resisted the environmental conditions of their employment. In 1906 the Western Federation of Miners, in affiliation with the International Workers of the World, organized a local at Joplin. With 600 members it went on strike in 1910 over working conditions and pay. Operators broke it. In 1915, an independent, grassroots American Metal Miners' Union (AMMU) staged another bitter, unsuccessful strike over health and safety conditions. That union was devoted to the district's traditional xenophobia—"This is a white man's camp; down with the foreigner"—but it upended the workers' traditional commitment to capitalism. Having long defended the "piece rate" of pay by production, and the "sliding scale" of wages tied to market prices for metals, the AMMU for the first time demanded, but failed to win, a daily rate.[1]

Despite this history, by the 1920s boom, industry publications sought out the Tri-State for stories of commendable labor relations. The district's past may have been peaceful relative to others around the country, but much of the comity that commentators found was about operators' ability to control the district story and an assumption that white, U.S.-born workers brought labor

[1] Rosner and Markowitz, *Deadly Dust*, 143; Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 161-63 (quotation 161).

peace by exercising their prerogative to exclude others. *Engineering and Mining Journal* credited the "cordial and mutually helpful relations" to the workforce of "wholly native-born Americans," to "Negroes … conspicuous by their absence," and to the fact that "operators and practically all the superintendents were just common miners, who raised themselves step by step, as an intelligent native American will do when given the opportunity, freed from the trammels of restrictive unionism and the poison of specious propaganda."[2] In other words, the paired powers of the poor man's camp and the white man's camp ensured labor peace. Or, at least, it was an attractive tale that local operators and national industry types were keen to spread, an interpretation hoping to be a reality in the anti-radical atmosphere following the Great War.

That interpretation was running out of time. In the boom years, increasing mechanization threw greater dust counts into the air, resulting in high rates of silicosis. The operators' response—identifying and firing ailing workers rather than implementing successful dust control and medical treatment—engendered new antagonisms between workers and employers while creating a class of sick, unemployable miners looking for recourse.[3] Consolidation in growing companies changed the nature of work and had a similar effect. Bigger companies placed more workers into larger groups segmented by type of labor, such as pump crews, blasting crews, and shovelers, comrades with whom they could make common cause. Some workers could see the end of the poor man's camp myth in permanent wage labor.

In a district disjointed by small mines, small operators, multiple state jurisdictions, and the lack of an organization advocating for worker safety, the Great Depression proved transformative. Although the early Depression was rock-bottom for employment and pay, in President Roosevelt's famed first 100 days, New Deal measures revived the Tri-State district

[2] *Engineering and Mining Journal* (1921) quoted in Suggs, *Union Busting*, 12.
[3] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 31.

somewhat. Alongside unemployment relief, the regulation of banking, finance, and agriculture boosted public confidence and raised demand for metals. More miners and millmen found employment and higher wages by the summer of 1933, when metal prices rose appreciably. The National Industrial Recovery Act that same season became the bedrock both of widespread New Deal support and lingering animosities during the 1930s. The National Recovery Administration (NRA), which administered the act, aimed to reverse deflation, raise prices, increase employment, and boost wages. Modeled on wartime mobilization, it pursued those goals by suspending some of the country's traditional economic truisms, such as exempting industries from antitrust law and encouraging what might be called collusion by industry to tamp down rampant competition and overproduction.[4]

The NRA brought hope to the Tri-State because it held something for everyone. Industry groups such as the OPA jumped at the chance to shape the codes that would govern prices, minimum wages, and maximum working hours. Conservative workers heard the act's appeal to saving industries through cooperation and labor-capital accord, holding open the door of the old poor man's camp, perhaps. Workers inclined towards unionization saw a federal government for the first time signaling its support for labor organizing.[5] Section 7(a) declared that workers "shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." Employers could not coerce or restrain that activity or force workers into so-called company unions. These twinned fig leaves to labor and to capital produced wide early support for the New Deal in the Tri-State. Miami hosted more than 10,000 spectators from around the district for a Blue Eagle Day parade, named for the iconic NRA logo that shops could display to prove their commitment to abiding by the laws that claimed to save workers and merchants alike.

[4] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 207-8.
[5] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 28.

Miners, millmen, supervisors, and management in many cases marched together under company banners.[6]

Ultimately, although it appealed to diverse audiences in northeastern Oklahoma, one of the New Deal's starkest consequences was how it brought labor organizers back to the Tri-State, and they, in the past, had never been welcome for long. Unions nationwide jumped at the chance to organize in the summer of 1933, and new Mine Mill president Thomas Brown joined the rush, sending Roy Brady to Picher in July. Brady quickly organized locals in Picher and Galena. He built momentum amid the region's fervor for the NRA by telling prospective members, misleadingly, that President Roosevelt himself wanted them to join the union, or that they *had* to join the union to get a job under the law's new zinc codes. His claims gained the appearance of credibility when the NRA placed Brady on its advisory board for negotiating the codes late that year. It looked like Mine Mill had an official relationship with the NRA. The union signed up many men, but seldom because of their allegiance to Mine Mill or its rather radical lineage back through the Western Federation of Miners and IWW. They joined in Picher because they sensed that future employment depended upon Mine Mill membership.[7]

Brady's strategy was not all misdirection, though. He wisely put worker bodies and the environment at the front of Mine Mill's new organizing drive. These were intensely local issues and the sole source of antagonism in a district short on solidarity and revolutionary anticapitalist fervor, to say the least. The OPA's examination bureau remained a salient issue as the district continued its modest recovery into 1934. It dropped the pretense that the clinic was a benefit for workers, admitting that it was only a cost-saving measure for operators. The OPA claimed costs had run too high because of "malingerers," or false claimants for worker's compensation,

[6] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 208-9.
[7] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 209-10.

perhaps men who had come to the district already ill, only to gain employment and sue for damages. Indeed, with Mine Mill's encouragement and support, workers were suing operators for injuries and illnesses. The suits were a credible threat in one of the first states to pass worker's compensation legislation, a 1915 law that didn't even burden workers with proving employer negligence.[8] Amid Mine Mill's rapid growth and the threat of compensation suits, operators fired and intimidated those who joined the union.[9] Workers had long seen this as a key function of the examination bureau, and a strategy tied to operator inaction on righting the environmental challenges of their mines.

So, Roy Brady declared that Mine Mill would close the examination bureau. The union deepened its widespread support from sick, unemployed miners, claiming that the examination system "work[ed] hardships upon hundreds of bona fide workmen." The OPA, on the other hand, could admit of no "bona fide workmen" among any who would sue for injury or illness. According to Harbaugh, these sick men—if they were sick—"became fertile ground for labor agitators and organizers" such as Roy Brady.[10] This was the effect of outsiders stirring trouble in the Tri-State. To the OPA's satisfaction, Mine Mill president Brown had to come and clean up after Brady absconded from the district with union funds. With the rank and file growing restless, union efforts to bring operators to the bargaining table languished through 1934. The OPA also ignored union requests for a conference, claiming it lacked the authority to recognize the union over the wishes of its individual operators. A Department of Labor Conciliation Service agent likewise failed to persuade operators to negotiate.[11]

[8] Oklahoma Workers' Compensation Court of Existing Claims, "History," http://www.owcc.state.ok.us/history.htm. Accessed Oct. 31, 2022.
[9] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 38-9.
[10] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 211.
[11] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 41.

Finally, Mine Mill admitted operators' unwillingness to give up the open shop and called a strike in the spring of 1935.[12] Approximately 700 of 800 union members voted to strike, representing about fifteen percent of the district's mining and milling workforce. The operators' reactions revealed an enduring interpretation offered by generations of residents. They claimed to be taken aback by the strike decision, insisting that "there was no controversy between employers and their employees," and no known violation of Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Ignoring widespread intimidation and threats, the OPA blamed union leadership for the strike, rather than their own unwillingness to recognize the union or the environmental conditions it challenged. And with low percentages of workers involved in the union, they could maintain amity with those who they deemed legitimate: the (as yet) robust, healthy men who wanted to work, who were not "malingerers" or relief loafers. Keeping blame off most workers allowed operators to sustain the poor man's and white man's camp myths of labor accord and a cross-class allegiance through white manliness.

The operators had some cause for their claims that the strike was led by a noisy minority. It was never clear exactly where all workers' allegiances lay. Mine Mill leadership underestimated the severity of Depression conditions in the district, and the degree to which men were desperate for work on any terms. They overestimated the capacity for relief agencies to support out-of-work miners. Since these factors, plus the district's long distaste for labor organizers, kept membership and strike support low, the union was open to charges such as those from ground boss F.J. Cuddeback that "the strike was obviously forced upon the laborers and operators by a minority which includes union organizers, relief workers, mine workers of the radical and lower element, a few misled miners … and many local would be [sic] politicians who

[12] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 42-3.

could gain power in no other way."[13] A miner on relief was hardly a miner, operators argued in order to bolster their message that the strike was only "the work of an oppressive minority," in the historian George Suggs's telling.[14] Apparently many Eagle-Picher employees did not know of the strike, so when they arrived for work on the morning of May 8, 1935, they were barred by armed men that operators testified were "recruited … from the coal fields of Kansas" (heavily unionized and composed largely of European ethnic workers), "the pool halls of the Tri-State District, unemployed WPA workers and loafers generally, including only a small sprinkling of employees of [Eagle-Picher] and other operators in the district." With the threat of violence the Mine Mill strike succeeded in shutting down district operations, even rebuffing local sheriffs at the Central Mill and in Baxter Springs.[15]

Operators, foremen, and ground bosses sensed the desperation among ordinary workers and organized a back-to-work movement. Like Mine Mill's gamble, it was far from a sure thing. In May 1935 both union *and* back-to-work rallies consistently drew crowds of 2,000 to 3,000, but already by the 18th around 900 had signed a back-to-work petition.[16] By the 25th the back-to-work movement's undisputed leader was F.W. "Mike" Evans, an OPA member and embodiment of the poor man's camp ideal. Well-known and popular among workers, Evans operated mines, owned the Connell Hotel (Picher's largest) and another downtown building, a poolroom, a dance hall, part of a used-cable company and a Ford dealership. Evans employed 35 men at the Craig Lease. While only one of them joined the strike, his operations were shut down because the striking Central Mill normally handled his ores.

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[13] F.J. Cuddeback interview, quoted in Suggs, *Union Busting*, 45.
[14] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 45.
[15] Testimony from Eagle Picher v. J. Warren Madden, DB 4272, Eagle Picher Case, NLRB, quoted in Suggs, *Union Busting*, 46-7.
[16] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 57-8.

Evans' influence changed the back-to-work movement into an all-out assault to destroy Mine Mill in the district. On May 27th that movement became The Tri-State Metal Mine and Smelter Workers Union, what the New Deal's new labor apparatus would call a company union.[17] The companies angled to get their employees of supervisory rank into its leadership. Although Suggs asserts that no smoking-gun evidence exists to confirm a precise plan—the union's records turned to ash when Evans' car suspiciously burned during the labor tumult—most evidence points to Evans, Joplin attorney Kelsey Norman, and perhaps fifteen others carefully designing the union's founding meeting and documents to ensure their own dominance of the organization.[18] It also indicates that Eagle-Picher and other companies financially supported the union before it collected dues. The executive committee, which held all decision-making powers by majority vote, included six ground bosses (Picher-Field vernacular for foremen), one operator, one engineer, and four workers. Further, committee eligibility at the executive and the local level was only open to employees with "vice-principal" ranks indicating supervisory roles of some kind, and at least five years' experience in the district—no recently arrived "malingerers," certainly. This was hardly an independent laborers' organization in the spirit of the federal legislation that supported workers. It was, perhaps paradoxically, a perfect illustration of the poor man's camp at work: ordinary workers, bent on risking their lives for capitalist opportunity, rushed into an organization dominated by operators and overseers, their betters in the poor man's camp hierarchy, always understood to share common interests with the workers.

[17] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 58-62.
[18] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 66.

Ordinary workers held no real authority in the new "Blue Card Union," as it was commonly known for its blue membership cards.[19] They jumped into it due to high unemployment; the ongoing presence of employees at the struck properties who never supported Mine Mill; their personal relationships with Blue Card union officials (and the attendant threat of retaliation by them); and, most significant of all, Mine Mill's failure to show how union recognition and collective bargaining were worth such steep sacrifices via the strike.[20] "I joined the 'Blue Carders' because I thought my wife and kid 'ud starve if I didn't an' a lot more o' them that joined felt like me," one worker said in 1939. "I've made a point o' soundin' out the men I know that are workin' now," he continued, "an' so far I've only met two that don't agree that a good strong union is the only kind of salvation we'll ever get."[21] Most understandably chose immediate work over that possible salvation, but their choice hardly indicates district labor's supposed anti-union stance. The Blue Card Union quickly agreed to terms with operators: a closed shop, in which employment depended on possession of the union's blue card. Its constitution declared any "white male of eighteen who had worked in the mines or mills of the Tri-State was immediately eligible for membership." Others were subject to executive committee whim, which in practice meant the exclusion of Mine Mill partisans. The Blue Card constitution administratively relegated pro-Mine Mill workers to the ranks of the nonwhite, an echo of Mac's 1920 assertion that a white man's camp hinged on the exclusion of Bolsheviks and Wobblies.

Agreement on a return to work did not, however, mean the immediate reopening of all mining properties. Instead, Mine Mill hardliners kept many sites picketed. The Blue Card union and their operator underwriters used Mine Mill violence as justification to request state power,

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[19] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 68.
[20] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 71-2.
[21] Mr. M, interview, Tri-State Survey Committee, *A Preliminary Report on Living, Working, and Health Conditions in the Tri-State Mining Area, Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas* (New York, 1939), Appendix B, 20. Box 62 PSU.

first the Oklahoma National Guard. Fresh off a summer of training at Fort Sill for the containing of "mobs, strikes, hunger marches and demonstrations," with officers calling laborers "damned cowardly rats," "yellow bellies," "bastards," "sons of bitches," "socialists and communists," a "bunch of lousy bums who claim to be hungry," and "just a lot of scum," the Guard arrived on the same day as the Blue Card Union's founding meeting, May 27, 1935.[22] With directions to take Ottawa County under martial law from governor E.W. Marland (D-OK), an erstwhile oil millionaire chastened by bankruptcy and born again as a New Dealer, the Guard played what Suggs has called "the decisive element in breaking the strike."[23] With clear backing from the Guard and local law enforcement, bolstered by restless, hungry men eager to work, operators simply fired up their machinery and reopened.

Troops left the mining district June 26 with almost all operations back up and running in Oklahoma. Indicating the importance of state force, the Kansas portion of the field remained struck until an operator decided on the same strategy: enthused by events in Oklahoma, F.H. Beck gambled on support from his state's National Guard by starting his mill. He knew it would draw a reaction from Mine Mill partisans that would put the strikers on the wrong side of public opinion. As he predicted, Governor Alf Landon (also a New Deal Democrat) dispatched the Kansas National Guard, breaking protocol by doing so in anticipation of, rather than reaction to, violence. He merely responded to local businessmen's request to preserve order. Once in Cherokee County, the guard moved to sites scheduled to open, dispersing pickets in their path. The move effectively, but not officially, broke the strike. Mine Mill members blew up a power line, cutting off power to mining properties and again hurting the strike's public sympathy near and far from the district. Violence rekindled after the Kansas Guard departed June 27, with

[22] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 80.
[23] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 84.

intermittent firing on company guards and other fights with less lethal means, such as fists. This prompted Governor Landon to re-send his state's Guard the next day, again at the request of Galena's businessmen. Convinced that rioting would continue so land as each side was armed, military officials demanded the "wholesale collection of guns" at Galena on June 29, yielding 250 weapons.[24] In both Kansas and Oklahoma, counties deputized special forces made of company watchmen and other operator allies to replace martial law when guardsmen departed throughout the summer of 1935.

While workplace democracy and the clinic's grading system were at the fore of Mine Mill's organizing campaign, operators targeted race and Americanism in their effort to undermine the independent outside organization. They fanned the flames of Tri-State xenophobia and insularity most effectively by underwriting the union's propaganda arm, the *Tri-State Metal Mine & Smelter Worker*, later the *Blue Card Record*. The newspaper de-legitimated the independent union with robust district support and tried to prove that a company union could forward worker interests. The company union paper quickly showed its stripes when editor Kelsey Norman "went anti-Semitic," in the words of the man who replaced him, with an early editorial. Replacement editor Glenn Hickman oversaw a paper that celebrated Evans' remarks on the first anniversary of the Blue Card Union's founding: "We want to work with our picks and pick who we work with, but if we are forced to do this with our pickhandles, thank God, We've still got the courage to do it."[25] While picking who they worked with was a clear reference to sustaining the white man's camp, Evans also gestured at what became the iconic symbol of the district's labor trouble and easily recognized threat to Blue Card opponents: the pickhandle, a club-like replacement part for that ubiquitous mining tool.

[24] "Fighting Breaks in Oklahoma In Mining Area," *Sedalia Democrat* (Sedalia, MO), June 30, 1935.
[25] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 139.

With operators intransigent—why recognize a strike when operations could continue as if there wasn't one?—Mine Mill renewed its focused efforts on the Tri-State in 1937. On April 11, Evans and the Blue Carders proved their courage when they used a counter action against a planned Mine Mill rally to turn things violent in downtown Picher. Armed with pickhandles that had been stored for the occasion at the Picher Police Department, the Blue Carders violently forced Mine Mill partisans from the town and destroyed the Mine Mill local. On rumors of another rally just over the border in Treece, Blue Carders marched on that town and, finding no Mine Mill men, held an impromptu pickhandle parade down Main Street and destroyed the union hall there as they had in Picher.

On another rumor, the pickhandlers turned toward Galena, where this time Mine Mill diehards were prepared at the union hall. With 500 to 600 Blue Carders marching up Main Street toward the Mine Mill local headquarters, an estimated 15 or 20 armed men inside the local opened fire after a pickhandler smashed the front windows of the Mine Mill building. Eight pickhandle partisans died in the skirmish, including a teen-aged boy, marking the climax of two years' labor unrest in the Tri-State.[26] The Blue Card Union may have lost the day on casualties, but the destruction of union locals and records, plus ongoing targeted violence against Mine Mill partisans helped turn the district further in the company union's favor. "Since this district is purged of the horrible stench [Mine Mill]," reported the Blue Card newspaper later that year, "white folks can go about their business of personal gain."[27] It also linked union leaders to district residents who sought relief work, all as people who "live off the grimy dimes you grovel

[26] "Nine Wounded in Battle of Metal Unions," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 12, 1937.
[27] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 133.

[for] in the dirt."[28] With labor proponents linked to dirt and juxtaposed against "white folks," the old, foundational white man's camp lived on in the strike.

Evans aired his desire to "pick who we work with" in an important venue meant to further harden worker allegiance to the company union: the first annual community picnic held on the anniversary of the union's founding. That event, too, required a Blue Card. Mine Mill partisans who stayed in the district sought out the overtaxed Ottawa County relief agencies and New Deal programs, further solidifying the conflation of labor agitators and relief loafers. The companies underwriting the union drew local merchants close by recruiting and pressuring them for support, even forcing them to display blue membership cards in their windows. Resistance would have been financially disastrous to business, so a substantial number did join, and they, too, subsidized the annual picnics. Merchant involvement widened the base for Blue Card support and reinforced the sense that there was a community of shared interests. Union membership also gave would-be miners access to outside work during the downtimes of the Depression. They could work for those merchants; in "indirect relief" like "squad car" work policing Mine Mill members and their locals; dues collection; and free meals at Mike Evans' Connell Hotel.[29] In the union once again was the measured, intentional sustenance of the poor man's camp imperative to identify with operators and merchants as a local district, rather than with distant workers *as workers*. This time it drew the district's merchant class into tighter embrace with operators against any independent movement by mine laborers.

Local media supported that project of merchant-operator alignment during the period of labor strife. District media had long carried the ads of those merchants and, even more often, of those operators. The long, combative period from the early 1930s through the early 1940s,

[28] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 134.
[29] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 146-148.

however, made their anti-labor stance much clearer, even if they tried to hide it in paeans to miners. This was tricky. When Mine Mill reentered the district in 1933, newspapers denigrated it as well as the national labor organization of which it was a part, the American Federation of Labor (AFL). But in 1938 Mine Mill and nine other leftist-led unions split off to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a group aimed at industrial, as opposed to craft, organization, meaning the acceptance of workers without reference to skill. Tri-State media swiftly took up the CIO and especially its president, John L. Lewis, for journalistic abuse of the usual sorts: their being un-American, foreign, and the like. The CIO split left the AFL as the relatively conservative formation in the American labor movement, more prone to entertain the older Tri-State prerogatives of exclusion based on race and gender. Tri-State commentators, additionally, would soon have to burnish the reputation of the AFL when the Blue Card needed the legitimacy that membership would grant them, charged as a company union.[30]

Tri-State reporters had no such trouble consistently lauding Mike Evans and Joe Nolan, "The Pickhandle King," who had worked security in the development of the back-to-work movement and Blue Card Union. It was a distinctly Tri-State sleight-of-hand to argue that operators were miners and everyone in the district shared a set of interests that were opposed to any outside body. One of the chief purveyors of that story was also one of the only women in the local papers during the period, a "miner's wife" with a recurring *Miami News-Record* column called "Chattering Chat, with Chad." "We should be truly grateful and as one big family of a great industry," she wrote on Easter, 1937, "we should this day be thankful for His wonderous [sic] goodness to us."[31] "Can we avoid being optimistic?" asked "Chad," soon after the pickhandle parades drove Mine Mill from Picher, Treece, and Galena. "No, and we shouldn't

[30] Suggs, *Union Busting*, 140.
[31] Chattering Chat, by Chad, *Miami News-Record* Mar. 28, 1937.

ever try. … Where on earth can a happier man be found today than the Tri-State Miner[?]" In her conceit the miner was sitting on the creek bank, fishing and daydreaming of all "the wonderous [sic] advantages" of living "in this great district of the Middle West," like its "churches, our public school system, and friendly little towns, our happy homes and our peaceful rivers."

Chad did not say why that day, May 2, 1937, should be his "thanksgiving day," but her next item of note was that Evans, Nolan, and Blue Card attorney Kelsey Norman had just returned from a Washington conference with William Green, president of the AFL.[32] The AFL was now the good side if Mike Evans and Joe Nolan endorsed it. In relaying Nolan's description of the conference, the paper made a characteristic appeal to bridge any potential gap between Nolan, an operator, and workers: "Joe says his only wish was for a couple of machine men, a few dummies and several shovelers." Had these workers been along, "we might now have a Washington monument in Tri-State."[33] Despite Nolan's good-old-boy entreaty to Tri-State laborers, the agreement's ratification meeting illustrated the union's hierarchical and undemocratic nature. After asking for those in favor to stand up at another Fair Grounds get-together, Kelsey Norman then invited those opposed to "stand up and get knocked down." At the threat of violence, nobody stood in dissent.[34] It was "thanksgiving day" for Chad because the Blue Carders gained the legitimacy of the AFL, striking another blow for authoritarian rule by operators and against independent unionism.

The Blue Card Union's turn to the AFL was a strategic play aimed at legitimating it in the eyes of outside observers. In the wake of the strike, blacklisted Mine Mill partisans brought complaints to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) against Eagle-Picher for unfair labor

[32] Chattering Chat, by Chad, *Miami News-Record* May 2, 1937.
[33] Chattering Chat, by Chad, *Miami News-Record* May 2, 1937.
[34] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, 12.

practices and the untoward relationship between the company and the Blue Card Union. From December of 1937 to April of 1938 the NLRB investigated those claims, which brought out damning evidence of Eagle-Picher's illegal involvement in the creation and support of the Blue Card Union. Its embrace by the AFL did not change the illegal nature of the union, the NLRB ruled. As the *Blue Card Record* admitted, "If the recently negotiated affiliation means the sacrifice of a single iota of confidence we have established with the employers of this district, it is better that we repent of our action and fight to the end as an independent union."[35] Despite the Blue Card's claims of independence, the NLRB concluded that the operator-dominated union's "sole function … was to act as a counter-organization to the International [Mine Mill]."[36] It was a play to crush independent unionism, not promote it. Affiliation was strategic for the AFL as well. It was an opening salvo in the AFL's attempt to beat the CIO nationally, a move that it duplicated many times with company unions in traditionally conservative—and white—industries. The AFL took in many more unions that, as the board noted, had leadership like Evans, whose "interests … identified him with the interests of the company rather than with its employees."[37]

Chad's gendered, religious, family-oriented rhetorical celebrations of both the singular Tri-State miner, on the one hand, and actors such as Evans and Nolan on the other, was important to weaving those potentially oppositional forces together. In addition to its sustenance of good feelings about the poor man's camp, her column inured readers to the centralizing, corporatizing trend in the district. Central milling was, for Chad, a perfect expression of the (all male) happy industrial family at work. Marking the second annual Blue Card picnic in May of

[35] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, appendix A, 13.
[36] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, appendix A, 11.
[37] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, appendix A, 8.

1937 (find Joe Nolan wearing his "miniature pick-handle," presented by a local supporter!) she wrote that it was an occasion to give credit to "the workmen and the superintendents of both the Central mill of the Eagle-Picher Mining & Smelting company, and the Bird Dog mill of the Commerce Mining & Royalty company." Those two largest companies, then secretly in talks that would merge the Commerce Company into Eagle-Picher, operated the new mills "with less interruption than did the old … mills." It was not only the technological innovation that the picnic should celebrate, Chad argued, but also that it "takes a good crew of men for smooth operation of this type."[38] True enough, but central milling also brought the closure of dozens of the older small mills, and with them a significant employment reduction.[39]

Holidays granted Chad wide latitude to unite the district under one home roof. Just as Tri-State miners could celebrate Thanksgiving Day all year, at Mothers' Day 1937 she called "every miner and the members of his family" to express and celebrate the love for their mothers each and every day because "these mothers of miners are among the world's bravest." Fittingly, the rough-and-tumble Mike Evans traveled all the way to Des Moines, Iowa, to see his mother, bringing her back to the district for an extended stay. He was, characteristically, just "one of the mining men of this field."[40] In the Tri-State Chad's motherly, feminine figure helped mask the operation of power because her gender allowed her full purchase on the language of family, emphasizing the positives as only a mother could.

The media onslaught against organized labor became clearer and less nuanced by 1940 as the district again entered national conversations around worker health, environment, and labor law. The NLRB's investigation of Eagle-Picher and the Blue Card Union revealed Tri-State

[38] Chattering Chat, by Chad, *Miami News-Record* May 23, 1937.
[39] Tony McTeer, resolution to Kansas Governor Rattner, February 1939, quoted in Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, 48-50.
[40] Chattering Chat, by Chad, *Miami News-Record* May 16, 1937.

troubles to the nation more sensationally than they'd been broadcast in the industrial hygiene research or limited Indian rights social reform circles of the 1920s. As the NLRB issued its intermediate report in August of 1938 and its ruling in October of 1939, other investigators and cultural productions popularized the district's challenges as laid out by the NLRB findings. As always, it was the district's appearance in the national media that rankled the "Picher dads."

In the spring of 1939, an obscure heir to a Connecticut mimeograph factory fortune toured the Tri-State taking photographs. Sheldon Dick had been nominally employed by the New Deal's Farm Security Administration among famous photographers such as Dorothea Lang and Arthur Rothstein. Dick was contracted for just $1 with the FSA, bankrolling his own work to preserve his artistic freedom. What he liked to shoot often failed to meet the approval of his superiors, and so his time with the FSA was short.[41] His final assignment, though, took him to Joplin. What he saw there enticed him to return, once freed of the FSA. The nation's first public notice was an interview Dick gave with the *New York World-Telegram*, in which he described area living and working conditions. He claimed to have received permission from the two dominant companies at first (Eagle-Picher and Commerce, likely), until they learned that he had "union contacts." After photographing the former Picher Clinic, then called the Tri-State Industrial Examining Bureau, a detective told him "You'd better pack up your damned equipment and get out of town." He did, while four thugs searched the town for him that night. Still, Dick got enough material, and good enough material, for a solo exhibit at the Julien Levy

[41] Alan Trachtenberg, "From Image to Story: Reading the File," in Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly Brannan, eds. *Documenting America: 1935-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 62; Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 39.

Gallery on 57th Street in Manhattan. He also got enough evidence to build the foundation of what would become an incisive critique of the district, its operators, and their environment.[42]

The OPA flew into internal hysterics, but through the next year measured their response in order to avoid granting their critics further publicity, or putting "water over the Communists' wheel," as OPA secretary Evan Just wrote to the organization's members. Those not complying with OPA suggestions about cleaning up their surface dust conditions were "simply furnishing ammunition to a group of Communists and 'fellow travelers'" bent on "making our District the subject of a nationwide scandal, heaped with misinformation and abuse." Externally Just wrote about Sheldon Dick's dispatches in the *Mining Congress Journal*, "I have never seen a more vicious distortion of facts than in the story printed by the 'World-Telegram.'"[43] Instead of firing back in the news press, the OPA decided on a limited response to inform mining industry colleagues and Congressional representatives of their side of the story, "if anything comes up," as Just wrote one congressman, hinting at the possibility of someone trying to gin up a congressional investigation.[44]

Just's published editorials in the *Mining Congress Journal* and the *Engineering and Mining Journal* rebutted Dick's interpretation, yet largely admitted the truth of the environmental conditions Dick had found. Decrying the "Communistic" tendencies of Dick and Mine Mill organizer Max Salzman ("the Communist"), in specifics Just confirmed the conditions, but not their causes. Silicosis was "a natural hazard" in a place with siliceous rock like the Tri-State, he argued. "These conditions," he wrote of the crowded, unsanitary dwellings in use in Picher since the boom years of the World War, "constitute a serious local social

[42] Peter Kihss, "Photographer Tells of Conditions in Silicosis-Ridden Area: Records His Trip Through 'Street of Walking Dead,'" *New York World-Telegram*, May 29, 1939.
[43] Evan Just, "Statement to the Mining Congress Journal (June) [1929]. Box 62 PSU.
[44] Just to Tri-State Operators, June 7, 1939. Just to Arthur Capper, Oct. 14, 1939. Box 62 PSU.

problem, but are not attributable to the mining industry."[45] That became an operator refrain: the industry they proudly claimed to have birthed in turn created conditions they had no responsibility for. "The principal obstacle" to remedying the conditions "is the difficulty in obtaining sincere cooperation of the workmen in protecting themselves."[46] "Transients" had overrun Picher in the boom years. "These people and their numerous progeny, many of whom are mentally or physically unsuitable for employment in mining," made up that social problem, "but to blame their condition on the mine operators is a gross calumny," Just stated in the *Mining Congress Journal*. He promised to expand on his editorials with more "factual" work to prove the operators' good faith efforts on dust control and silicosis prevention.[47] Still, the public relations campaign was limited to industry journals, with a flurry of correspondence to Congressmen beneath the surface. Speaking for the operators, Just's dismal view of local labor indicates how the OPA's slipping hold on the environmental narrative also threatened the durability of the poor man's camp and Chad's "one big family of a great industry."

Despite claims that Sheldon Dick had just "happened to stop in the Tri-State" and "happened to hear some talk about 'silicosis' and 'tuberculosis,'" Just and the OPA recognized Dick's photo journey was neither an accident nor a one-off ploy to get an art exhibit.[48] He was, more threateningly, part of a New York group called the National Committee for People's Rights, whose founding move was to create the Tri-State Survey Committee. Through its influence, the publicity kept coming in 1939. Famed radio and newspaper gossip Walter Winchell relayed a teaser to his national audience over the National Broadcasting System:

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[45] Evan Just, "Editorial," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, June 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[46] Just, "Statement to Mining Congress Journal."
[47] E.V. Gent to Just, Dec. 9, 1939. Box 62 PSU. Just's hurried articles include: "Living and Working Conditions in the Tri-State Mining District," *Mining Congress Journal* 25 (November 1939): 44-45; and "Dust Prevention in Tri-State Mines," *Engineering and Mining Journal*. Box 62 PSU.
[48] Anonymous to W.N. Smith, October 28, 1939. Box 62 PSU.

"Attention Midwest. A story which will shock the nation is expected to break on your front pages in a very short time." It would reveal conditions worse than the Gauley Bridge silicosis scandal of two years prior in West Virginia, Winchell claimed.[49] Evan Just asked to appear before the Tri-State Survey Committee, eventually fitting a tea-time meeting into his schedule.[50] Other national media amplified the committee's findings, including a *Time* magazine article provocatively titled, "Zinc Stink." The challenge to operator prerogative had Evan Just flummoxed. That people without the operators' experience, privilege, and expertise could interpret the mining landscape seemed ridiculous. He demanded the tea with the Tri-State Survey Committee to, in his view, better inform them about operator efforts at dust remediation and the underlying social challenges that laid blame on the workers themselves.

It was fitting that the group scheduled a tea with Just. Evan Just was born in 1900 and grew up in Chicago, the son of a Danish-born tea merchant. He'd attended public schools and lived a time in Japan for his father's work. He thought he'd become a farmer after high school, so he enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Realizing his "background didn't fit" him well for agriculture, Just transferred to Northwestern. First, though, during World War I, he fixed his farmer's fancy by laboring on his uncle's Oregon farm with the Boys' Working Reserve. After the war Just earned his bachelor's degree in geology at Northwestern, worked briefly in the Oklahoma oil fields, and earned a graduate degree in geology from the University of Wisconsin in 1925. He gained lead-industry experience in the Southeast Missouri district during the Picher Field's heydays on the other side of the state. He took a leave to explore for emeralds in Brazil and followed one of his Wisconsin professors on a reconnaissance for bauxite in the Soviet Union. He taught geology at Lehigh University and the New Mexico

[49] Ernest V. Gent, telegram to Just, Oct. 17, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[50] Just to Eleanor Weinstock, Oct. 20, 1939. Weinstock to Just, Oct. 28, 1939. Just to Weinstock, Nov. 4, 1939.

School of Mines, and, finally, worked as a petroleum engineer in the South Oklahoma City Field from 1934-1937. That's where he was when M.D. Harbaugh, the OPA secretary through the Picher Clinic's founding and a Wisconsin classmate of Just's, departed for a similar role leading the Lake Superior Iron Ore Association.[51]

Harbaugh hand-picked Just to succeed him as OPA secretary. Just was the perfect candidate for the job, and for the increasingly influential posts he would come to hold: a globally experienced, university- and field-trained geologist with a would-be farmer's rural sensibilities, if not his disposition. Just's role as secretary of the OPA began a long tenure bringing his expertise to bear on the Tri-State. Only in the OPA role was he an advocate for the district. Like the industry itself, Just widened his minerals focus to the world. For the time being, however, he was at home in an anti-labor lobbying group pretending to the defense of local workers. That pretense was clearest in his outrage about the Survey Committee's pulling an end-around on the OPA—straight to those intelligent American workers themselves—to define the Picher Field's working environment.

When *Business Week* passed along the Tri-State Committee's findings to its readers, Just wailed to their labor editor, "Did it not impress you that this group, who have never been underground in our mines, who have no direct contact with our practical knowledge of mining operations or of the special problems of this District, are not qualified to undertake a critical review of our conditions?"[52] Instead, as *Time* reported, the Committee had sent, among others, the economist James Raymond Walsh of Hobart College; Sociologist Esther Lucile Brown of the Russell Sage Foundation; and Dr. Adelaide Helen Ross Smith, a Manhattan silicosis expert, in

[51] Evan Just, "Geologist: *Engineering and Mining Journal*, Marshall Plan, Cyprus Mines Corporation, and Stanford University, 1922-1980," an oral history conducted in 1989 by Eleanor Swent, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1990.
[52] Just to "Labor and Management Editor" of *Business Week*, Dec. 18, 1939. Box 62 PSU.

addition to Sheldon Dick, "Socialite."[53] They surveyed 4,867 of homes in the district, interviewed residents, and reviewed publicly available reports dating back two decades indicating state and federal authorities' long knowledge of the deadly conditions. "Did you not notice," Just continued on indignantly to the *Business Week* editor, "that in their investigation they made no contact with our Association … or any leading citizen of this area?" His huffy responses to what were merely factual news reports reveal the baldly class-based project in which he was engaged administering the poor man's camp. The "leading citizen," to Just, was not a miner's wife sweeping chat dust from her windowsills. Pontificating on district living conditions should be left only to the Ore Producers Association.

The survey was done, however, and the publication forthcoming. The Tri-State Survey Committee understood the district quite well. The report narrated the history of the poor man's camp and its persistent local meaning. It recognized how the concentration of leases by larger companies and central milling had brought "a new level of industrial efficiency" and changed the calculus for would-be poor man's campers. And it described the deleterious effects of "piece-rate" pay for shovelers, giving them the incentive to eschew safety and health prescriptions in the effort to produce more metal and bigger pay. And the committee cited Eagle-Picher's own reports and local newspapers to show the diminishing economic opportunities for small operators and slimming economic prospects for ordinary workers.[54]

What frustrated operators the most was that surveyors' senses, paired with the words of the affected local people, told the story of Tri-State conditions. And the survey found conditions little changed from what Bureau of Mines clinicians were prepared for in the 1920s. One woman reporting on the hastily built dwellings recalled neighbors arriving, putting down a floor, setting

[53] "Zinc Stink," *Time*, Dec. 4, 1939.
[54] Tri-State Survey Commission, *Preliminary Report*.

furniture in it like a proper home, room-by-room, and only then building the rest of the house, which they completed by next morning.[55] These old shacks were still inhabited, and 3,541 out of 4,867 the survey judged to be unfit for habitation. Real estate "wild catting" was popular among a certain class of investors building tarpaper shacks and renting them for $5 or $7 per week when metal prices were strong, selling them for $25 or $50 in the downturns.[56] The authors were well versed in various working-class causes, so they understood how Picher was a single-industry town much like Gary, Indiana, or Flint, Michigan. What set it apart was "that in the lead-zinc fields the payroll is not the only link which binds life to industry." Chat and its dust did that too. "When the Tri-State miner takes his lunch bucket and comes above ground at the end of his shift, he cannot leave his industry behind him as the factory worker does," they argued, because of how the miners' shacks huddled close on the chat piles.[57] The report described the worker's route home over chat-graveled roads, the worry about his children playing on chat filled playgrounds, and uneasiness about kids "sneekin' off to swim in the mill ponds," as one interviewee reported, in water that "makes yer hair 'stiff as a board.'"[58] At work and play, in the mine and at home, the Tri-State Survey Commission took a total view of the mine landscape as a social world linked by chat dust and risk.

It galled Evan Just that investigators would seek out the people experiencing local conditions and the experts qualified to interpret them. Just sought comfort with American Zinc Institute secretary Ernest V. Gent, asking what recourse the OPA might have for such slander. He was sorely uncomforted. "All in all, I cannot see that the [*Time*] article is particularly unfair,"

[55] Tri-State Survey Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 14-5.
[56] Tri-State Survey Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 15.
[57] Tri-State Survey Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 18.
[58] Tri-State Survey Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 18-9 (quotation 19).

Gent wrote, except in its "Zinc Stink" headline and an unflattering photo.[59] Even Anthony Lanza, longtime friend of the OPA, found the full *Preliminary Report* "satisfactory."[60] He was likely one of the "certain government officials" the committee consulted, "already familiar with the fact that conditions in the area were bad," and who "felt that publicizing them would be an effective means of expediting remedial action." OPA officials knew that he at least found the report satisfactory.[61] One motive for their subdued response was to avoid alienating Lanza and Dr. Sayers.[62] "I suppose I am too close to have the advantage of sufficient perspective in this thing," Just admitted in a moment of humility. "It seems," he wrote, "that [the committee members] crowd their facts pretty hard in an effort to create a viewpoint unfriendly to employers."[63] Alas, he submitted, they did have many facts.

Compounding the OPA's challenges, that same summer a prominent New York publisher released *South of Joplin: Story of a Tri-State Diggin's*, by Lallah S. Davidson. The operators' case that outsiders alone were behind a "sinister conspiracy" against them became muddled with the arrival of Davidson's book.[64] Based on her experiences growing up in Picher during the 1935 strike and the subsequent "years of continual labor war," *South of Joplin* was a proletarian novel, sympathetic to the plight of workers.[65] It was highly autobiographical, but, being a novel, took a few liberties with geography, timing, and real events. As she admitted in the introduction, most of the material was from Picher, but Davidson found it "impossible to separate Picher from towns in Missouri and Kansas." It was the liberties, of course, that caught the OPA's attention

[59] Gent to Just, Dec. 20, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[60] Harry W. Blair to unknown (likely Just), Nov. 27, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[61] Harry W. Blair to unknown (likely Just), Nov. 27, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[62] Harry W. Blair to unknown (likely Just), Nov. 27, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[63] Just to Gent, Dec. 26, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[64] Quotation from "Operators See Letter As Plot to 'Smear' Area," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 19, 1940.
[65] Quotation from Lallah S. Davidson, *South of Joplin: Story of a Tri-State Diggin's* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1939), 11.

and gave the operators fodder for discrediting the work, but it was what the *New York Times Book Review* somewhat derisively called her "pro-labor" stance that gave them the motive to do so.

The *Times*' otherwise positive review, though, judged by Evan Just's rejoinder, was among the cosmopolitan East's gravest transgressions of Tri-State prerogative in defining the district. "I am amazed at this review," Just began, in an irate missive to its author. "You may be ignorant of our conditions, but your position as a reviewer for the *New York Times* would indicate a certain degree of literary competence which I cannot reconcile with your statement that this silly story is well-told and convincing." The book was "replete with exaggerations and lies," Just went on, "gross distortions of fact and outright falsehoods." He gave few specifics, though: Davidson too casually stated Picher's location as being a "few blocks" from Missouri, when the actual distance was twenty miles; she introduced her narrator (her fictionalized self) with a colorful anecdote from a childhood run-in with a Quapaw man on horseback who threatened to scalp her for believing the government "gave" his people land, an "impression … of the Indians … so fantastic that it does not merit analysis," according to Just; she declared that the Ku Klux Klan was active during the 1935 strike, which Just called "a complete error"; she had the Kansas National Guard crossing into Oklahoma; she claimed to witness a former student named Sam Miller get killed in the streets of Picher, when in reality the only deaths occurred in Galena, Kansas, when the troubles revived again in 1937 with the pickhandle parades; finally, and perhaps most egregious for Just, "Her representation of the diction used by ignorant folk in this region is completely false." She had them using "'furriner' to typify an outsider," which was not a word used there, he claimed. "I give you my word of honor that she has thoroughly

misrepresented conditions here, falsely maligned the mine operators, and that as a piece of folklore the book is purely and simply tripe," Just closed.[66]

The operators tried their time-tested method to paint Davidson an outsider. Her interpretations, he wrote, "could hardly be made by a sane person familiar with this District."[67] She *had* grown up in the Missouri portion of the district, even joining the rush to Picher with her father, a mining engineer and prospector, and her family as a young girl. They'd felt "like pioneers of the new camp."[68] Davidson had also, however, moved to New York City for a time. She was so cosmopolitan as to be entertaining a trip to Europe before being called back, in her book's telling, by a postcard from an old friend anticipating the labor troubles. "Ain't you afeard of the furriners?" he asked. "They air 'bout to git us."[69]

Yet the lack of substance in Just's charges render Davidson's insider or outsider status insignificant. Davidson's *South of Joplin* was a work of fiction, and its infidelity to actual fact was hardly material. Davidson only lightly meddled with the events she had lived through and heard about from acquaintances. Just's accusations of falsehood raised no specific instances of Davidson having "maligned the operators," except, he might have implied, in the fact that merely telling the story was malignant.[70] Davidson's time as a New Yorker impugned her claims to having ever been a Tri-Stater. District coverage indicates that the book was widely known—perhaps widely read—in Picher and environs, while its making the *New York Times Book Review* reveals a decent level of success. Just's reaction illustrates how any readership at all was too much for his liking and that of other OPA members.

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[66] Just to Francis Brown, Oct. 17, 1939. Box 62 Silicosis Scandal Propaganda folder, PSU.
[67] Just to Brown.
[68] Davidson, *South of Joplin*, 12.
[69] Davidson, *South of Joplin*, 17.
[70] Quote from Just to Brown.

Just's final charge—that Davidson wrongly gave the Tri-State miners a countryfied, unintelligent dialect—goes to the heart of the dying efforts at sustaining the poor man's camp. The final fact of the district's whiteness since its founding was the Tri-State miner's intelligence. Being American-born and white guaranteed their intelligence, and the operators' method of assuring listeners of that intelligence was a critical and long-running play to keep them aligned against outsiders who would deign to cleave workers from the poor man's camp ideal. A Joplin medical doctor wrote Just to brag of his letter correcting *Time* magazine's article "[slurring] the intelligence of a large group of American workers." A son of the district, the doctor told Just he'd "enjoy watching the editor of Time inhale a handful of chats" for his bad judgement about the district's workers.[71] Government representatives had historically nursed this interpretation of white worker intelligence: a Picher Clinic official wrote in the 1920s, "The white men were mainly of a sturdy pioneer stock, … many … illiterate, but as a whole they are very intelligent." Tri-State miners tended to break laws at higher rates than in other mining camps, he averred, but mostly just prohibition and moral turpitude laws, ones "interfering with their personal liberties."[72] We might question how a contemporary would view a law-breaking, illiterate class of workers bearing any race but American whiteness. Linking whiteness, American belonging, and intelligence to their independence was a necessary move in keeping the poor man's camp alive through the centralizing, corporatizing years of the early twentieth century. It was American individualism and intelligence, after all, that had ushered the district's operators into their lofty positions. Just hoped to breathe new life into the poor man's camp in the late 1930s. "The very diction [Davidson] puts into the mouths of our people is absolutely foreign," he wrote

[71] Sam A. Grantham, M.D., to Just, Jan. 10, 1940. Box 62 PSU.
[72] "Living Conditions," 63.

the editor of *The Oklahoma Teacher*, complaining of their positive review of *South of Joplin*.[73] Tellingly, the Tri-State Survey Committee also found locals fearing "furriners" in their interviews, independent of Davidson.[74]

For Davidson's part, women critical of district conditions and operators were important in dismantling the "big industrial family" that Chad had tried to gird with her motherly affect. The operators' posturing as defenders of Tri-State labor grew more tenuous through time as vocal, often well-connected and highly educated women brought expertise and empathy to bear on the workers' plight. The Tri-State Survey Committee's *Preliminary Report*, made largely by women academics, social workers, and clerical support, appeared against the OPA's wishes a few months after *South of Joplin* in the fall of 1939. As Just had fretted to the press, the *Preliminary Report* made no effort to hear from operators, but instead sent Anne C. Couch, Ph.D., to analyze government documents on past health reports in the region. It sent Mildred Oliver to hundreds of homes in and around Picher to speak with every working family that dared. This included, to a degree seldom seen in the district's past, elevating the voice of what Chad lauded as "the Tri-State mother."

Operators and "district dads," predictably, grew apoplectic. The "communistic tirade" against their district "and the citizenship of this area," as the *Miami News-Record* editorialized in early 1940, arrived alongside more local and national attention.[75] Still the good citizens soldiered on in the maintenance of the poor man's camp. "Regardless of politics, whether we be operator, miner or private citizen," the paper wrote, attempting to unify the district against outsiders, "we

[73] Just to C.M. Howell, Jan. 13, 1940. Box 62 PSU.
[74] Tri-State Survey Committee, *Preliminary Report*, 13. Despite claims of an organized "smear campaign," operators felt convinced by Survey Committee assurances that the timing of their work and Davidson's were merely coincidental. Gent to Just, Nov. 22, 1939. Box 62 PSU.
[75] "Every Community in America Honey-Combed with Destructive Forces!" *Miami Daily News*, Jan. 21, 1940.

do not believe there is a single reader of this newspaper" who could have read the recent news of the NLRB's investigation of Eagle-Picher "who was not shocked and alarmed as to America's future as a democracy." It was a time-tested Tri-State ploy, blithely transcending political stances and occupation to render opponents not only as contraposed to the district, but in fact un-American and even undemocratic.

Despite locals' claims about a top-down, national, and organized "smear" of their district, though, local elites were well-equipped to oppose it. Contrary to their claims that outside power aligned against their district, the operators and local media took succor from those very same sites of power. As soon as the Supreme Court decided the NLRB's constitutionality in 1937 conservative forces in business and Congress organized to defang it with amendments. In 1939, with Senate and House Labor Committee hearings moving too slowly for his liking, the leader of the conservative coalition, Congressman Howard Smith (D-VA), who had once championed the New Deal, spearheaded a House-sponsored "special investigation" of the NLRB.[76] The Tri-State closely watched the Smith Committee, as it was known, because the Eagle-Picher case had been one of the first to test the NLRB's legality and the labor board's rigid ruling against the district's largest employer seemed to place the whole Tri-State mining industry in the breech along with the company. The Smith Committee's long-term success was the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, which greatly undercut the NLRB and American workers' rights to collective bargaining. In its beginnings, though, the committee's intention was only to lay a foundation of anti-NLRB public sentiment with publicity, not least by seeding sensational stories in the press.[77]

[76] James A. Gross, *Rights, Not Interests: Resolving Value Clashes under the National Labor Relations Act* (Ithaca, NY, 2017). (no page number in my notes because I found it only through an unpaginated Google Books preview)
[77] Gross, *Rights, Not Interests*.

It was in these congressional investigations that Tri-State leaders found fuel for attacking the New Deal labor regime. Her was where they could perceive the extent of, and government role in, the alleged smear of their district. Even the timing all came together in their conspiracy theory—for that is what it was. In late 1939 and early 1940—immediately after the Board's strong ruling against Eagle-Picher's obvious violations—the investigations aired damning testimony revealing federal authorities' outspoken support for organized labor. This shouldn't have been any surprise to anyone aware of the composition of Roosevelt's administration or following the development of the NLRB. District media, however, with the OPA alongside, fingered the inherently undemocratic and arbitrary nature of the Board in their accusations that it was specifically targeting the Tri-State lead and zinc industry, a "legitimate" and American institution. A 1937 letter read into the congressional record revealed that NLRB chief examiner George O. Pratt once quipped that he'd been judge, juror, and prosecutor in the CIO's case against Eagle-Picher. "Apparently neither Dictator Stalin of Russia nor Hitler of Germany has anything on this board," opined the *Miami Daily News*.[78] It should be "relegated to Russia," echoed the *Joplin Globe*.[79] Perhaps even more damning, Pratt admitted to the congressional committee that he once said he considered companies already to have "two strikes" against them before their hearings began.[80]

Pratt's claim about his many roles—if not the paper's hyperbole—was true, to an extent. His career trajectory had put him in contact with the Eagle-Picher case at several key points. When the CIO first filed its charges, Pratt was regional director of the Board's Kansas City office. He was the *only* employee working there, except for his stenographer.[81] Thereby Pratt did,

[78] "Every Community in America."
[79] "Where It Belongs," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 21, 1940.
[80] "Pratt Says He Was Prosecutor, Judge and Juror," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 19, 1940.
[81] "Pratt Says."

true enough, have the power to shape the fate of the union-company conflict. Mine Mill's claims were the first of unfair labor practices that he'd heard and investigated. He defended his "two strikes' comment by explaining that he only acted on the union's claims if he was confident that he had gathered the evidence to gain a favorable ruling. He only requested the NLRB bring charges if it was already clear that a company had violated the law.[82] In other words, he did his job carefully. Further, Pratt's multifaceted role in Eagle-Picher's prosecution was less an indication of his or the Board's corruption than a rather straightforward series of promotions from a relative backwater in Kansas City to the head of the Board in Washington, D.C. After investigating the CIO's claims against Eagle-Picher and asking that the NLRB bring charges, Pratt was some-time trial examiner and, finally, the "judge" of it all.

At the heart of the Pratt revelations—and the alleged conspiracy—was another 1937 letter he had received from NLRB trial examiner William Avrutis. Pratt had just arrived in Washington, D.C., and Avrutis was handling the case from Kansas City. Feeling "expansive" one night, Avrutis laid out the Board's case: "Our index card of facts is nearly complete and it's nothing short of deadly," he began. "We'll be able to try the case in five different directions, varying the theme whenever the melody begins to pall." He boasted that Mine Mill's strike had cost Eagle-Picher "approximately five million dollars," that the company couldn't afford to have the hearings go on, and that the back pay they would owe could force them to "mortgage every mill and mine to do it." He revealed close work with union attorney Sylvan Bruner, who had brought the first worker suits against operators back in the 1910s, going so far as to ask that Bruner request a "publicity man" from CIO president John L. Lewis "to whip everything in[to] final shape."[83]

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[82] "Pratt Says."
[83] "NLRB's Chief Examiner in Triple Role," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 19, 1940.

Front-page *Jopin Globe* headlines blared the news and the paper gave over its editorial pages to the revelations. "Here are the facts brought to light," began one editorial, distilling the front page: the head of the NLRB saw himself as "Prosecutor, Judge, and Juror"; enjoined as an examiner, he was given the power to name another examiner; he received a letter from the NLRB's regional attorney, who, with gleeful malice, believed the case would put the company in dire financial straits ("mortgaged mills mean fewer jobs," the editor warned); and that the attorney asked the union to embark on a publicity campaign to fan the flames of outrage about district conditions.

Such local coverage was symptomatic of district media's wider aim, the root of which was always its devotion to district operators. It gave wide voice to the operators' point of view, reported operator allegations as fact, editorialized with summaries of "facts" for lazy readers, and passed on insinuation as somehow meaningful. "A local attorney," reported the *Miami News-Record*, claimed to have visited Pratt's Kansas City office once, seeing "indicative" reading material on Pratt's shelves indicating "Communistic leanings."[84] More consequentially, district coverage sought no voice from district workers, under the guise of Chad's "one big industrial family" or the poor man's camp, like a twisted, cis-gendered regime in which manly independents represented their less manly dependents. Even without worker voices in assent, that coverage always aligned the operators' interests with "the district" at large. "If there were any residents … who clung to a belief, fathered by a wish," that the investigation "was soundly based and conducted in a spirit of equity and fairness, they must finally be convinced otherwise."[85] The district had one set of interests; pro-labor support by federal representatives was not fair and equitable to those interests.

[84] "Pratt's Visit in Miami Recalled," *Miami News-Record*, Jan. 23, 1940.
[85] "The Melody Begins to Pall," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 20, 1940.

The rare occasions that the local, usually insular, Tri-State newspapers took on national stories further reveal the relationship between the Smith Committee and the press. At the moment that the district heard revelations about what many deemed to be corruption in the NLRB, the *Joplin Globe* ran with Smith-Committee testimony from Congressman Clare E. Hoffman of Michigan, who criticized the courts for misconstruing NLRB decisions, and doing so primarily because of "the fact that numerous 'reviewing attorneys' for the board are young women," a comment prefaced by Hoffman's age (65) and alma mater (Northwestern University law school). Such stories, otherwise unrelated to the Eagle-Picher case—Hoffman himself referred only to the controversial break-up of Republic Steel—seem targeted at the sensibilities of the poor man's camp in the Tri-State. "Another [female reviewing attorney] is Ann Landy Wolf, 29 years of age, born in Hungary, came to this country in 1929, became a citizen in 1935." Everything in the NLRB's procedure, Hoffman alleged, followed from the investigations of these "women, or, more correctly speaking, young girls," even *immigrants*, the Tri-State reader might have been led to exclaim. Hoffman claimed "no criticism is offered because" they were women. Young men and even older men with no experience or qualifications were doing similar work. Yet his monolog and the *Joplin Globe*'s retelling led with the "girls." "They are utterly without experience, either as an attorney, a judge, an industrial worker, or an employer. What can they … possibly know about the difficulties which confront employers and employes [sic] in great industrial plants? Nevertheless," Hoffman concluded, "these girls and young men" led the labor board to decisions that "will make or break a great industrial enterprise."[86] It was in this last prospect that district operators and their media mouths saw the treachery of so many outside actors whose interpretations converged in 1939 and 1940.

[86] "On Flimsy Foundation," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 24, 1940.

District media railed against such threats primarily by cherry-picking scenes from recent labor history to paint the CIO as destructive to working-class cities and families. The *Joplin Globe* explained "Why Akron is a Ghost City" on January 8, 1939. The sub-headline brought home the point: "How Strikes Brought Ruin." The advertorial penned by that city's former mayor told a tale of union guile and treachery leading to threats, violence, property damage, plant closings, and, ultimately, ruin for the city. Just like in the stories that Tri-Staters told themselves, Akron had always had perfect labor relations fostered by a company union at the Goodyear Tire Company facilities, until John L. Lewis and the CIO showed up. The CIO, in the former mayor's telling, hoped to use Akron as a guinea pig in a hoped-for takeover of the auto industry. Instead, amid the unrest and in its wake, companies fled the city rather than cave to union demands. Of course, the former mayor's blame lay not with the large companies which had "no recourse" but to move production elsewhere. Instead it was the union's fault, pushing even the smallest companies to eventually "[discover] that there are several thousand unhoodlumized communities"—that is, apparently, union-free; the CIO was notoriously diverse—all waiting for their industries to arrive. No man of violence, the author did believe that "the only way to keep John L. Lewis' cohorts from ruining your town is to keep them out of it," which could be accomplished by "an alert Chamber of Commerce, a courageous police force, and a public-spirited press." By reprinting the advertorial the *Joplin Globe* indicated its status as a public-spirited press, while the Tri-State's response to the 1935 strike and subsequent CIO organizing indicated solid possession of the other prerequisites. But the article's existence and its credit line hint at the underlying tensions remaining by the end of the 1930s. "This article is reprinted by permission of the Editors of Liberty Magazine and subscribed to by loyal citizens of

this district who want industrial peace."[87] The only way to be a "loyal citizen" was to desire "industrial peace." The only way to reach industrial peace was to capitulate to the historical dominance of the operators.

Beyond the Tri-State Survey Committee and the bogeyman of the NLRB, too, women wielded expertise and connections to publicize the environmental calamity in the middle of the country. Survey member Sheldon Dick's wife, Lee Dick, produced a film based on the committee's report and Sheldon's video and still photography.[88] *Men and Dust* (1940) was a dramatic, sixteen-minute art film capturing, like the report itself, living and working conditions in the Tri-State. The affordances of film granted it far more emotive power. Professionally narrated by the activist-actor Will Geer, among others, the film juxtaposed the Tri-State's rural Ozarks surroundings against its industrial core, and the country's wealth against the Tri-State's poverty, in stunning photography and cinematography. "This is our land," the narration begins, backed by an Ozarkian scene of a country church, a rural idyll. "A great land, for a great people. … We are this nation. This is our country. The richest country in the world. … We live here." In characteristic style the film cuts sonically and visually to an image of chat piles twice the height of the telephone wires, a board shack perched at the top. The stark visual is supported by the acapella refrain, "There are mean things happ'nin' in this land," a cover of the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union advocate John L. Handcox.[89] The audio-visual call-and-response of idyll and

[87] "Why Akron is a Ghost City: How Strikes Brought Ruin," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 8, 1939.
[88] From the late-1930s to 1940s, Lee Dick created aesthetically adventurous, artistically significant documentary, industrial, and amateur films. Tanya Goldman speculates that her gender-neutral professional name (given name: Margaret Burgess) was an effort to navigate the male-dominated film industry, and argues that Dick's career "challenges perceived divisions" between her many spheres of nonfiction filmmaking "and invokes tensions between personal and institutional authorship within a sponsored, and deeply collaborative, media context." Dick's bankrolling by Sheldon Dick to make *Men and Dust* fits this interpretation. See Tanya Goldman, "Picturing Lee Dick: A Nonfiction Film Pioneer," *Feminist Media Histories* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 125-134.
[89] John L. Handcox, "There Is Mean Things Happening In This Land," Mar. 1937, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, accessed Sept. 8, 2020, https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc9999005.6543.0.

industry from scene to scene gives way to increasingly harsh and dissonant images jamming together audio tracks of clanking hammers, visuals simulating the sensation of being run over by an ore train, and racing narration. The narrative implicates the growing economic power of the largest operators at the top of a hierarchical and especially exploitative labor regime exacerbated by disastrous environmental conditions. The film ends with a litany of the dead—men as well as women and children, despite the film's title—named and made real in Sheldon Dick's photography. Finally, a stern refrain from Mine Mill's Tony McTeer at a late-1930s rally: "Give us health! Give us work! Give us life!"[90]

*Men and Dust* and the other public attention to the district catalyzed a Department of Labor silicosis conference in Joplin in the Spring of 1940.[91] The first female cabinet secretary in United States history, secretary of labor Frances Perkins, assembled industry, labor, state, and federal representatives April 23 in Joplin to discuss the status of employer efforts at dust control and assess the scientific state of the district's ongoing plagues. In large part, though, the conference rehashed enmities that the 1935 strike—still ongoing, technically—had surfaced. Speaking for the operators, Evan Just told Secretary Perkins that the group she chose to represent workers at the conference, Mine Mill, represented only "an extremely small minority" of the "real workmen" of the district. Notably, however, no Blue Carders were there to speak for themselves either, a typical move by the OPA.[92]

Only weeks after the Joplin conference, Congress convened hearings on "Prevention of Industrial Conditions Hazardous to the Health of Employees." Elizabeth Wade White, Acting

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[90] *Men and Dust*, directed by Lee Dick and Sheldon Dick (1940; Lee Dick, Inc.). Added to the National Film Registry in 2013, the film is preserved by the Library of Congress, accessed Nov 20, 2022, https://www.loc.gov/item/mbrs01852325/.
[91] Rosner and Markowitz, *Deadly Dust*, 152-4,
[92] Paragraph largely drawn from Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 237-39.

Secretary of the Tri-State Survey Committee, showed *Men and Dust* and firmly rebutted the OPA's repeated claims that silicosis and tuberculosis in those years were merely holdovers from the older Joplin District. She referenced McTeer's Joplin testimony to the effect that he had always worked in the Picher Field, always with wet-drilling techniques supposed to decrease dust, and yet he was dying of silicosis. There were many like him, he claimed. *Men and Dust* illustrated the claim, with men using the wet-drilling technique, yet being blasted in the face by dust. The hearings' thrust indicated White's (and the Survey Committee's) good faith: knowing that federal investigations had always found such horrid conditions, the Murray Bill under consideration would empower the states to actually act on them. Dr. Alice Hamilton, who had toured the district back in 1915, was conspicuously present in Washington in 1940. "I am a physician, who specialized in occupational diseases since 1910," she announced when asked to introduce herself. "I was 15 years professor of industrial medicine at Harvard Medical School and now I am consultant for the Division of Labor Standards of the Department of Labor." Of course, she was in favor. She declared that living conditions looked just as they had on her first visit in 1915. "We cannot emphasize enough," Elizabeth Wade White summed for the labor advocates, "the importance of representation and participation of workers, who are exposed to the hazards of industrial disease … in the planning and carrying out of prevention and the general industrial hygiene."[93] The operators had always claimed a monopoly on caring for local labor, but they had never done so to such an extent as to give them an actual voice.

[93] "Prevention of Industrial Conditions Hazardous to the Health of Employees. Hearings before a subcommittee of the committee on education and labor, United States Senate, on S. 3461, a bill to provide for the general welfare by enabling the several states to make more adequate provisions for the control and prevention of industrial conditions hazardous to the health of employees, May 13, 14, 16, 1940," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940), 62-64 (White statement); 99 (Hamilton statement).

Instead, the landscape outside of that singular congressional hearing—a turn against the New Deal's labor support and a national airing of grievances against organized labor—gave Just and the OPA grand ideas about combatting their critics. Although he had admitted the truthfulness of *Time* magazine's article on the district from the previous year, by May 1940 American Zinc Institute secretary Ernest Gent suggested the OPA might be able to drum up a "reasonably successful little show" with the House Committee on Un-American Activities, headed by Martin Dies of Texas.[94] Evan Just duly drafted a letter to Dies describing the "widely publicized attack" by the Tri-State Survey Committee. He accused the committee of using as "subterfuge" the widely held belief that harsh living and working conditions "are cesspools [for] subversive influences." They distorted the local conditions, Just argued, "in a way that makes it clear to me that their real purpose is to discredit the employer class in the public mind." As usual, Just admitted that "we do have some poor and dirty people, examples of bad housing, and some survival of more than average tuberculosis." However, he contested the district being made the face of such conditions nationally, since "the same technique could be used to smear any community on earth." He hoped that both *Men and Dust* and the *Preliminary Report*, whose misguided "furor" had spread to Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins, could be subpoenaed so that Just could have the "opportunity to point out their departures from the truth" and so the Dies Committee could "sift out their real objectives," which Just believed were aligned with Communism. As always when facing outside criticism, Just as the OPA's representative declared that these "trouble-seekers" "have done nothing constructive toward correcting the conditions they claim to exist."[95] It's unclear if Just ever sent the letter.

[94] Just to Harry W. Blair, May 7, 1940. Box 62 PSU.
[95] Just, draft letter to Martin Dies, Committee on Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, May 7, 1940. Box 62 PSU.

Just's claim was another years-long OPA approach, their most oft-repeated charge against critics. The late scene in *Men and Dust*, though, when Mine Mill's McTeer roused a union crowd, clearly had the Tri-State Survey Committee's approval: "The answer to our problem is a four-point program … to straighten out these conditions": a federal workman's compensation law, federal legislation on minimum standards of working conditions ("a law with teeth in it."), an affordable housing development away from the chat piles, and a regional sanitarium for tuberculars.[96] The Tri-State Survey Committee, those "parlor pinks" from New York, publicized their findings as widely as possible, including in front of Congress, where they and others argued that a dignified working life in the Tri-State could only be had by centering workers' desires.[97]

It was up to the real powers in the district to do that. Amid the 1939-1940 onslaught of bad press, though, "Picher Dads" instead rejected a $27,000 WPA project that would have employed eighty-five men through the winter and, perhaps, even alleviated some of the flooding conditions in Picher. As the *Tulsa World* recognized, it was "another chapter in the old C.I.O.-A.F.L. friction over organizing the district's zinc and lead mines": The Picher city council rejected the plan because the WPA had tabbed Mine-Mill sympathizers for the roles of timekeeper and foreman.[98] The poor man's camp had made the Picher Dads. Its continued mythology made remote the prospect of following through on centering workers in their ongoing struggle with the environment and increasing company power. At the same time, structural changes in industry and the economy threatened the whole enterprise, even as a wartime revival

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[96] *Men and Dust*.
[97] "parlor pinks": unknown, letter to W.N Smith (attachment to W.N. Smith letter to Evan Just), Oct. 28, 1939. Box 54 PSU.
[98] "Picher WPA Project is Blocked by Row," Dec. 5, 1939 (clipping from unknown paper); "Council Rejects $27,000 Project: Picher Dads Turn Down Plan to Give Word to 85 Persons," *Tulsa World*, Dec. 12, 1939. Box 1 PSU.

loomed on the horizon. The poor man's camp was dead. But its dying raised issues that only went dormant for a couple of generations: The legitimacy of illness claims; the matter of who was a true Tri-State miner; whether the mining landscape was dangerous; and the proof for many that strife followed outsiders into the district. These would rise again.

## 3. MICKEY MANTLE'S CLEAN WHITE ASS ESCAPES THE MINE AT MIDCENTURY

Mutt Mantle came as close to the poor man's camp ideal as a worker could in the final productive years of the Picher Field. He would never hold a mining lease or collect royalties from the labor of others, but as the companies grew stronger than ever and barred Mine Mill supporters from employment, he advanced from shoveler with the Eagle-Picher Company in 1934 to shovelers' boss, to ground boss by World War II, the local term for a foreman.[1] It was a series of promotions and elevations, from underground at the rock face, to up in the fresh air, and from working under the whole company to managing at least some of its bodies. By moving away from the dirt Mantle moved more firmly into his white manhood as race science and eugenics had made southern, poor whiteness racially suspect, especially in the Depression.[2] Devotion to the company, not to the union, had allowed him to rise.[3] Mutt was like other western miners and home-front laborers who, contrary to Greatest Generation mythology, found the war a threat to their masculinity because they didn't serve in uniform. In the Picher Field, as elsewhere, demand for their work allowed them to grasp their breadwinner's manhood through steady wages and support for their families.[4]

Mutt's trajectory, however, did not mean that the working-class "organization man" would win the future. Larger forces were afoot, anticipating the dire future for working people

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[1] Tony Castro, *Mickey Mantle: America's Prodigal Son* (Washington: Brassey's, 2002), 13; Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 239.
[2] On the relationship between dirty work and whiteness: Zimring, *Clean and White*. On the backsliding whiteness of poor, rural workers, especially in the South: David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 200; and Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Country* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
[3] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 239.
[4] Matthew L. Basso, *Meet Joe Copper: Masculinity and Race on Montana's World War II Home Front* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1-4.

across the country regardless of their organized power. From the end of World War II to 1960, Tri-State mining all but came to an end. Its proponents developed an interpretation that they—good, white, American workingmen—were betrayed by a country that helped up the impoverished people of the Third World and turned its back on the domestic mining industry.

The Picher Field's predicament, however, was less a betrayal of the white workingman than an extension of the logic that had made him: capitalist extractive expansion as the hallmark of progress, a racial civilizing project tending toward industrial modernity. The Picher Field, as it turned out, was but one mineral frontier in the forward march of that progress. Global frontiers beckoned. With their wider view of American prosperity—and an eye to Cold War geopolitics—political and economic elites wedded ideas about conservation, race, and capitalist progress familiar to Tri-State boosters, but now wielded those ideas to liberalize and more thoroughly globalize the minerals industry, undercutting places such as Picher, Oklahoma, in the process. These harbingers appeared in critical events and federal programs at midcentury. Mickey Mantle, not Mutt, would win the new era, escaping his dad's occupation on the strength of uncommon baseball talent and a white working-class history to cheer for. The midcentury moment revealed just how fragile were footings sunk only in extractive industry and the inherited privileges of whiteness.

The first stirrings of these processes emerged even before the United States entered World War II. When the *Joplin Globe* assumed in 1940 that the Picher Field's salvation was imminent in the defeat of Mine Mill, the writer had lost the thread. The important clue dwelled in his own article; the issue that had convinced him of organized labor's destructive tendencies was that the "smear" of district industry coincided with a federal reduction in the zinc tariff. The tariff on imported minerals had always made the Tri-State profitable, so it must have been Mine

Mill and the CIO, the *Joplin Globe* editorial assumed, who brought the tariff reduction because the industry's struggle was "grist to their mill."[5] Lower wages made district laborers more receptive to the union's radical hatred for operators, according to the newspaper's logic (a localized version of the geopolitical narrative about the Soviets profiting globally by hunger and insecurity). Without inquiring about other forces behind the tariff reduction, however, the writer and most Tri-Staters failed to see the power of market liberalization driving industrial and political elites toward an embrace of global markets.

The zinc tariff reduction was part of a program called reciprocal trade, an expression of New Deal-era internationalism. In pushing for market liberalization, the Roosevelt administration argued that protectionist trade policy had worsened the Great Depression. Protectionism's poster child was the 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, an industry-driven knee-jerk reaction to the onset of the Depression that raised tariffs on imports in a failed effort to protect the American market for American-made products. Instead of solving the problem of U.S. overproduction, Smoot-Hawley helped spur Europe's own such problem, deepening and globalizing the Depression.[6] The act motivated reprisals, putting up barriers to global trade at the very moment the global capitalist system might have benefited from the opposite. Smoot-Hawley became infamous as a cautionary tale.[7]

Reciprocal trade and tariff reduction, alongside a so-called Good Neighbor Policy aimed at improved relations with Latin America, started to point a perilous future path for the Tri-State when it came to federal policy. The Good Neighbor Policy repudiated a decades-long history of

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[5] "'The Melody Begins to Pall'," *Joplin Globe*, Jan. 20, 1940.
[6] T.H. Watkins, *The Great Depression: America in the 1930s* (New York: Little, Brown, 1993), 43-4.
[7] Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013), 262.

U.S. military interventions in the region, replacing it with economic influence. This was not a stated goal, but rather an outcome. Latin America was, it turned out, a region rich in industrial and strategic metals, in addition to its long status as plantation economy for American fruit consumers. Lowering tariffs to promote global trade flowing both into and out of the United States was a prime tenet of reciprocal trade. In theory it meant lower prices for American consumers and stronger profits for American corporations thanks to the creation of new consumer markets in foreign lands. To the Tri-State, however, tariff reduction allowed for easier access to cheap foreign metals by American industries, which would render the Tri-State's increasingly marginal ores uncompetitive. Yet, instead of blaming the agents of reciprocal trade, or seeing how the wide interests of American consumers were replacing producers at the center of economic thinking, in Picher it was much easier to see the devil in the labor agitator.

Evan Just, the capable mouthpiece of the OPA, saw these forces of diminished American metal reserves and declining protectionism on the horizon. In 1942, only a few years after defending the district's reputation from outside interpretations of working conditions, Just left the OPA to become editor of the *Engineering and Mining Journal*. There he made an editorial reputation for emphasizing what he called the "larger view."[8] He was, perhaps owing to his time in the Tri-State, obsessed by tariffs. While at the OPA, he opposed the State Department's targeting of the zinc tariff (the issue the *Joplin Globe* took exception to in 1940), but only because he saw it as wrongly singling out zinc. Production of that metal was marginal in the wider American minerals landscape and needed ongoing tariff protection, especially because the Tri-State's ores were decreasing in richness. The larger view as editor, however, meant that he was generally supportive of reciprocal trade and the relaxation or removal of protective tariffs.

[8] Just, "Geologist," 55.

Overall, Just felt that Hull's program "did the country a great deal of good," and Just appeared to be a rather devoted "free trader" himself as editor of the mining industry's most prominent publication.[9] Just preached that the industry "wouldn't get anywhere by trying to build a 'Chinese wall' of tariff protection around the country." No longer a lobbyist for the OPA's Picher-based concerns, Just had become the spokesman for a wider industry interest in profit wherever it could be found, and more general American interest in affordable consumer goods built from all sorts of metals.

The larger view, from Just's postwar editor's desk, forced him to reckon with the realities of extracting finite nature: American mineral reserves were vanishing. The war that Picherites so patriotically profited from with a temporary zinc boom had played a large part. "Whether we liked it or not," Just averred, "there were going to be imports." He counseled the minerals industry to "learn to live with" that fact instead of fighting "selfishly" for short-term protection that would create "conditions … adverse to the best interests of the country."[10] He was merely a pragmatist, and although his stance was not always popular with industry heads, they grudgingly respected his sincerity and foresight. Just was thankful for that, and that the industry's men were "a little broader in their viewpoint" than most, "a little larger than life." As such, they were willing to accept his sometimes inconvenient long view.[11] The industry was filled with people like Just: trained in geology, adventurous, and well-traveled in what had always been an international industry. Those men might even profit by placing their American companies even more fully into global minerals production, especially if the effort was backed by state power.

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[9] Just, "Geologist," 49.
[10] Just, "Geologist," 55.
[11] Just, "Geologist," 55 (first quote), 56 (second quote).

Broad mining-industry experience and his keen sense for the longer view made Just attractive to policymakers in Washington. They, too, saw the writing on the mine walls warning of depletion.

More pressingly, they saw the crisis of postwar recovery as a potential breeding ground for communists. If the Depression had been global, and World War II was an all-encompassing conflict, so too was superpower strategy a big picture affair after the war. With two powers standing, the United States and the Soviet Union, neither erstwhile ally would stand pat and let events play out in a war-torn world. And Europe was in shambles, its economy anemic, its infrastructure ruined, and many of its people facing the prospect of famine. Already by 1946, communist guerillas were on the move in Greece and Turkey, a civil war in progress in China, and the French at war in Indochina. Facing the growth of a globe-spanning communist bloc, President Truman decided to aid Greece and Turkey, signaling what he later called "the turning point in America's foreign policy."[12] Strong communist parties winning democratic elections, especially in such countries as France and Italy, added urgency to the matter.

The crisis of postwar recovery was the motive behind the European Recovery Plan and Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), known colloquially as the Marshall Plan, a program to pump huge sums of money into reconstructing Europe for prosperity in the hopes of diminishing the appeal of communism. In 1948 Paul Hoffman, first administrator of the ECA, asked Just to lead the organization's strategic minerals division. Just took a leave from the *Engineering and Mining Journal* to do so. While the ECA's work was ostensibly based in Europe, the strategic minerals division developed mining enterprises in Europe's "dependencies," colonial holdovers such as Jamaica, the Guyanas, Algeria, Morocco, French Equatorial Africa. The upshot of foreign mineral development for the Marshall Plan was that

[12] Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, 417.

unlike in Europe proper, the strategic minerals division in the "dependencies" produced raw materials for American stockpiles.[13] It was explicitly extractive and colonial.

Where Europeans could simply accept American largesse through the Marshall Plan, the so-called developing world had to give something up. Marshall Plan monies for the continent came usually as grants and material, virtually no strings attached. European recovery was urgent not only to stave off communism, but also to rapidly recreate the markets for U.S. goods lost since the war's destruction. European leaders in the many countries received and administered the Marshall Plan's grants and materials. They knew how to rebuild their great industrial economies, which offered a hoped-for return of incalculable margins to Americans.

Development dollars spend in the "dependencies" did not. There, in addition to the extraction of minerals for U.S. stockpiles, American contractors administered the programs. Just and the government he represented eventually extended the underlying logic: mineral extraction from "backwards" countries to enrich the "developed" world, exacted by shaping the domestic politics of host nations. As in its larger context of global market liberalization, though, this would not be merely imperialism of an older order, according to its proponents. It would rain benefits of economic development down on those host nations, too. First, that vision of mutual profit through enlightened self-interest had to be articulated and its administrative apparatus constructed.

President Truman mounted a cold January podium to do that in his 1949 inaugural address. Having assumed the presidency in 1945 when Roosevelt died, it was the first speech on such a stage for the unexpected victor in the 1948 election. The inaugural address was a momentous opportunity for Truman to frame the fluid moment of that new postwar world order.

[13] Just, "Geologist," 65-73.

He drew a Manichean depiction of what was just coming to be called the Cold War. Truman declared American intentions for a lasting peace and the country's goodness in the world, a sort of faith simultaneously secular and religious, connecting "equal justice under the law" and "equal opportunity to share in the common good," to equal rights flowing from Americans' creation "in the image of God." "From this faith we will not be moved," Truman stated. He crafted a litany of back-and-forth comparisons opposing that faith with communism, "that false philosophy," describing communism as a threat to individual liberties within the Soviet orbit and to recovery and peace across the world.[14] The United States, then, he asserted in the second half of his speech, was to be the guarantor of that recovery and peace.

Truman's 1949 inaugural address laid out four "courses of action" toward his "program for peace and freedom." The first three assured continued support for the fledgling United Nations; continued programs toward world economic recovery, like the Marshall Plan; and a commitment to military preparedness.[15] Together these reveal the general outlines of the United States' Cold War imperatives to come: the seeds of a "domino theory" that communism might advance country-by-country, the need for the United States to exercise influence to forestall that spread, and the twinkling of the strategists' assumption that the country needed to pursue and maintain a "preponderance of power" over the Soviet Union, as one historian termed it, which the country would enter an arms race to keep.[16]

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[14] "Harry S. Truman Inaugural Address," Jan. 20, 1949, Clark M. Clifford Papers, Box 37, Presidential Speech File folder, Inaugural Address January 20, 1949 (1 of 4), Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri. Hereafter cited Truman Library.
[15] "Harry S. Truman Inaugural Address."
[16] Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

Truman saved most of his breath and time for Point Four, and it was only Point Four that took on a life of its own as a defined program beyond the inaugural address. Point Four declared, "We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas." More than half the people on Earth were "living in conditions approaching misery." They were hungry, diseased, and constrained by "primitive and stagnant" economic lives. "Their poverty," Truman argued, "is a handicap and a threat both to them and to the more prosperous areas." A few years earlier he might have been describing the Picher Field, the Ozarks, or Appalachia. Instead, he was more expansive and hopeful. For the first time in world history, he claimed, "humanity" could solve that problem. "The material resources" the United States could marshal for this project were limited, "but our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible."[17] The country, Truman believed, possessed human capital that, trained on the "underdeveloped areas," would let them develop their own human capital. In time, that developing human capital would become traditional capital—wealth, comfort, and the staid politics that stability engenders.

In this conception of spreading nothing more than American knowledge, Truman tried to insulate his program from charges of imperialism. He pointed out that "we have sought no territory and we have imposed our will on none." If the buzzword of the domestic New Deal was "security," the mantra of Truman's global Fair Deal was "cooperation." Guaranteeing investor returns had to be balanced against pledges to the people in the developing nations "whose resources and whose labor" would ultimately build the enterprises. "The old imperialism—exploitation for profit," Truman forcefully annunciated, "has no place in our plans." Point Four,

[17] "Harry S. Truman Inaugural Address."

he assured, would be based on "democratic fair-dealing." Truman would not allow Point Four to be lumped with older European projects of extractive empire.

Yet Truman was clear to his American listeners that their own country would also benefit. Point Four was not, mainly, altruistic. History proved that U.S. "commerce" grew as foreign countries made industrial and economic progress, he asserted. Production was the "key to prosperity and peace," and the key to increased production was technological advance. To harness that knowledge and defeat the developing world's "ancient enemies" of "hunger, misery, and despair," Truman concluded, "we must have continued prosperity in this country and we must keep ourselves strong."[18] Democracy as the redeemer. Production as the key to prosperity and peace. A strong nation at home. These must have sounded like timeless truths in the Tri-State, a place that understood its existence as having contributed to democracy, a strong nation, and national prosperity.

A presidential speech, however, is not the clearest expression of an administration's intent. It is, rather, a distillation meant to make that intent politically palatable. And a government's intent is hard to pin down, "the state" being a sometimes unwieldy and diverse thing, made up of many interests. In other words, such a speech obscures as much as it reveals. What it clouds is instructive. The many rounds of revisions reveal an awakening postwar power uncomfortable with the title of empire. The speech's concept grew out of administration anxiety over the charge that the U.S. had theretofore only been negative in its opposition to communism.[19] The speech thus outlined a positive alternative, Truman's point-by-point

[18] "Harry S. Truman Inaugural Address."
[19] "Use of U.S. Technological Resources as a Weapon in the Struggle with International Communism," Dec. 15, 1948, and handwritten note, Clifford Papers Box 38, Presidential Speech File, Inaugural Address January 20, 1949 folder (2 of 4). Truman Library.

opposition of the American love of freedom and individualism in the image of God, versus a communism that required "strong masters" and subjugation to the state. The speech's many drafts, passed around the State Department in the weeks leading to January 20, revealed a painstaking effort to outline a program that would make real Truman's definition of the country.

Clearest of all changes, the inaugural's draftees displayed a growing sense that the speech would be heard globally. While Point Four's concept came from mid-level department staffer Ben Hardy, and most drafting from Truman's advisor Clark Clifford, it was Dean Acheson, the Undersecretary of State who would soon be named Secretary of State, who made the edits that were most clearly aware of their global audience. The important architect of postwar foreign policy trimmed Clifford's first-draft paeon to humans' world-shaping power: "We can change rivers in their courses, move mountains, convert deserts into fertile fields. Man has the power to bend nature to his own uses."[20] Better not to highlight the disruptive extraction that might accrue from "technical cooperation." Likewise, Acheson edited how Point Four's benefits would redound to host nations, and not only the United States. "Their poverty is a handicap and a threat to more prosperous areas" he expanded to include "themselves" in the ranks of those threatened by poverty. Similarly, the address's changes democratized Point Four's windfall beyond the U.S. and host nations to include the U.N. and even "all nations."[21] These subtle revisions hinted at the potential that Point Four's messaging and its real purpose might be different things.

In the year-and-a-half after Truman's inaugural, as Congress batted around legislation to make Point Four a reality, man different interests from media, business, and government got

[20] "Revised Outline for Inaugural Address," Jan. 12, 1949. Clifford Papers Box 37, Presidential Speech File, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949 (1 of 4) folder, Truman Library.
[21] Truman inaugural draft of January 16, Clifford Papers Box 37, Presidential Speech File, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949 (1 of 4) folder, Truman Library.

their say about what it should be. They further inflected the original message and various intents silenced in the drafting process. Almost instantly, State Department staffers began receiving inquiries from national business leaders interested in lending their "experience in the field" and expertise "for legislative and administrative suggestions" to implement the program.[22] The economic expert and former executive director of the Board of Economic Warfare Milo Perkins distilled the business elite's common sense for *Harper's Magazine.* Suggesting what he called "partnership capitalism," Perkins argued that the U.S. should end all government-to-government payment programs on the order of the Marshall Plan and replace them with private investment. We should take the lessons of our domestic success—"using the powers of government to buttress our economy rather than to control it"—and extend that to the world, effectively coercing foreign governments into creating a "climate" suitable to attract American investment. "Our economy in this country can remain healthy only if it continues to expand," Perkins stated, echoing Truman's inaugural assumption. The country's main business need for the foreseeable future, he claimed, was "an ever-increasing number of customers and for ever-broadening markets." American businessmen could "join hands" with business leaders in Point Four host nations to satisfy their self-interest, too, in increasing their industrial and agricultural output.[23]

Between Truman's inaugural and Point Four's codification in law, the Picher Field's own bargain with extractive private capital began to appear doomed. The wartime boom had petered out as soon as the war ended, and the war's subsidies propping up lead and zinc prices went

[22] David D. Lloyd to Clark M. Clifford, January 24, 1949. Clifford Papers Box 38, Presidential Speech File, Point IV—President's Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949 folder, Truman Library.
[23] Milo Perkins, "What We *Can* Do Under Point Four," *Harper's Magazine* (December 1949): 52-61. Sent from Harry Stinnett to Clark Clifford. Clifford Papers, Box 38, Presidential Speech File, Point IV—President's Inaugural Address, January 20, 1949—Miscellaneous folder (1 of 2), Truman Library.

away in 1947. By 1948 and 1949 the district's operators undertook lengthy shutdowns when low metal prices made profits impossible. Mining towns such as Picher leaked laboring men to larger regional cities and, especially, to other mining areas in the West.

If leaving was an individual solution, the town of Picher and the people invested in its permanence had no such option. They would have to live alongside the landscape created by forty years of mining that had been more profitable, and more productive of chat, than any similar period. The historical geographer Gray Brechin has written that cities are "inverted minescapes," material pulled from the ground and built up to the sky in reassembled forms like skyscrapers.[24] At the other end of our geographies of labor, in rural landscapes of production, the mining process makes a similar, if seemingly less modern, inversion; most of what comes out of the earth is not usable, and what is not usable has to be piled somewhere. Even in Commerce, on the edge of the Picher Field, Mutt Mantle's son Mickey grew up down the block from a chat pile. When he wasn't learning to play baseball in one-on-one instruction from Mutt after the mine whistle, he practiced with friends on dried sludge ponds, perfectly flat but lacking grass "because it was so heavily slanted one way or the other on the chemical chart," according to one of his childhood friends.[25] Mickey's mother forbade him from swimming with other children in mining ponds, saving him a few bouts with red eyes.[26] Just north of town loomed the largest chat pile in Tri-State district history, conveyor-belted skyward by Eagle-Picher's Central Mill in only two decades. As productivity ballooned during World War II, the useful portion of the mined material fell off sharply; only about two percent of the material taken from the earth by the 1950s

[24] Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley, CA, 2006), 66.
[25] Jane Leavy, *The Last Boy: Mickey Mantle and the End of America's Childhood* (New York, 2010), 40.
[26] Leavy, *Last Boy*, 40.

was mineral. The chat piles mounted faster than ever. They gave Picher its distinctive grid of dead-end streets that continued again on the other side of the pile; they ringed Cardin in a belt of chat; and they bracketed Treece, Kansas, in a chat-pile straitjacket. Other towns had more breathing space, seeing a skyline in the chat piles, a country counterpart to the urban centers the minerals were also making.

Meanwhile, the underground caverns hollowed out in like proportion to the growing piles and the weight of all the zinc zooming around in the reassembled form of postwar automobiles (as one notable example). Sometimes the ground fell in, as it always had in the mining areas. Usually these were harmless events in a place mostly rural. But on February 7, 1950, the Eagle-Picher Company announced that five blocks around Picher's central business district posed an immediate cave-in risk.[27] The interest on Picher's investment in brash, risk-taking, extractive whiteness was coming due.

It might have been a nice metaphor of the relationship between a town and its industry: a mine room so exploited that its pillars could no longer be trusted to hold up the whole affective heart of the American small town, Main Street. The local response entertained no such morbid whimsy. While Eagle-Picher recommended closing the area to public traffic, the City Council met in emergency session to weigh the risks. Then, at least publicly, and with the help of local media, they minimized those risks. In this they were probably not uncaring politicians so much as mouthpieces for the town's prevailing sentiments. "We don't know how dangerous the ground really is," and so closing businesses would be irresponsible, counseled the Council.[28] The day after the announcement, businessmen told reporters that they were "satisfied with morning sales

[27] "Eagle-Picher Claims Five Block Square is Dangerous," *Tri-State Tribune* Feb. 9, 1950.
[28] "Eagle-Picher Claims"

and no one has indicated definite plans to move." There was "no need of being unduely [sic] alarmed at this time," echoed a Picher bank official. "Business there will go on as usual." His evidence was the fact that no collapse had happened there in the past, so there shouldn't be any worry about a collapse in the present or future.[29] He was not alone in such circular reasoning. Mrs. Lyndon Scott, wife of a prominent town builder and furniture store owner, lived over the cave-in area and told the *Miami News-Record* that the newly announced dangers were "no worse than in former years."[30] Adding a bad pun to the litany of reassurances, the paper reasoned that "Town leaders, the mining company, businessmen and the average citizen at Picher, surely won't 'fall out'" over the news.[31] It was the old Tri-State media message of community unity, but now, curiously, without mention of mine workers.

Underneath brave headlines, behind the City Council's closed doors, and within the businessmen's offices, however, the response was less sanguine. The collapse scare was clearly not just another day in the mining town's history. The council was asking for legal help about its potential liability. Mayor T.D. Wood said in the emergency City Council session that downtown's fate was "a tough decision … nothing like it has faced us before," countering every single citizen quotation in the news.[32] Businesses *were* closing and moving to new sites in town. The Plaza theater, concerned about "the moral obligation to their public," closed its doors the day *before* the paper claimed that nobody planned to move a business out of the area.[33] The next

[29] "Not Critical yet, But Picher Residents of Four-Block Area Told Ground Might Give Way," *Miami Daily News-Record*, Feb. 7, 1950.
[30] Picher Calm, Residents Voice Little Alarm over Quick Act," *Miami Daily News-Record*, Feb. 8, 1950.
[31] "Picher's Dilemma," editorial, *Miami Daily News-Record*, Feb. 8, 1950.
[32] "Picher's Dilemma."
[33] "City Without Movie House," *Miami Daily News-Record*, Feb. 8, 1950; "Eagle Picher Claims…"

week, the *Tri-State Tribune* headlined, "Picher Carries on in Usual Manner," while also admitting that "a few businesses have already moved into new homes, away from the 'area.'"[34] In addition to downplaying risk and conveying unity where it might not have existed, district media completed its characteristic trifecta by closing its immediate post-announcement coverage with an appeal that the federal government "lend a helping hand" to "this zinc capital, which has produced so much for America in two World wars, [and which] deserves whatever aid it may get from outside."[35] Nothing here was out of the ordinary, the paper argued: mining brought risk, and the community needed federal aid. The paper's linking of federal aid and district deservingness both hearkened back to its history and anticipated Picher's future as environmental threats compounded.

Mayor Wood's outward resolve disappeared in his appeal for federal support. "Dear Sir[, I] Am writing you today in [sic] the behalf of business men['s] conditions in the city of Picher[,] Okla," he scrawled in a scantily punctuated note to Senator Robert S. Kerr (D-OK). After describing the threat to "16 residential 4 office bldg.. 39 business places 4 rooming houses in this area," Wood asked, "Is there a way that they can get federal aid on this in regards of relocating there [sic] property?" Wood hoped the "Department of Mines" (the federal Bureau of Mines, likely) could perform an investigation as soon as possible to assess the actual risk of imminent collapse.[36] A representative of the bureau did soon visit, making a quick walk-through, and informally recommending that the town seek an appropriation of just over one hundred thousand dollars from Congress to fill the mine. Everyone knew the city of Picher had no hopes of raising

[34] "Picher Carries on In Usual Manner," *Tri-State Tribune*, Feb. 16, 1950.
[35] "Picher's Dilemma."
[36] T.D. Wood to Robert S. Kerr, Feb. 14, 1950. Robert S. Kerr Collection, Departmental, Box 8, folder 17-2, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, University of Oklahoma. Hereafter cited CAC.

such a fund. The Bureau of Mines refused to do a fuller study and expose itself to potential liability. Within two weeks of Eagle-Picher's warnings, the district's U.S. Representative Elmer Thomas (D-OK) informed Mayor Wood that he—speaking for the federal government—could "give no aid to Picher."[37] The "area" became the newspaper's new name for what had once been downtown Picher. All of the businesses and homes were evacuated permanently within a year. Main Street closed for business, fenced off by chain link.

The government's inability to relieve Picher put an exclamation mark on more than a year of growing trepidation about the federal government's global vision. While Truman appealed to Congress for Point Four funding, *Tri-State Tribune* publisher M.L. Post noted that the president hadn't "kicked up much dust" for a bill to aid the mining district that fell partly in his home state.[38] In the context of weekly headlines such as "Price of Ore Dropped Again Last Week," and "Eagle-Picher Shut Down Big Mill and Mines," he wrote acidly, "It is of far more importance that natives in those foreign nations have something to eat than American people who probably voted for him."[39] Post claimed to support "being good to the world," but went on, "I don't like the idea of being taxed for the support of people in a foreign land who are still farming with a forked stick pulled by a water buffalo."[40] While understanding the political-economic relationship of domestic and foreign, Post did not accept it on Truman's terms: that American benefits would flow out from global development. The district neared full unemployment in the mining industry, since the closure of Eagle-Picher's Central Mill meant

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[37] "Thomas Can Give No Aid to Picher, He Tells Mayor," *Miami Daily News-Record*, Feb. 22, 1950.
[38] M.L. Post, "Thinking Out Loud," June 23, 1949.
[39] "Price of Ore Dropped Again Last Week," *Tri-State Tribune*, May 5, 1949; "Eagle-Picher Shut Down Big Mill and Mines," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 7, 1949; Post, "Thinking Out Loud."
[40] Post, "Thinking Out Loud."

that small producers who might have battled through the low prices had no place to process their ore. M.L. Post, however, was on his way to retirement, and district media's antagonism of foreign aid fell off for a while.

The period of mining decline alongside the rise of foreign aid could appear extremely dissonant in the pages of Picher's paper at midcentury. In the late 1940s a syndicated cartoon began appearing, often on the front page, called "The American Way." It trotted out stock characters like "Lefty," a swarthy, unshaven young man with dark pompadour and generous nose; the "Political Planner," a diminutive, bespectacled and bowtie-clad wonk; and "Most of Us," a mature, white man dispensing common sense from beneath his grey moustache, often as a farmer in overalls. These figures all served to lampoon "collectivism," "subsidized" public goods, taxes, and political planning as un-American (arriving with the recognizably "ethnic" Lefty). In another frequent column, "Snowball, The Office Cat, Says," the paper's resident feline pondered asking the editor for a raise, and then realizing he "was making some money, had a nice home and a good living, and perhaps I had better be satisfied. Many a poor fellow doesn't have near as much as I."[41] Or, wondering what to do on the editor's vacation, asked "Who will find a job for me—Lots of men are like me, if it wasn't for a boss, I wouldn't have anything to do."[42] Or, lamenting how the "Missus" forced him to plant flowers in Springtime, but then realizing how nice it really was: "I'm glad I'm an American and can have flowers and freedom. AREN'T YOU?"[43] Snowball's anthropomorphized messages resonated perfectly alongside another frequent entry, also, like "The American Way," syndicated. "My Neighbors" was a small, single-image cartoon with a folksy aphorism, such as, "The difference between

[41] "Snowball, the Office Cat, Says," *Tri-State Tribune*, May 26, 1949.
[42] "The Office Cat Says," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 7, 1949.
[43] "Snowball, the Office Cat, Says," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 17, 1949.

Collectivism and Free Enterprise is that Free Enterprise REALLY WORKS … when the people do!"[44] Or, "A Collectivist is a guy with more dinner-bucket than dinner. Instead of workin', he'd rather pass a law to get your pork chop."[45] In their renderings of American and un-American bodies, their depictions of hard-working individualism, and their preoccupation with collectivism as opposed to an "American free enterprise system, "The American Way," Snowball, the Office Cat, and "My Neighbors" all placed Tri-State Americanism in its global Cold War context.

The paper's other news contradicted these polemics almost weekly. Ironically, at the same time "The American Way" depicted bad "Security Seekers" being carried by good "Tax-Paying Producers" from the cradle to the grave, or "My Neighbors" decried collectivists trying to get "your" pork chop, district operators launched a drive for federal subsidies to keep them in business.[46] The operators hoped for "collective Tri-State support of premium price legislation" that would draw federal money pooled collectively through taxation.[47] The week after the "mine subsidy bill" received a "Thumbs Down" in the House of Representatives, "My Neighbors" intoned, "Our political leaders ought to give us another 'freedom.' Freedom from so darn much political leadership!"[48] As if *less* government was going to solve the local economic conundrum while its industry died of ostensibly natural causes both market-oriented and from depletion.

In the place where "Most of Us" toiled in solid American individualism, eschewing collectivism, a letter to the editor asked, "what is wrong with Picher?" Its author didn't mean the "situation as a whole"—the mine and mill closures or environmental challenges—but only the

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[44] "My Neighbors," *Tri-State Tribune*, May 5, 1949.
[45] "My Neighbors," *Tri-State Tribune*, August 25, 1949.
[46] "The American Way," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1949; "My Neighbors," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 25, 1949; "Operators Launch Drive for Subsidies," *Tri-State Tribune*, April 21, 1949.
[47] "Operators Launch Drive for Subsidies."
[48] "'Thumbs Down' On Mine Subsidy Bill," *Tri-State Tribune*, Oct. 20, 1949; "My Neighbors," Oct. 27, 1949.

"lack of business." Yes, he admitted, "the mining industry is practically our only answer of keeping our town alive and going," yet he implied that perhaps, if only people remained committed to the town, it could still thrive. Most pointedly, he lamented the fact that even the miners lived somewhere else: Miami or Commerce, Oklahoma; Columbus or Baxter Springs, Kansas; even Joplin, Webb City, and Granby, Missouri. Likewise, the owners of local businesses. Too much of Picher's money was leaving Picher. While his focus was local, he revealed a global conflict at the heart of his argument when he transitioned, "thank God this is still a free country we are living in. No one yet may tell us where we must live, send our children to school, etc." Seemingly on the verge of an authoritarian solution, he continued, simply, "But, … in our bewilderment, chagrin, and downright disgust, I think I am getting close to some of the reasons why our merchants are 'singing the blues.'"[49] He could not, for geopolitical, Cold War reasons, bring himself to demand that people be forced to live in Picher to support its non-mining merchants. In doing so the letter writer revealed his confusion, perhaps exemplary in the town, about the waining status of the white, American working-class community beset by a declining industry in a global economy and a globalizing political awareness. Picher residents, unlike the generations before them, were conflicted about their position. Comfortable with taking subsidies in the past as the political economic benefits that should accrue to native-born whites, now such support was entangled in global problems on the leeward side of totalitarianism and amid an ongoing threat from the "Reds."

As the collapse scare wound down and 1950 wore on in Picher, Congress came to an agreement to fund and administer Point Four. On June 5, it passed the Foreign Economic Assistance Act of 1950, which empowered the Department of State to establish the Technical

[49] "To the Editor: What is Wrong With Picher?" *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 24, 1949.

Cooperation Administration (TCA) on October 27. On November 15 President Truman appointed, with the consent of the Senate, Oklahoma A&M College president Henry Garland Bennett as the first TCA administrator.[50] The *Tri-State Tribune* reported positively on the appointment, noting his international experience at the intersection of agriculture, education, and foreign aid. "His job, actually," wrote the Picher weekly of the Point Four gig, "as pointed out by Washington sources, is to help build world wide [sic] barriers against communism."[51] The paper's distillation of Bennett's wide-ranging responsibilities illustrates the degree to which the nearly two years of debate about Point Four inflected Truman's original vision (also, perhaps, the change in editorship after C. Allen Matthews replaced Post). Despite Truman's hopes for humanitarian uplift, the anticommunist potential for technical assistance became its strongest selling point to people such as those in the Tri-State, a place born in opposition to Bolshevism and collectivism. Picher anticommunism was strong enough even to throw Tri-State media off the scent of something M.L. Post had been onto a year prior: their government giving U.S. taxpayer money to the world while the mining district struggled.

Born in 1886 in Nevada County, Arkansas, Henry Bennett moved to the new state of Oklahoma 1908 after graduating from Ouachita College. He taught school in Boswell, moved down the road to become superintendent in Hugo in 1910, and then down the road again to become president of Southeastern State Normal School in Durant in 1919. There he developed a

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[50] Office of the Historian, United States of America Department of State, "Administrators of the Technical Cooperation Administration, https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/principalofficers/administrator-technical-cooperation-administration, accessed March 1, 2021; Office of the Historian, United States of America Department of State, "Henry Garland Bennett (1886-1951), https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/bennett-henry-garland, accessed March 1, 2021.

[51] "Dr. Henry G. Bennett Appointed to Direct Point-Four Program," *Tri-State Tribune* Nov. 23, 1950.

knack for building institutions, overseeing Southeastern's move from a "normal school" with two buildings and under five hundred students, to a modern "state teacher's college" with triple that enrollment by 1928. In the same period, he earned a master's degree from Oklahoma A&M and a doctorate from Columbia University. Bennett attracted the attention of state higher education leaders, who tapped him with hopes he could duplicate the feat at Oklahoma A&M College, then a small, academic backwater. He did, on the foresight of a "Twenty-Five Year Plan" that, as in Durant, tripled enrollments while constructing and renovating dozens of buildings. By the early 1950s Bennett's vision had helped A&M achieve national recognition as a leader in land-grant colleges offering mechanical and agricultural programs.[52]

Conventional interpretations paint progressive reformers, New Dealers, and especially postwar liberals as modern and technocratic, but it was not so much Bennett's modern administrative credentials as it was his traditionalism, his pride in hefting the mantle of the American frontier settler that fit him perfectly for the country's postwar expansion. Young enough to have missed the pioneer's roughest challenges, Bennett was old enough to have grown up amid the pioneer's elegiac valorization.[53] In no state was that history closer to the surface than in Oklahoma. Although not born there, Bennett was steeped in the settler iconography of his near-frontier birth. His orations floated on "Anglo-Saxon initiative and freedom," the "hardy and restless pioneer spirit" that both gave birth to Oklahoma and was "the flower of America's adventure in democracy."[54] The son of a Baptist minister, he was filled with missionary zeal for

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[52] L. David Norris, "Bennett, Henry Garland," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BE018 (accessed March 3, 2021).
[53] David Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).
[54] Henry Garland Bennett, "Our Oklahoma Heritage, and Other Addresses," 10 (first quote), 8 (second and third quote), 1932-1933, Bennett Papers, Box 1, Truman Library.

spreading the gospels of agricultural and industrial development, the superiority of American institutions, Christianity, and all else falling under the "Anglo-Saxon" Western tradition.

Bennett's sense of the expansive American past informed his work toward an expansive American future. As he told one A&M graduating class in a speech filled with ministerial appeals to his "friends," "history is the story of the coming of a broader, finer, freer life to the inarticulate masses of mankind." He exhorted his charges not to forget "this fact of America's mission to mankind: colonization by God-fearing, home-loving, freedom-seeking men and women."[55] Alongside the state's vaunted oil industry, Bennett even remembered the "gigantic moles burrowing" for zinc in "our northeast country." He queried, "who can view these vast material blessings and not feel pride of State and pride of people well [up] from the secret places of his heart!"[56] Such blessings, presumably, were what continued American expansion would endow upon the earth's "backward" races as American "colonization" continued through Point Four. Although nobody in the Truman administration said it aloud, Bennett was the perfect bridge between the United States' earlier continental expansion and the global one it was orchestrating after World War II.

Men such as Bennett illustrate an important continuity across time in U.S. global intervention. Many others in the minerals milieu carried similar assumptions about extraction, empire, and freedom. James Boyd, director of the U.S. Bureau of Mines from 1947-1951, positioned the American mining industry as direct inheritor of the crumbling British Empire. It was an uncomfortable idea to Truman, clearly, one needing justification and a new vision to manufacture its legitimacy while Europe's colonies rebelled. Boyd had to make no such

[55] Bennett, "Our Oklahoma Heritage," 5-6.
[56] Bennett, "Our Oklahoma Heritage," 14-15.

concessions to the minerals industry, however. As he told the American Zinc Institute in 1948, assembled in St. Louis, "I believe all of us who serve in the mining industry have been attracted there because of its venturesome aspects." He resonated along with Evan Just. Boyd's gesture toward the "attractiveness" of mining's "speculative side" called forth Cecil Rhodes' "founding of an empire," he argued. That empire was built on diamonds and gold, but by 1948, Boyd reminded the zinc men, those colonies were major producers of lead, zinc, copper, and other metals. "Today the United States finds itself increasingly dependent on the produce of that empire and consequently we are accepting, though reluctantly, an increasing responsibility for it."[57] Truman was soon to declare that the old imperialism had no place in his plans, but the people carrying out those plans had updated little in their ideas about imperialism. In any case, old or new, extraction and industry were the vanguards of the finer and freer life for "backwards" peoples—and for sustained American prosperity.

The lineages that Bennett and Boyd drew on make clear how the midcentury mineral expansion could be as centrally focused on race as its precursors. Also, like earlier imperial adventures, the postwar expansion of American empire was predicated in part on having run itself out of domestic resources. Like the country's continental conquest, the postwar minerals regime was positioned as a tutorial for simple peoples. The U.S at midcentury made new plans to teach the backwards nations to husband resources because it, paradoxically, had failed to do so at home. Market liberalization was a conservation measure, and conservation always has kept uncomfortably close company with white supremacy.[58] Just's work in the Marshall Plan was

[57] James Boyd, "The Replenishment of Our Mineral Resources," April 15, 1948, James Boyd Papers, Box 10, Publications File: Magazines re mining and engineering—1948 folder. Truman Library.
[58] Miles Powell, *Vanishing America: Species Extinction, Racial Peril, and the Origins of Conservation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

designed to build back the American mineral stockpile, depleted by World War II such that scarcity threatened to slow the postwar recovery. Boyd's American Zinc Institute speech was titled "The Replenishment of Our Mineral Reserves." Point Four was to institutionalize that logic further, and beyond Europe or its "dependencies." As always, progress, race, and nature were bound together to shape the Picher Field, this time in its unmaking.

Fittingly, technicians such as Boyd, from the U.S. Department of Interior, led Point Four's global minerals regime. Since its establishment in 1849, Interior's mission was, as the historian Megan Black has shown, "to wrest domestic meaning from foreign space."[59] Interior was created as a response to the country's most rapid territorial expansion after the Mexican-American War, necessitating the incorporation of numerous Spanish-speaking people and a multitude of Indigenous nations. It took in existing offices such as the General Land Office and the Indian Office, bureaucracies tasked with turning the country's ostensible possessions into veritable settler spaces.

The department did not slough off this paradox at the core of its name and mission simply by crossing into the twentieth century or completing the country's continental expansion. Rather, the contradiction intensified; as its agents and most Americans considered the frontier to be closed by the 1890s, Interior reinvented itself in the idiom of conservation and, especially, minerals expertise. Minerals were the stuff of the rising modern industry and, importantly, a realm unclaimed by other federal bureaucracies.[60] Interior also joined the country's expansion into its recognizable overseas empire through the Spanish-American War. Interior's work in material foreign nature enabled Point Four's State Department shills to keep up the rhetorical

[59] Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 5.
[60] Black, *Global Interior*, 5-6.

moves purporting a new form of enlightened expansion by the second half of the twentieth century. Minerals expertise was positioned as a merely *natural*, not political sort. Its spread was beneficent, not extractive. Management of nature and the environment—borderless entities themselves—made U.S. border crossings acceptable.[61] Interior in no small part was responsible for the Picher Field, facilitating leases of Quapaw land. Likewise, Interior's work around the world would help destabilize the region anew. The department identified frontiers, incorporated them under American political and capitalist economic institutions, then moved on to new frontiers. Interior has thus been the most distinctively American institution, positioned by its name and rhetoric to obscure its function of turning foreign spaces into settler places.

Helping the developing world to help itself raised sharp contradictions between Point Four's humanitarian ends and the means Point Four would take to accomplish them. From the start, even the outward face of Point Four's administration—as indicated by Bennett's and Boyd's comments—betrayed different imperatives than Truman's inaugural address. As Bennett told the State Bankers Association at Oklahoma City in 1950, Point Four was not "a means of spreading [American taxpayer] dollars round the world." It was, contrarily, "a highly economical means of spreading knowledge and skills." As ever, the "untold wealth" of natural resources "in Latin America, Africa, the Middle and Far East" was "waiting to be surveyed, worked, and harnessed to human needs." This statement was vintage Bennett, but he made a curious turn in order to sell Point Four to bankers: "During the period of our westward trek, it was the British who pioneered abroad with private capital, and reaped the dividends." Now that the U.S. was

[61] Black, *Global Interior*, 8.

"the world's leading banker," he continued, "we, in our turn, must pioneer with capital."[62] The developing world had the resources, Point Four would provide the expertise, but the scheme needed investment capital.

Pioneering with capital made an inversion of Bennett's older pioneer celebration and raised interesting questions about American empire at midcentury. By pulling away from the scramble-for-Africa imagery that Boyd used when he invoked Cecil Rhodes, Bennett refocused the history of empire on his Oklahoma audience's home region, the American West. Where his A&M commencement address endowed the American pioneer as the agent of that American process called the frontier, to these Oklahoma bankers he positioned the receiving region of that investment as an independent, freedom loving place, the modern American West. Recall that it was *The Oklahoma Banker* who came to Picher's defense against those who would slander the mining town about the collapse scare.

Bennett's address to the Oklahoma bankers, however, was "Point 4 and American Security." The domestic and the foreign were conveniently unattached. Picher's needs were unconnected to investment capital's search for global resources in the interests of "American Security," now filtered through the Cold War's bifurcated lenses. Modern U.S. freedom and independence, Bennett more than implied, could be the fate of the Point Four partner nations. Never mind that in the United States, the capital pioneers had not only invested in the West's development but had done so while replacing the Indigenous population with a settler society. This rhetorical move allowed Bennett to skate past the unavoidably racial meanings of the civilizational conquest he had always celebrated. Point Four was a modern, beneficent

[62] Henry G. Bennett, "Point 4 and American Security," excerpts from an address to State Bankers Association at Oklahoma City, Dec. 11, 1950, and released to the press the same day. George M. Elsey Papers, Box 62, Foreign Relations—Point IV (clip) folder, Truman Library.

intervention abroad that was simply economic. Yet, traveling Latin America on Point Four assignment, Bennett's wife, Vera, was reminded of the picturesque Native people from her childhood in the Indian Territory, "only much more colorful" in Latin America.[63] American empire works in many idioms, but they share a frontiering motive to change the "colorful" wider world into something else.

Bennett's settler lexicon of frontier expansion puts the Picher Field's rise and fall into its global context as the country looked outward to new mineral frontiers. The frontier, in its general usage, is an often loosely defined but broadly understood territory over which multiple interests—be they states, corporations, sovereign nations—compete. In mineral frontiers that competition is over the right to extraction as well as the place itself. A frontier is a figurative, ideational thing but also a spatial, material *place*, one rich with human history that differentiates it from abstract *space*.[64] In United States culture the figurative version often obscures frontiers as material places. That's because the frontier has been a *process*, a moving nowhere line at which, as Patricia Nelson Limerick once quipped, revising Richard White, "white people got *scared* because they were scarce."[65] Racial difference framed American imaginations of and actions on the frontier. Usually, then, the frontier's change over time is also civilizational and racial (indeed, racist), the process Bennett so often described. It is the process of a place being turned from one thing into another in the name of progress. Thus, when invoked as aspiration, the frontier "represents a set of spatialized intentions to transform a place that is unknown and

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[63] "Mother's Diary of South American Trip, 1951," 22-23. Bennett Papers, Box 4, Travel—South America, Jan-Feb 1951 folder, Truman Library.
[64] Julie Michelle Klinger, *Rare Earth Frontiers: From Terrestrial Subsoils to Lunar Landscapes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 13.
[65] Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Frontier in the Twentieth Century," in James R. Grossman, *The Frontier in American Culture: Essays by Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick* (Berkeley, 1994), 73.

ungoverned," as the geographer Julie Michelle Klinger puts it, "into the known and disciplined." This was the intention of early miners and their Interior Department collaborators who saw the Tri-State's "Indian lands lying waste"—that is, unexploited.[66] And it was the intention of American officials placing mineral extraction at the center of their postwar technical assistance projects, ones that would both betray the country's domestic mineral frontiers and exploit new ones in the name of far more than extraction alone. They demanded not just mineral profits, but new ways of living and orienting economic and political life in their Cold War context. For the people in places swept by mineral frontiers, the frontier process also implied disposability: for the greatest good to the greatest number of people, some others would have to be sacrificed.[67]

No matter the complicated application of his languages of expansion—driven by settlers, or distant capital? Always beneficent, or hiding something else?— Bennett would not see to fruition his call for capitalist pioneering. Making a world tour of Point Four sites just before Christmas in 1951, Bennett's plane crashed near Tehran, Iran, killing Bennett; his wife Vera; Point Four's originator, the State Department staffer Ben Hardy; and the other eighteen people on board, five of them Americans.[68]

If Bennett's hope for "pioneering with capital" indicated his earnestness for recipient countries, the realities of attracting that capital investment were where good intentions ran aground. After a couple of years, officials remained underwhelmed by the pace of change Point Four was bringing to the underdeveloped world. The problem, everyone seemed to agree, was that technical expertise could do little in the absence of capital investment, and that private

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[66] William S. Mosely, "one of the leading proprietors in the Southwest [of Missouri]," in 1851, quoted in Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza*, 24-5.
[67] Klinger, *Rare Earth Frontiers*, 11.
[68] "Plane Crash Kills 21 During Iran Snowstorm," *Stars and Stripes*, Dec. 24, 1951. Henry G. Bennett Papers, Subject File Box 1, folder: Newspaper Clippings, 1-8. Truman Library.

capital would not arrive without more significant meddling in local politics and economies. They had to have assurances of a safe environment for investment. The program became what Milo Perkins had proposed with "partnership capitalism," the government working hard to create the conditions that would make capital investment possible and attractive. Then, development would be on American corporations' terms.

Creating what everyone was calling a "favorable climate" meant drastically reordering local social relations and modes of production. As a 1950 resolution to the Inter-American Conference on Agriculture assumed, "democracy is … a system of farm land tenure in which the cultivator of the land has the opportunity to own the land. … The family on the land is best motivated to adopt efficient farming practices when it owns the land." Governments' recognition of these facts and "the inviolability of individual dignity" would "strengthen the traditional inter-American system of individual freedom"—a dubious appeal to hemispheric homogeneity—and would be "a strong bulwark against the reactionary and regressive forces known as Communism."[69] Therefore, the American-led institution resolved, the other American republics must reevaluate their policies to see that they prioritized "the family on the land," and cooperated with international organizations in doing so. The United Nations similarly resolved that the developing world undertake "land reform" because their "agrarian conditions" were "a barrier to their economic development."[70] The Inter-American Conference's reference to Communism

[69] Fourth Inter-American Conference on Agriculture, "Resolution 1: Aid to Rural Families as the Basis of Democracy," Dec. 6, 1950. Stanley Andrews Papers Box 10, Gov't Service File, 1942-1953 Point IV & Technical Coop. Admin. Folder 1. Truman Library.
[70] "Land Reform: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its 312th plenary meeting on 20 November 1950," Nov. 21, 1950. Stanley Andrews Papers, Box 10, Gov't Service File, 194201953 Point IV & Technical Coop. Admin. Folder 1. Truman Library.

makes clear that it was not only the subject countries' interests in question, but also the interests belonging to American pioneers of capital and their governments.

Whether or not American good intentions were true, Point Four reveals the extent to which, by midcentury, "development theory" thinking had captured the architects of that empire. Emerging in the West across the postwar decade, motivated by geopolitical imperatives to make democracy and capitalism attractive to the developing world, development theory was in fact a diverse set of theories from various academic disciplines and policy quarters. One thing uniting the theories as *a theory* was the assumption that developing nations were on a trajectory that followed the United States and western Europe toward affluent consumer capitalism as the end point of an industrialized, modern society. In that ahistorical and idealist view, South Americans, Central Americans, Asians, and Africans could, with the aid of American capital, achieve standards of living like the United States, as though the historical or material contexts were unchanged since the nineteenth century expansion over the American West. They had changed, though. Development theory was a universalizing one, fitting for its time of contest between the Cold War superpowers.[71]

The social sciences, particularly economics, from which development theory sprang, were arriving at a new place of honor in American life by midcentury. Few scholars were read as widely as the sociologist David Riesman. Just as Picher vowed not to "fall out" over the collapse scare in 1950, Riesman's bestselling book, *The Lonely Crowd*, hit the shelves. It was his effort to make sense of what effects material affluence would have on the American "character type." Although it was focused on the American character, its motive and data, like development

[71] Encyclopedia Britannica, "Development Theory," accessed Nov. 3, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/topic/development-theory.

theory, were global: every society lived on the same population curves, and countries "in the phase of incipient [population] decline"—that is, the "developed"—"feel threatened by the pressure of population and expansion" in the developing world.[72]

In a linear model of growth typifying development theory, Riesman posited three character types, which corresponded roughly to a society's population curve and economic development: as it developed economically, a society's population growth slowed and sociological types changed, from "tradition-directed," to "inner-directed"—the American type up to midcentury—to the "outer-directed."[73] Internalized authority from parents and parent-like figures, as well as ancestors and tradition drove the inner-directed character. The new type, on the other hand, drew his—always his—social cues from peers. Yet this development was not necessarily progress. Instead of conformity won by "guilt-and-shame controls," as in the inner-directed case, the modern outer-directed was coerced into conformity by "a diffuse anxiety."[74] Think of it, Riesman said, like "a radar," where the outer-directed measures his sense of self by bouncing it off of others and registering the feedback. American man at midcentury was escaping family and tradition to join his wide social circle in the titular lonely crowd.

Modern man was also, Riesman argued, escaping the materiality of nature, work, and production. The outer-directed was an urbane, youthful, higher-income American on his way to "white-collar work and the service trades."[75] His desire to get along, to be what others expected of him, was not only characterological but economically vital to these new types of work. Paradoxically, as the stuff of life became easier for more Americans to attain, material nature

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[72] David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, 1950), 35.
[73] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 31.
[74] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 26.
[75] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 21.

came to matter less and less. While keeping up with the Joneses was an old American pastime, it was taking on new meaning in the pursuit of the Joneses's *experiences* of affluence, rather than only material things.[76] In an intensification of a process inaugurated by industrialization, in the suburbanizing, outer-directed time, the experience of affluence came detached from the material experience that produced it. How foreign this would have sounded to the Picher miner.

If one arm of *The Lonely Crowd's* analysis heightened a contradiction between modern Americans and the Picher Field's experience of nonhuman nature, another arm grasped at the rural worker's shaky racial status. Tradition-bound, rural, working-class inner-directeds faced what Riesman called a "characterological struggle." Tellingly, it was about much more than character: "The southern poor white or the Negro who moves North," he began, putting Picherites immediately into uncomfortable racial company, "is usually about as deracinated as are the migrants from abroad."[77] By facing the modern lonely crowd, these "southern poor whites" were uprooted like the immigrants their fathers had violently excluded from the mines, Riesman more than suggested. While "deracinate" derives from a Latin root for, well, "root," and not from our Italian source of "race," it does carry a secondary definition of removing the racial or ethnic characteristics from a person or population. Riesman does not say whether the poor white would lose the essence of his whiteness, or of the southern poverty that called his whiteness into question. Did he become more, or less, white? Riesman implicitly answered by doubling down on the rural white worker. Resentment of the new characterological style was "to be found among miners, lumberjacks, ranch hands, and some urban factory workers." They held the "dominant culture" in "manly contempt for smooth or soft city ways." He compared these

[76] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 25.
[77] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 34.

white workers to "the Sioux" and their "cocky legends" about their "belligerent past." He pondered "to what extent all these groups may be dying out, like their Sioux counterparts, as other-direction spreads down the class ladder and beyond the metropolitan areas." The Sioux, Riesman reasoned, at least had their reservations. The poor whites had only a choice, "between homelessness and a rapid acculturation to other-directed values" in the new world of the service economy, where a suave smile meant more than a strong back.[78]

In this sense development theory bounced back home against rural white workers. The theory was about the extension of modern civilization to nonwhite *others*, over there in other countries. Moving overseas, "development" jumped right past so-called backward Americans, especially rural white workers. It lumped them together with Black Americans. It compared them to immigrants. And it anticipated their disappearance alongside Native people. Not even Riesman could have understood the rhetorical power of comparing rural white workers to the supposedly vanished race of Native people in a settler mining district on Quapaw land. The Quapaws had been written out of northeast Oklahoma's mining history, but they still owned most of the land as mines shuttered and the settler project appeared doomed in the area. In social science theory of the day, the new idea of a national economy disappeared the existence of rural white workers and their towns. Their poverty placed them analytically alongside nonwhite others, modern affluence representing a foil to the backsliding of their very whiteness. No wonder Mutt Mantle willed his son to escape.

Before Mickey Mantle became "America incarnate," as one biographer described him, he was the mining district incarnate. He followed his dad into mining employment, at least for a while. He excelled in football as well as baseball, scoring 10 touchdowns in 7 games his only

[78] Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, 34 (quotes), 31-35 ("Characterological Struggle").

season out for the Commerce High School Tigers. He showed the opposition "a good, clean, white ass," as he later bragged to minor-league baseball teammates.[79] He was, like the other poor white working-class people he grew up with, screwed over by Yankees.[80] At the end of a childhood of relentless training by Mutt after workdays underground, it seemed a good portent when New York Yankees scout Tom Greenwade first contacted Mickey even before his 1949 graduation from Commerce High, violating league rules to indicate his great interest. Then, however, Commerce High School's principal appeared to run interference on other scouts, ensuring that *only* Greenwade would have access to the tucked-away Tri-State prospect. Once Mantle graduated, the Yankee's scout played on the family's ignorance about baseball's big business, lying to Mutt about the young slugger's potential as a big-leaguer, and even using Mickey's meager mining wages as a benchmark for contract negotiations. The same week a more worldly prospect from Broken Bow, Oklahoma, received a $50,000 signing bonus, Mantle signed for $1,500; $400 to finish the season in minor-league Independence, Kansas, and a $1,100 signing bonus. Where similar prospects entertained parades of scouts through their living rooms, Mantle's only option took fifteen minutes to hammer out a contract with Mutt in a car outside the Commerce ballpark.[81]

Mickey was Mutt's inner-directed "work of art," to draw on Reisman and quote from Mickey's first wife, Merlyn, a Picherite herself.[82] "He never told me he loved me," Mickey later recalled, "but he showed that he did by all the hours he spent with me, all the hopes he invested in me." If ever anyone took his social cues from a father, it was Mickey Mantle. "I worked hard"

[79] Leavy, *Last Boy*, 60.
[80] Quote: Leavy, *Last Boy*, xv.
[81] Castro, *Mickey Mantle*, 29-34.
[82] Castro, *Mickey Mantle*, 5.

at baseball, Mickey wrote later, "because I wanted to please him. … I adored my dad." "[Mutt] spent every minute he could with [Mickey]," Merlyn recalled, "coaching, teaching, shaping him, and pointing him toward the destiny he knew was out there."[83] The Mantle family, none more than Mutt, was obsessed by getting Mickey "out there" into a world beyond the mining district. After his first full professional season in the winter of 1950-1951, Mickey shaped himself too, working as a "screen ape," local vernacular for a sledge-wielding man crushing oversized rock to fit into the mill's machinery.[84] Not exactly a baseball swing, the work nonetheless honed Mantle's iconic muscles. Neither that work nor early success in New York, however, extricated Mickey from Mutt's overbearing presence. Slumping and demoted to triple-A Kansas City the next season, Mickey decided to quit when his struggles continued even in the minor leagues. He called home and eventually connected with Mutt in the Eagle-Picher mines. Mutt raced to Kansas City for a lesson: "Mickey, you can't have it easy all your life." Baseball was like any other job, he told him. "It takes guts, not moaning, to make it." If he had no more guts, then he was right to return to northeast Oklahoma and "grub out a living in the mines for the rest of your life." But Mutt was only calculating, measuring. He paused, then tore into Mickey: "I thought I raised a man, not a coward!"[85] The tear-streaked inner-directed child took the cue, according to his biographers, reclaimed his manhood, found his courage, and commanded the baseball career that kept him "out there" beyond the Picher Field.

While Mickey from Commerce was becoming "The Mick" for the Yankees, the issues swirling around the expanding postwar minerals regime came together in the type of obscure outfit that drives government policy, but outside of the news. In January 1951, President Truman

[83] Castro, *Mickey Mantle*, 5.
[84] Castro, *Mickey Mantle*. 45.
[85] Castro, *Mickey Mantle*, 100.

convened The President's Materials Policy Commission (PMPC). Popularly known as the Paley Commission, for its chairman William S. Paley, past president and chairman of the board at the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), the PMPC was an outfit of study, fact-finding, publication, and, ultimately, planning for the future of the country's minerals procurement. In his letter announcing its establishment, Truman asked the commission to study "the broader and longer rage aspects of the nation's materials problem" and report to Truman, assisting him in "formulating a comprehensive policy on such materials." He asked the group to study the country's long-range requirements and supply outlook for the undefined "materials" upon which postwar growth and security relied. He further asked the PMPC to study the "consistency and adequacy of existing Government policies, plans, and programs," as well as "the consistency and adequacy of private industry practices." Truman assured the commission that it would have the cooperation of any pertinent government agencies, and "of course" would "want to solicit the cooperation of private industry." Such "planning," the historian Richard White has written, "is an exercise of power … suffused with boredom." Its agents are boring; the process is boring; implementing plans is boring, but "in a democracy boredom works for bureaucracies and corporations as smell works for a skunk," White continues. "It keeps danger away." Power operates in the open but "the audience is asleep. The modern world is forged amidst our inattention."[86] For the Tri-State mining district, the way the PMPC conceived of the growing global minerals industry would spell the end, and again it operated within the district's sight.

From January of 1951 to publication of its report, *Resources for Freedom*, in June 1952, the PMPC pursued the president's questions however it saw fit. The commission's composition indicates how the Executive Office of the President was imagining the "materials problem":

[86] White, *Organic Machine*, 64.

mineral industry executives outnumbered all other groups, including a Texas oil man and the president of Climax Molybdenum corporation.[87] Nearly their first order of business was to decide who to consult about reserves, projected demand over the next twenty-five years, and the status of minerals industries in countries around the world. The first individual they named was Evan Just, who should "meet soon with the Commission … to assist in finding personnel for special key assignments." Other consultants would come from the Bureau of Mines (in the Interior Department), the Department of State, industry research consultancies, the electronics industry (reliant on strategic minerals), the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), and the Freeport Sulphur Company. Additionally, there were David Rockefeller (because his graduate thesis at the University of Chicago had been on conservation) and Everett DeGolyer, a world-renowned oilman and expert on geophysical exploration who had learned the science at the University of Oklahoma.[88] The bureaucracies and corporations inclined to keep trouble away with the stink of the commission's boring function had a capacious opportunity to insert their interests in long range federal planning.

Evan Just helped them do so. In addition to his view being wide-ranging, it was also always top-down. Close-cropped hair, his temples betraying their etymological relationship with time, Just carried forceful features that gave him the look of someone who might be celebrated in the Tri-State as a hardy miner. His experience in the geological field, the oil field, and as a petroleum engineer had not only given him the credentials for his *EMJ* editorship and PMPC call. They had shaped his ideas about the relationship between workers, industries, and their

[87] RG 220, PMPC Box 9, Biographical Summaries folder, Truman Library.
[88] "Minutes … President's Materials Policy Commission … No. 2, Feb. 13, 1951. RG 220 PMPC Box 9, Restricted: Minutes- President's Materials Policy Commission No. 2 (February 13, 1951) folder, Truman Library (ellipses in original).

government. When he sat for a portrait in 1952, his long hands and prominent wrist bone hinted at the lobbyist and editor he'd been, as opposed to the laborers with whom he'd occasionally rubbed elbows. Approaching the PMPC, tellingly, he'd seen the Marshall Plan's biggest mineral success in a situation where, he admitted, the company it supported didn't need the money, but rather saw its aid as a commitment by government to support its interests abroad.[89] It meshes perfectly with his positions at PMPC meetings. To the PMPC Just underlined the central point of his mining journal editorship: even more than during the 1940s, the United States by 1951 was "a sort of trustee for world well being [sic]" and, as such, "a protective policy is not compatible with that kind of broad position."[90] In other words, the tariff that made the Picher Field was not coming back, and in the postwar period there was a new reason. When the mining industry maintained a high protective tariff in earlier years, "the producer had pretty much the whole stage down here in Washington." But by 1950, "whenever you bring up a tariff issue you have more consumers and they are better organized than producers."[91] They took his hint that U.S. mines could no longer satisfy the demand the PMPC predicted over the next twenty-five years. The United States, for "security" purposes and sustained prosperity, should look elsewhere.

Just also granted legitimacy to the PMPC's and Interior's efforts at keeping minerals and politics distinct from one another: "everything should be done to make this thing a non-political, honest operation with clear-cut, long-range objectives," he declared about actions needed to protect industry from "the destructive impacts of liquidation" in foreign lands.[92] Yet, he admitted

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[89] Just, *Geologist*. 68-9. The description of Just comes from the portrait in the frontmatter of this same oral history.
[90] "Executive Office of the President, President's Materials Policy Commission, Minerals and Metals Meeting," Dec. 12, 1951, 124. RG 220 PMPC Box 7.
[91] "Executive Office of the President," 128.
[92] "Executive Office of the President," 126.

about the relationship of producers and consumer power in Washington, D.C., "that is a political question."[93] Likewise, Just's arguments supported the PMPC's efforts at keeping domestic and foreign distinct. Domestic concerns were consumers and corporate profitability. The foreign was merely where those consumers would be provided for, and where the profit would come from. When Just and others talked about "stability" and "security," they were not talking about domestic mining communities. In fact, they seldom mentioned U.S. mines, except to consider taxation schemes and industry lobbying strategies as lessons for how they might successfully inflect foreign politics.[94] Where the Tri-State district entered the PMPC discussion at all, it was merely to consider the costs and conservation question of leaving "mineral in the ground" in that district "on the decline."[95]

The spatial solution to U.S. mineral needs was also attractive to the PMPC as a creator of investment opportunity. If the early Point Four days had proved underwhelming, it wasn't because of a lack of capital. "There are huge amounts of money being held in New York right now waiting to go into foreign countries," one PMPC member stated. "To me," he went on, "the mineral development is the spearhead of the Point IV Program." The State Department just hadn't emphasized that fact enough, he argued, and the government "ought to jump right into that problem, go after it and support our private industry abroad."[96] Accordingly, Paley wrote Henry Bennett about giving strategic minerals greater emphasis in Point Four, since putting the PMPC's pursuit of resources under the rubric of "aid" could make their conclusions more

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[93] "Executive Office of the President," 129.
[94] "Executive Office of the President," 23, 104.
[95] "Cost to the Economy of Mineral Material Left Behind in Mining Operations," attachment to Phil Coombs to Isenbergh and Chayes, June 9, 1951, RG 220 PMPC Box 68, General Records: Ore left in the ground folder, Truman Library.
[96] "Executive Office of the President," 131.

acceptable.[97] The PMPC, in formulating future federal policy, advocated just what Milo Perkins had suggested before Point Four became a reality: government must create the conditions for private investment, and then get out of the way. "There are no politics in this problem," as another PMPC member put it. "Nature placed these things."[98] The government must make investment possible in foreign countries because that was where the resources were. Nothing about it was political, according to PMPC participants. Throughout the 1950s the Eisenhower administration made minerals procurement an even more pronounced part of the technical assistance regime inaugurated by Point Four and coopted by the PMPC.[99]

The final publication of *Resources for Freedom* reflected Just's and the commission's efforts to make global nature apolitical. They positioned it as a commons for management by capable (western) technocrats and open for profit by local elites and American corporate investors. The PMPC sustained that pretention to be apolitical by assuming without providing proof, as one reviewer noted, that mineral development would automatically "lay the basis" for a diversified economy and widespread improvement in living standards.[100] This, of course, had been the way Henry Bennett sold Point Four to Oklahoma bankers. The cover image of *Resources for Freedom* reflected the global and professedly apolitical vision at midcentury: a stylized globe dotted with mines, mills, derricks, refineries, dams, reservoirs and forests—presumably what one PMPC report called "the common pool of available resources"—fading into a rectilinear grid-lined territory evoking the American settler project that turned the

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[97] Black, *Global Interior*, 126.
[98] "Executive Office of the President," 131.
[99] Black, *Global Interior*, 138.
[100] Arthur Maass, review of The President's Materials Policy Commission, *Resources for Freedom, A Report to the President by the President's Materials Policy Commission*, *: Vol. I, Foundations for Growth and Security; Vol II, the Outlook for Key Commodities; Vol. III, the Outlook for Energy Sources; Vol. IV, The Promise of Technology; Vol. V, Selected Reports to the Commission*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952, in *The American Political Science Review* 47, no. 1 (March, 1953).

American West into its predictable, commodified, salable sections.[101] There were no national borders. Resources for freedom would no longer come from places with working people, neither the hardscrabble plains of the Tri-State nor the high mountain diggings in Chile. Instead, resources for freedom would increasingly arrive, for Americans' purposes, in assembled form, thirty pounds of lead and sixty-six pounds of zinc in every midcentury Buick Roadmaster.[102]

By the 1950s, the man who had defended Tri-State honor before 1940 had become an agent of the postwar mineral empire that undercut Picher. Yet the mundanity of that work meant there would be little accountability for Evan Just in Picher. Likely, few observers followed his career after the OPA. Even more certainly, across the 1950s there were fewer miners every year. Both the operators remembered as "miners" and the wage laborers who'd dug the rock were vacating the district. Just was lionized decades later by his successor at the OPA, who told of one drunk operator that proposed tarring, feathering, and exiling Just for an unpopular stance, and how a former pick-handle brigade leader shut it down, declaring, "Boys, you know Evan is our friend; we all know him for the honest, thoughtful, and kind man he is." The pick-handler offered to fight the man who suggested violence against Just, but the cheering crowd obviated the need.[103] Just went on, apparently secure in the district's friendship for services rendered, no matter his role in lubricating the entry of foreign ores that killed the industry of the district's fathers.

Individuals such as Evan Just and the adopted Oklahoman Henry Bennett were not singular forces, but they helped enlarge Picher's world at midcentury. That wide world of

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[101] This analysis owes much to Black, *Global Interior*, 128.
[102] William C. Ackerman to Eric Hodgins, July 2, 1951, PMPC Box 110, Hodgins * Ackerman folder, Truman Library.
[103] James K. Richardson, "Introduction," in Evan Just, *Geologist*. vii-x.

minerals expertise did not belong to Picher miners or even its operators, merchants, or media. In 1958 the local publisher C. Allen Matthews joked about the national discussions of a hoped-for "moon shot." He reckoned he'd rather see a few more sites in Oklahoma before getting a ticket on the "moon special." "And, if they happened to have lead and zinc mines" on the moon, he joked, "there's another good reason we need a tariff quota system on imports."[104] He understood how global competition was driving the Tri-State out of business, and probably, with earnestness beneath his humor, could see that tariff support had breathed its last, as well. The chat piles' only purpose had become citizen science; locals began scaling the heaps to get a peak at Sputnik, that extraterrestrial symbol of global competition and the Cold War that catalyzed the globalizing minerals industry.[105] When one in a series of ill-fated mining bills failed that summer, one mining man jibed that "the only way to get relief is to secede from the United States, and then we'd be a cinch for foreign aid." Closing the session, Matthews figured there would be "a mass migration" of congressmen "to every corner of the globe to 'investigate' some thing or other…. All at taxpayer's expense of course. We'll let some of them investigate the Tri-State Mining District."[106] Soon enough, Picherites would get that wish. Meantime, they mostly missed the ways that the global reach of the modern minerals industry had grown out of the very logics that had once defined their place as a mineral frontier, the pioneering process that was the mining industry's calling card and the district's patrimony.

Patrimony and inheritance. It was the language of a country's mineral endowment and its policy looking increasingly out toward the globe. It was the language of fathers and sons, too. When Mutt commanded Mickey to stick with baseball in that Kansas City hotel room, Mickey

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[104] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 27, 1958.
[105] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 21, 1958.
[106] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 28, 1958.

didn't notice something giving urgency to the message: Mutt's frailty. He was growing thin and angular under his denim work outfit, his working-man's muscles consumed by cancer. Mickey rebounded on the baseball field, returned to New York, and by the next season hit .311—third best in the American league, incredible for a twenty-year-old—while the Yankees won the 1951 World Series. As they did, however, Mickey and Mutt lay next to one another in a New York hospital bed. Mickey had twisted his knee on a Yankee Stadium sprinkler head in game two of the World Series. Mutt, weaker still than he had been a year earlier, took a tumble getting into a cab outside the stadium. Too fitting that the ground should give out beneath a father and son from the Tri-State in 1952.[107] A few months later Mutt was dead at age forty. Mickey's talent, his brawn, his smile, and his awe-shucks rural working-class story help explain his rise to stardom. But inside, he was without his compass once Mutt died, hardly capable of navigating the world beyond the Picher Field. This too was the inheritance of the mining field.

Speaking of death, patrimony, and inheritance, the OPA man who stood up for Evan Just was probably Mike Evans, pick-handler *par excellence*. Through the 1950s he remained the iconic father figure of the district's past, an operator with hands calloused and bulked by work on the shovel, the pick-handle, and the pump fitting, "a member of the old school of rugged and venturesome mining men."[108] By the late 1950s, however, he was as sick as the Tri-State mining industry. As Evans's health faded, the writer James Agee won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction with *A Death in the Family*. Just as the Tri-State mining district fell into its most severe shutdowns yet, *A Death in the Family* told the tale of a young boy only dimly comprehending southern racism and his father's death. He was like the miners' children in Picher, harried by a globalizing

[107] Leavy, *Last Boy*, 38.
[108] "Mike Evans Funeral Will be Saturday Afternoon," *Tri-State Tribune* (from the *Joplin Globe*), Aug. 13, 1959.

world seemingly stripping them of their fathers' white working privileges, waiting for the mines to reopen or wondering if they would at all. Perhaps by the time Mike Evans died in the Summer of 1959 they did know, even if nobody was saying.

## 4. THE MINER'S DIASPORA, A NEW REGION, AND THE LABOR-LEISURE DIVIDE

Two weeks after Mike Evans's August 1959 funeral in Joplin, another Picher miner died much younger, with less fanfare, and farther from his Picher home. Troy Graves, aged forty-two, had been living in Grants, New Mexico, for only a week.[1] If Evans embodied the Picher Field's past in life and death, then Graves mutely heralded one of its workers' futures: dispersed and distressed, still working dangerous jobs with both short- and long-term health risks. In three ways, the end of mining in Picher reshuffled the district's geographies of labor, historian Gunther Peck's concept for the "spatial, material, and cultural connections between nature and labor." First, it pushed ordinary workers such as Graves to new extractive frontiers; Graves had moved to Grants to mine uranium. Secondly, the close of mining reoriented Picher's remaining, declining population to a new economic existence as beneficiaries of the burgeoning welfare state. Those who stayed faced new challenges to the town's very existence, such as provisioning livable homes as well as sewer and water services; they could not afford them without substantial support by the federal government. Finally, the former Tri-State mining district shifted with northeast Oklahoma's economic fortunes toward a new and larger regional orientation centered on the industrial and, more importantly, recreational potentials of Grand Lake, a reservoir downstream from Picher. These flows of people, investment, and water put the Tri-State's mining history in the past. Nature, however, worked on different time scales, holding a poisoned, extractive history both in the bodies of miners dispersed across the continent and in the waters of the new region's main attraction.

Troy Graves was far from the first Picher miner to leave town, or to die young once he did. Headlines announcing former residents who "Died in California" were as common as high

[1] "Troy Graves Died in Grants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 27, 1959.

school football recaps in *Tri-State Tribune* editions of the 1930s and 1940s. Many, like Mickey Mantle a few years later, found their escape incomplete, their bodies still registering the wages of chat dust, their medical challenges even recalling the Ore Producers Association's (OPA) 1920s and 1930s clinic. Across the 1930s and 1940s, the OPA and its members dodged culpability for sick miners in diaspora. The companies officially owned the clinic's records, so when former employees contacted the OPA, it demanded to know the patient's ailment and to what use the records might be put. Then, the OPA ran these requests past the individual mine operators, who could approve them or not at their whim (although no record exists of any follow-up). Picher Clinic records had "never been released to any individual for private purposes," the OPA could accurately claim. They denied requests for medical history, particularly the old chest x-rays of tuberculosis and silicosis.[2] The OPA had, however, shared those records with researchers as far away as South Africa.[3] Thus, many a former miner's doctor had to search for pathologies within patients' bodies unaided by their medical records from the Tri-State district, despite pleas like that from L.G. Patterson in Salinas, California, who even sent his assurance that he had no intention to sue anybody. "I'm a sick man," he wrote, expressing his doctor's belief that he could provide better care if he had access to Patterson's health records. In a world "of justice fair play and common decency, not mentioning your professional ethics or the human side of this problem, I feel that the least you could do, would be to mail the records of my case." The bulk of such requests came from California, while individuals in working-class towns as far north as International Falls, Minnesota, and as near as Pittsburg, Kansas, also received the run-around

[2] Evan Just to Alfred W. Brooks, Feb. 5, 1941. Pittsburg State University Special Collections, Picher Mining Collection, Box 88. Hereafter cited PSU. See Chapter 1, note 2 on Picher Mining Collection.
[3] RG 70, Bureau of Mines, Picher Clinic, Box 1, Folder 021, NARA Fort Worth.

from their former employers.[4] The ailing miners in diaspora carried their share of the Picher Field with them, years after their labor ended and often thousands of miles away.

Outside of the famed Okie haven of California, Picher miners made targeted moves to places demanding their specific backgrounds. Here again the miners of Troy Graves's generation were not breaking new ground, only intensifying earlier patterns of migration as mining employment fell rapidly in Picher. After World War II they went in significant numbers to the Coeur d'Alene mining district in the panhandle of northern Idaho, where earlier Tri-Staters had "scabbed," or entered the workforce on behalf of mine operators to replace striking workers, in the early twentieth century.

Based around Kellogg, Idaho, the Coeur d'Alene district produced silver and lead under environmental conditions like those coming to national awareness in the Tri-State.[5] The work made Picherites' familiarity with lead ores attractive to employers, but the more important carryover was Tri-Staters' whiteness and willingness to perform dangerous work without recourse to union support. In 1899, 1901, and 1907, company agents went direct to Joplin precisely because the companies' foe, the Western Federation of Miners, was organizing the polyglot immigrant workforce in the Coeur d'Alen district. Tri-State miners had a formative experience scabbing in Kellogg; they were paid well to be non-union. Scabbing reinforced their devotion to American capitalism as rewarding for white, native-born nationalists like themselves. They defined their righteousness not by their support of a family, but through their belligerence: they bragged to local papers about beating up anybody who would called them scabs.[6] The

[4] PSU Box 88.
[5] Bradley D. Snow, *Living with Lead: An Environmental History of Idaho's Coeur D'Alenes, 1855-2011* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), 47-85.
[6] Roll, *Poor Man's Fortune*, 108-12, 118-22, 124, 125.

miner's diaspora drew Tri-State miners from their homes, affirmed their belief in the benefits of brash, white masculinity, and in most cases returned those miners to the Tri-State even more committed to that worldview.

By the 1950s, with a new generation of miners, former Tri-Staters dying in Kellogg vied for space on the front page of the *Tri-State Tribune* with those dying in California. Perry Isaac Hart, dead at 34 in 1953, was emblematic of the Picher miner's diaspora. He died "apparently of a heart attack" in his car after returning home from the night shift in the mine he had worked "the past several years." He was survived by a wife and two sons in Kellogg, parents in Picher, a sister in Miami, Oklahoma, and two brothers and another sister in Los Angeles.[7] Claude Preston Phelps, a 47-year-old miner formerly of Cardin, Oklahoma, who moved to Wallace, Idaho, in the Coeur d'Alene district in about 1948 died the week after Hart. The officiant of Phelps's funeral, further, was the former Cardin Baptist Church pastor who had followed his flock to Kellogg.[8]

Some Picher expatriates met characteristic mining-industry deaths. Lifelong Tri-Stater from Galena, Kansas, Leroy W. Brandon, who moved to Idaho in 1952, fell 60 feet to his death at work in the mines three years later. Outside of such accidents, however, they almost universally died of what newspapers reported as heart attacks, like Hart and Phelps. To family, employers, and media at the time, their causes of death had no acknowledged relation to either their former mining camps in the Tri-State or the ongoing environmental health challenges of their new camps. They did not yet know that exposure to silica dust predisposed them to

[7] "Former Picher Man Dies in Kellogg, Idaho," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 26, 1953.
[8] "Former Cardin Resident Dies in Idaho," *Tri-State Tribune*, Dec. 3, 1943. Also died of heart attack (no age given): "Willard W. Boyd Dies in Idaho," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 21, 1955.

increased mortality from heart disease.[9] At the time, the only certainty was that men such as Hart and Phelps died frequently in their thirties and forties, ending a life of hard toil.

During the postwar decline, probably no western mining camp received more Picherites than Grants, New Mexico. Where aptitude with lead ores made the Coeur d'Alenes a logical site for Picher workers, only dangerous and toxic work carried over from Picher to Grants. Company and government scientists already knew that workers carried an increased risk of lung cancer, but workers were kept uninformed. Without protective measures, even their families were at risk for radiation exposure. What the Tri-Sate survey commission claimed about the Tri-State—that it was unique in the way that industrial risk followed workers into their homes and communities—was no longer true. In Grants, uranium dust entered homes on the miners' clothing, in the air, and—this was particular to uranium—radioactivity emanated even from the building materials in miner homes.[10]

Grants was the heart of the country's newest domestic mineral frontier, the northwest New Mexico uranium belt feeding the United States Atomic Energy Commission stockpile with its earthy fuel of the future. Developing in the 1950s, Grants provided perfect timing as an outlet for jobless Tri-Staters. And just like Kellogg for the Tri-State scabs of the early twentieth century, Picher expatriates in Grants viewed their sojourn as temporary. They continued reading the Picher newspaper as though they were simply at a new discovery in the Tri-State District,

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[9] Yuewei Liu, et. al., "Long-term Exposure to Crystalline Silica and Risk of Heart Disease Mortality," *Epidemiology* 25, no. 5 (Sept. 2014), 692, accessed July 31, 2021, http://www3.med.unipmn.it/intranet/papers/2014/LWW/2014-08-12_lww/Long_term_Exposure_to_Crystalline_Silica_and_Risk.10.pdf. "Long-term silica exposure was related to an increased risk of mortality from total heart disease, pulmonary heart disease, and ischemic heart disease."

[10] Sherry L. Smith and Brian Frehner, "Introduction," in Smith and Frehner, eds., *Indians and Energy: Exploitation and Opportunity in the American Southwest* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2010), 9-10.

rather than a distant mining camp of a new district altogether. A collection of Tri-Staters earned a free year's subscription to the *Tri-State Tribune* for the honor of having the most readers of a single copy of the paper. An individual and a family from Miami, a man from Hockerville, and three couples from Picher all claimed to be sharing their issue in what the paper's publisher eventually took to calling the "Picher colonies" of trailer courts in Grants.[11] The men of these families worked the same mine as Troy Graves.

As Picher's shutdowns deepened in the late 1950s, so too did its out-migration. In this iterative process, as more miners and their families left the region, so too did the folks who had provisioned them, like the Cardin-to-Kellogg pastor who buried Claude Phelps. Despite publisher C. Allen Matthews's dogged optimism for the city, the prospect of Picherites' return grew increasingly bleak as they read the news that the Picher Hospital closed in 1958.[12] It was "the first time this mining town has been without a hospital since its founding," wrote Matthews.[13] Doctor Matt Connell and his associate had already opened a clinic in Grants "specializing in industrial medicine," with a hospital under construction.[14] Picher, it turned out, was not only one among a series of global mining frontiers, but also a temporary laboratory for the study of industrial diseases. Grants was the next frontier in that industry as well. By Spring of 1959 an estimated two-thirds of miners had decamped from Picher, some leaving families behind (they hoped) temporarily. Men laid off from other area industries joined them.[15] "It's no longer a case of 'bringing prosperity back from around the corner' to this field," Matthews opined.

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[11] "Tribune Well-Read in New Mexico," *Tri-State Tribune*, May 31, 1956.
[12] "Picher Hospital Closes 'Hospital' First of August," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 7, 1958.
[13] "Nursing Home Established At Hospital Bldg." *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 21, 1958.
[14] (first quote) "Picher Hospital Closes 'Hospital' First of August," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 7, 1958; (second quote) "Nursing Home Established At Hospital Bldg.," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 21, 1958.
[15] "Congressional Committee Hears Grim District Report," *Tri-State Tribune*, April 9, 1959.

"We're face to face with the question of survival."[16] Such "economic conditions" were untenable for Dr. Connell, and so he followed the workers to New Mexico.[17]

Unlike other episodes in Picher's decline—the closure of J.C. Penney's or a couple of other merchants—the disappearance of the town's health infrastructure was more than symbolic. Across the century, increasing numbers of household goods could be had by mail order or by periodic travel to bigger district cities, especially Joplin, a drive of more than 20 miles. Medical care, however, is an obvious necessity to sustaining life and community, even more so in an aging, ill, economically depressed population. Healthcare was different for both its routine nature, especially for many people with the chronic conditions left behind by an industry such as mining, and for its immediate need in the case of emergency care.

This shift from heavy industry to healthcare in deindustrializing cities was perhaps the most consequential change over time in twentieth-century economic and working-class life. The end of industry in any given place set in motion several compounding historical processes: First, it remade local populations. Young men of working age and, in time, their families, were the first to leave town. In Picher's case, as in most, the result was a much older population, increasing as mining work faded away. Then, further, that population was sicker than average because of its age and the economic shock of joblessness paired with the toxic landscape that those jobs had created. Finally, in the United States system, healthcare was tied to employment; recall how only certain workingmen received free healthcare at the Picher Clinic in the 1920s and 1930s, and even that care mostly in the service of reducing employer liability.[18]

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[16] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 23, 1959.
[17] "Picher Hospital Closes 'Hospital'."
[18] The broad outlines of this "shift" follow Gabriel Winant, *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

In the industrial heartland of the conventional Rust Belt, these trends led to a new type of city, the education and medical capitals whose economies were bolstered by major healthcare providers and the higher-educational research institutions that fed them. Notice the reinvention of former industrial hearths such as Pittsburgh or Cleveland as medical metropolises in the second half of the twentieth century. While their boosters' rhetoric was about renewal and emergence from industrial ruin, and the renewal's face was the highly paid medical specialist offering cutting-edge treatments, these moves really pivoted on the armies of low-wage workers who kept facilities running or worked in home health and nurses' aide roles. As deindustrialization gripped these metropolitan areas, working-class women moved quite seamlessly into work that already fit social conventions and assumptions about gendered aptitudes: the work of caring, which they had already performed in the home, but now followed into a paid, institutional setting.[19] As such, and in a much longer historical sweep of feminized work being devalued, the jobs that replaced industrial labor could not match the wages or social power once garnered by the working class that had been coded white, male, and hard-hat clad.

For obvious reasons, however, not even this shift from industrial hearth to medical services center was possible for the huge number of smaller working-class communities in the wider rust belt. Describing what this transition did look like in the wider rural rust belt is essential to understanding the modern United States, however, because the United States experienced the most decentralized industrial production of any so-called Western or "developed" country in the twentieth century.[20] In other words, the country had much more rural

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[19] Gabriel Winant, interview by Saronik Bosu and Kim Adams, "Deindustrialization," *High Theory Podcast*, http://hightheory.net/podcast/deindustrialization/.
[20] Richard Lonsdale and H.L. Seyler, eds., *Non-Metropolitan Industrialization* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 5. Cited in Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class* (London, 1986), 129.

and small-city industrialization than its counterparts. In Picher, the problem was not that low-wage, precarious, feminized labor replaced more stable industrial work.

The problem was that nothing filled the breach left by mining and milling jobs. That's why so many Picherites joined the diaspora. The Picher hospital building's next life reinforced this point about the stark material challenges at the core of Picher's struggles, of what happens at the end of industry. The new tenant was a nursing home, a symbolic and material embodiment of deindustrialization's historical forces for being the site of low-wage work caring for sicker than average elders.

The closure of the hospital and its replacement by the nursing home points to the deeper crisis of what feminist theorists have called social reproduction. If decisions about whether to stay or to leave were only economic ones, and Picher's citizens could all follow the miner's diaspora into western mining camps, to California, or to the region's urban centers, then the decline of a small town would be unproblematic when its industry decamped. That's not how towns work, however, not the ones whose residents had defied mining camp custom to define their town by their settled, family-friendly nature, their permanence. Many people in Picher still imagined their town as permanent. The district had also always taken its self-definition from the manly work of wresting rock from the ground, but under its devotion to a free-market capitalism that would reward good, white workers like their men, the district's productive work had also always hidden the gendered and essential work of producing people, the foundation of these communities. The capitalism that grew up with the mining district begun at Joplin around 1850 had pulled an important trick by separating people-making from profit-making in a way unfamiliar, for example, to the agricultural family units from which these workers descended. More than literally birthing and feeding that life, women were responsible for making the *right*

kind of people, ones with the right values, dispositions, and skills for the reproduction of their community.[21] That meant, in Picher's case, inuring children to the rough-and-tumble, risk-taking culture of the mining town, encouraging them to carry the legacy of a brash, violent protection of white workingmen's prerogatives.

Those prerogatives came to make less sense as mining work disappeared. Picher's mothers and wives scrambled out for paid work amid the crisis of diminishing mine wages, while men often took on odd jobs. Everyone traveled longer distances to do so, since opportunities were shrinking within Picher. All the while, life-sustaining infrastructure limped along (where available). So, when mining came to an end in the Picher Field, there arose a social reproduction crisis. Who could raise the district's next generation while parents rushed out for low-wage work and prayed for good news in metal markets that would reopen district mines and restore their gendered norms of productive and reproductive labor? Who could tolerate that work in the increasingly dangerous environmental conditions rendering sewer and water systems ineffective? And why on earth would those young people, once they graduated high school, stay in the area given its challenges to the barest necessities of life, like adequate housing? Without mining, tough as that industry had been, Picher was losing the ability to make itself new.

Picherites who once imagined a return to the old hometown could hardly have sustained that faith as Picher's healthcare establishment followed the workers on to the next camp. Yet "hope springs eternal … within the miner's heart," C. Allen Matthews claimed in his *Tri-State Tribune* editorial column in the summer of 1959. "Incidentally"—one of his favorite words for passing along unsourced gossip—"they tell me that the Picher colonies in trailer courts in Grants,

[21] Cynzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto* (London, 2019), 20-21.

New Mexico, have already begun naming their streets from Picher streets. … Some of our Grants readers might verify this."[22] What Matthews understood as optimism for a return to Picher might have been more accurately recognized as a final homage to a place where they would never live again.

Matthews's plucky optimism for Picher's future highlights one side of a schism roiling beyond his pages. Just like he did around the 1950 downtown collapse scare, across the industry's dying years Matthews maintained an editorial illusion of business as usual: Picher High School's Gorillas kept winning football games, usually; current and former residents kept dying; local, state, and national election campaigns came and went, with Picher voting for Democrats; the important citizens continued to "boost" for Picher. Again, as in 1950, Matthews's editorial silences and whispers occasionally expressed and even shaped the town's fissures as increasing numbers of residents fell into despair. "We've been mildly criticized for our editorial stand on the hopes of Picher and our conviction that beneath every cloud is a silver lining," he hinted in the fall of 1953. His "big brother"—probably the *Miami News-Record*—came to town and surveyed locals about their lived experiences under the mine closures. "It broke our hearts," Matthews joked about that paper's editorial, "to learn of the starving, ragged urchins; barefoot kiddies, frantic housewifes [sic] and the desperate fathers."[23] Evidently Matthews received angry mail for the jibe but would not print it because it violated the paper's policy against publishing anonymous letters; he mocked the correspondent too timid to sign the letter, betting "five to one" odds that "you need an extension ladder to scratch a snake's belly." Matthews quoted from the disgruntled local who demanded that Matthews "forsake those ____ _____ strait-laced attitudes

[22] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 2, 1959. Ellipses in original.
[23] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 5, 1953.

and come down and see how the other half lives."[24] There was, apparently, much truth in the other paper's analysis of Picher conditions, much like the outsider descriptions from the late 1930s that had been so reviled by the local establishment. New topics springing into the paper's front page soon confirmed the truth behind what Matthews's counterpart tried to convey: back in the diaspora's homeland, widespread poverty, a city unable to pay for its basic functions, and a community losing the ability to reproduce itself.

To the most ardent boosters for a permanent Picher, the solution to the mining field's social reproduction crisis turned out to be the federal government. As its industrial economy dried up and its merchant class reeled with the rapidly declining population, a new economy emerged in the guise of the federal safety net. It began as a trickle: in the early 1950s a select crew of "city dads"—including C. Allen Matthews himself—formed the Picher Development Company to work with the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration (VA) to establish a low-income housing development in Picher.[25] Without admitting to the underlying conditions making it "born of necessity," Matthews called it "the greatest thing that has ever come to Picher" (just eight years earlier he had run the "American Way" cartoon listing "subsidized housing" as one of the evils that Lefty was foisting upon the American taxpayer).[26] The Picher Development Company succeeded in making 42 lots available for buyers using FHA and VA loans.

To the extent that it limped along, even the Tri-State mining industry only operated when federal subsidies made it possible. With the election of President John F. Kennedy, Picher's

[24] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 12, 1953.
[25] "Housing Project Moves Forward," *Tri-State Tribune*, Mar. 28, 1957;
[26] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Mar. 28, 1957; "The American Way," *Tri-State Tribune*, Feb. 3, 1949.

dream of the 1950s, a so-called "Small Producers Bill" that would ensure a price floor for lead and zinc in "marginal" districts such as the Picher Field, became a reality. After the disappointment of an Eisenhower veto in 1960, Kennedy signed an almost identical bill in 1961 that led to the at least limited reopening of Picher-area mines and, most critically, the Central Mill at Cardin, which still treated the ores that small producers dug. The bill failed to bring back the kind of mining employment enjoyed through World War II, but the subsidy was substantial. In the first year-and-a-half it cost $2.45, with Congress appropriating another $4.88 million soon after. In 1964 Oklahoma's 21 participating operators received more than $860,000.[27]

Picher's real future and more enduring source of federal support came from the pursuit of a seemingly unlikely program: urban renewal. First through the federal Housing Act of 1949, and then its updating in the early 1960s, urban renewal became a vital set of programs in U.S. cities. Encompassing neighborhood programs, feasibility surveys, code enforcement projects, and demolition projects, the suite of interventions adopted under the rubric of "urban renewal" have become a central way for historians to explain U.S. history in the second half of the twentieth century. For what needed "renewal" in the eyes of urban planners and other local administrators of the programs often fell sharply along race and class lines. On the one hand, industry decamped from central cities for greater flexibility and sleeker factories in the postwar decades, hollowing out urban cores. On the other hand, federal housing policy lubricated the outflow of middle- and upper-class white residents to new suburbs while allowing the individual bigotries of the housing market to close off such unfettered Black mobility. The sites deemed "blighted" and in need of renewal tended to be Black neighborhoods in those newly defunded central cities. When urban

[27] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 22, 1962; "House Votes Funds for Small Producers Bill," *Tri-State Tribune*, April 5, 1962; "Lead-Zinc Legislation Introduced," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 4, 1965.

renewal destroyed Black housing, federal housing policy was frequently there to build socially atomizing, spartan towers to "warehouse the poor," as scholars have termed it, while simultaneously spurring racially exclusive white suburban development. Federal urban renewal (with local control and a slate of municipal and state programs) helped create the "urban crisis" that many in the United States recognized by the 1970s.[28] Preoccupied by the country's largest and most charismatic cities, urban and planning historians have treated urban renewal as a uniform set of programs with similar results in different places, a bunch of big cities with racial and class antagonisms working toward clearing valuable central-city property for commercial redevelopment.[29]

This urban crisis and urban renewal's role in it, of course, say nothing about a town of 2,500 people, virtually all of them white because of its earlier history of exclusion. The town had no valuable real estate for redevelopment; indeed, where a shortage of downtown property led big cities to clear adjacent neighborhoods, in Picher the problem was too few people and too much space. The experiences of such small towns are worth questioning. Urban renewal there, like in big cities, was a federal and local response to deindustrialization. Urban historians, though, have almost universally failed to note that connection, and more importantly, the fact that most urban renewal programs were in smaller cities and towns. 247 cities of more than fifty thousand people received federal money for such programs, while 375 cities *under* 5,000 people

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[28] The classic remains Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). See also Collin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For an environmental history on similar processes, see Sylvia Hood Washington, *Packing Them In*. On the "new metropolitan synthesis" confirming and complicating the basic outlines described here: Needham, *Power Lines*, 6-7.

[29] Douglas R. Appler, "Changing the Scale of Analysis for Urban Renewal Research: Small Cities, the State of Kentucky, and the 1974 *Urban Renewal Directory*," *Journal of Planning History* 16, no. 3 (2017), 202-203.

had urban renewal programs (the largest single bracket being 10,000 to 24,999 in population, which had 313 project cities).[30] Some small cities in the South enacted urban renewal in ways that harmonized with their big city counterparts, destroying Black homes without meaningful consultation from residents. But the urban renewal narrative of the "metropolitan synthesis" scholarship cannot explain Picher's case. The reality that a preponderance of urban renewal programs went to small and rural communities holds great potential for rethinking deindustrialization and the ways that federal programs and their administration by local authorities revealed the anxieties, hopes, and dreams of small towns in transition.

During his brief presidency, Kennedy moved swiftly from his determination to root out poverty, generally, to targeting rural pockets of it specifically. One part of that was to revive urban renewal. Jumping on its newfound momentum, the Oklahoma legislature closed a loophole in the summer of 1961 to make it possible for cities under 10,000 in population to take advantage of federal urban renewal money. Picher was at the ready; almost immediately the city appointed a five-man planning commission to interface with federal bureaucracies.[31] For the next three years urban renewal was a near-weekly topic of discussion in the Picher press, in townhall meetings, and in conferences between city representatives and federal officials. Urban renewal, with the simultaneous passage of the Small Producers Bill, gave Picher new hope for permanence. "City dads" recognized the limited nature of the mining revival. It would remain a city that, at least for the foreseeable future, could not afford the environmental and public health

[30] Appler, "Changing the Scale," 203-204. Of course, as Appler also points out, the big-city bias in urban renewal scholarship is understandable given the larger populations and dollar amounts involved.

[31] "Renewed Interest in Urban Renewal Program," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 20, 1961. Matthews took the rare step of including a syndicated column, in this case by Senator Robert S. Kerr, explaining the potential for small Oklahoma towns to take advantage of urban renewal funds.

infrastructure necessary to sustaining life. Attracting federal urban renewal dollars was the safer long-term investment than more effort toward a mining subsidy.

In Picher and other small towns, social reproduction is a better focus for the study of urban renewal than capital accumulation and racism. City leaders' goal was not to replace certain populations or land uses with new and more profitable ones, only to reproduce the good people already there and create the conditions to keep them. "Picher must have a water and sewage improvement program," wrote Charlotte Cox, a Picherite-turned correspondent for the *Tulsa Daily World*. "Urban Renewal offers a solution."[32] C. Allen Matthews became the most important node of community education about the promises of urban renewal, making it the most dependable topic in his "Irish Pennants" editorial column and throughout the paper in the early 1960s. He repeatedly invoked the trinity of improved "Housing, Water, and Sewage" as the "nutshell" explanation of what urban renewal could accomplish.[33] Those issues would satisfy Picherites' related obsession: urban renewal's potential to keep young people—and the children they would birth—in Picher. "I am for Urban Renewal 100 per cent—anything that will help our future generation," one citizen declared. "My brother and I own a business," explained another. "If the town doesn't go forward and we don't get new families to keep our town going, no business can stay." If the city opposed urban renewal, wrote Matthews, "the very backbone of our city, our young married couples, with families," would be "forced to leave Picher."

Picher's hopes for urban renewal also reveal the extent to which social reproduction was an environmental challenge. Picher required updated sewerage and water systems because of the built environment established through the mining years; recall how its mining regime militated

[32] Charlotte Cox, "Urban Renewal," Feb. 20, 1964.
[33] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 29, 1962.

against permanent structures because landownership and financing were impossible on most lots, and expanded diggings could always force evictions. Into the 1960s Eagle-Picher and the Bureau of Indian Affairs evicted residents such as Laura Thompson, who had lived on North Netta Street for 47 years. By the end of mining, the small, dispersed chat piles next to individual mills had become "chat mountains."[34] When mining operations ceased, Picher's livable footprint was a sprawling four square miles broken up by chat piles, sludge ponds, cave-ins, Chat Creek, Lytle Creek, and the infamous "fenced-in area" of the former downtown. Northeast Oklahoma towns of similar population had surface areas of about one fourth that size, giving Picher a burden of city services provisioning—sewer, water, street maintenance—out of proportion to its population even before accounting for its beleaguered city budget; Picher even taxed its residents at lower rates than its peers.[35] That sprawling city footprint left more than forty percent of homes without city water and sewer, or even septic tanks.[36] Those connected at the far ends of the pipes suffered low water pressure and frequent outages when city pumps failed no fewer than seven times in the mid-1960s (with another flurry in the early 1970s, and yet another in the late 1970s with dire warnings for area water).[37] Existing water lines were leaky, which contributed to low water pressure, and they were inaccessible for repair, buried beneath chat piles. Picher had no building, electrical, or plumbing code. It had never had a plan. All these issues, environmental at their

[34] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Jan. 11, 1979.
[35] Clem S. Wilder, "Urban Renewal and What it is!" *Tri-State Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1963.
[36] Ron Sparkman, "Attachment 3, Supplemental Data," Sept. 19, 1966. RG 381 Community Services Administration, OEO Southwest Region, Records Relating to CCA Committee, 1966-69, Oklahoma, box 40, NARA Fort Worth.
[37] "City to Purchase New Submersible Pump," May 24, 1962; "More Water Troubles," June 21, 1962; "New Pump … Again," June 28, 1962; "City Looking for Solution to Water Problems," May 23, 1963; "Irish Pennants," Sept. 17, 1964; "Irish Pennants," Nov. 11, 1965; "City Pump Down," July 20, 1972; "City Water Pumps Back in Operation," Nov. 18, 1976; "City Pump Down, Conserve Water," July 28, 1977. This is not an exhaustive list of outages, and is confined only to what was reported in the *Tri-State Tribune*.

core, made home financing almost impossible to secure, an especially vexing problem for attracting young people just starting families. Picherites in power saw urban renewal as the solution, a path that, if taken, would make life in Picher possible for "those future home makers [sic] … now in diapers, … on the school play ground [sic], … and not even born."[38] Picher's crisis was to confront nothing less than the very ways of organizing and then sustaining a society, about the ways the modern city had, in its limited way, conquered environments to provide clean water, sewage disposal, and adequate housing at a tolerable financial cost—the benefits of being in society with other humans.

Beyond *what* urban renewal would do, its other selling point was *how*. As C. Allen Matthews and other "city dads" repeated at every opportunity, in all the federal programs the city was pursuing, Picher would foot only one third of the total cost (maybe only one fourth, but that bit of bureaucratic minutiae was uncertain). The federal government would pay the other two thirds to three fourths of the bill. The initial comprehensive survey that would make Picher eligible for such programs would cost $16,000, not a small sum for a city whose whole budget had been $15,000 just a few years prior; as one relieved city councilman put it when Picher voters approved a fifty-cent-per-household, per-month increase in water bills to pay for the survey, "we're broke."[39]

As many local boosters for urban renewal realized, Picher had recent, if unacknowledged, precedent for taking federal money to make critical improvements to its social reproduction infrastructure. Amid the late-1950s mine industry crisis, Picher built a new elementary school for about $350 thousand. The "entire cost" was paid by the federal government, W.A. Brewer, a

[38] "Will Urban Renewal 'Tear Down Your Home?'," *Tri-State Tribune*, April 2, 1964.
[39] "Assessment Voted to Gain UR Aid," *Tri-State Tribune*, Dec. 6, 1962.

cashier at First State Bank, claimed in making his urban renewal pitch to the community. Picherites had long vaunted the quality of their school system, usually as evidence of their civic virtue. Only when urban renewal arrived did the federal source of that school money come to the fore. "This," Brewer stated, "is an example of what can be done."

Selling urban renewal as a federal handout required some finessing, however, because Picher's racial homogeneity did not mean that race didn't matter in the campaign. In fact, better to avoid that word, *handout*. Despite the Tri-State district's long history at the federal trough—as recipient of tariff protection and premium price payments—there was something new about urban renewal and the growing expenditures from what was soon to be declared the War on Poverty. In previous eras, the Tri-State received federal monies as *producers*, deserving and rightful recipients of protection from "foreign" ores or in the service of wartime production aims. Urban renewal—*urban* anything—was different. "Originally the program was set up for large cities, with a slum problem," Matthews admitted in some of his earliest educational editorializing on the subject.[40] Combined with "handout," urban renewal's metropolitan siting could give it the pallor of a racial program "Some," Charlotte Cox averred, "may think government help is only for larger cities."[41] But it was not a "hand-out," or "a charity, or a 'racket'," argued a local minister. Urban renewal was only "a helping hand to aggressive cities and people who are vitally interested in moving ahead." Helpfully, by 1964 more area cities such as Miami and Joplin had "greatly benefited" from urban renewal.[42]

The anxiety about comparisons between Picher and "big cities" jumped in unbidden. Cleveland, Ohio, had twenty-six urban renewal and public housing projects costing more the $63

[40] "Urban Renewal," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1963.
[41] Cox, "Urban Renewal."
[42] Robert Nichols, "Urban Renewal-Hope for Progress," *Tri-State Tribune*, Jan. 2, 1964.

million in federal money, as well as a $43 million welfare program, wrote Picher city attorney Clem S. Wilder, in support of urban renewal for Picher. "What Picher requires is only a small fraction of what this large city and other large cities require, in order to modernize our streets, homes, parks, water and sewer systems."[43] By emphasizing the size and scope of such big-city projects, Wilder introduced an odd and uncomfortable issue, if only unspoken: that was a lot of money for urban renewal. Should Picher really be involved in such a program, especially from a source giving away so much in "welfare"? In Picher's case it was okay to take federal money, Wilder seemed to argue, since it wouldn't be nearly as much as the people in urban slums (no matter that small-town programs were more expensive on a per capita basis). Only three months later that comparison grew especially fraught when a widely circulated *Readers Digest* exposé described Cleveland's Erieview project as a boondoggle in which unscrupulous local authorities approved the destruction of commercial buildings deemed sound by inspectors, only so they could claim a $33 million urban renewal grant.[44] The urban, central-city site of high-profile graft became increasingly uncomfortable for rural white Americans over the next decade.

For all this, Picher never received a federal urban renewal project.[45] The town raised its share for the comprehensive survey of the city's infrastructure needs. Then, by a three-to-one

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[43] Clem S. Wilder, "Urban Renewal and What it is!" *Tri-State Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1963.
[44] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 19, 1964. Matthews references the article without naming it. More context comes from the Congressional Record, May 6, 1964, page 10,174, excerpted here: http://abacus.bates.edu/muskie-archives/ajcr/1964/Readers%20Digest.shtml.
[45] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Urban Renewal Directory: June 30, 1974* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), accessed Sept. 1, 2021, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435021529235&view=1up&seq=1&skin=2021. In this directory, published at the end of federal urban renewal, no entry exists for Picher, Oklahoma. As planning historian Douglas R. Appler has noted, however, this is drawn from a somewhat narrow definition of urban renewal, leaving out programs from such agencies as the Federal Housing Administration, Public Housing Administration, or non-housing programs with similar aims as urban renewal. Appler, "Changing the Scale," 217.

margin, it reaffirmed its faith in the city's continued pursuit of urban renewal in 1964. Public discussion helped dispel rumors about what such a government program might do: tear down homes and put people out on the street; exclude the parts of town on leased land; make millionaires out of a select few citizens; squander tax money; and raise taxes so high that Picherites wouldn't be able to afford them. Most, apparently, were persuaded by the good intentions of "city dads" and their new government accomplices. Finally, the city council appointed an Urban Renewal Authority, the last step for a municipality to interface with federal urban renewal. But it never got an official urban renewal program.

Still, the process of pursing the programs had important knock-on effects. First, chasing urban renewal helped Picher make its city administration more professional, building critical institutional infrastructure to enact real city planning for the first time. Oklahoma's Department of Commerce and Industry guided Picher officials at every turn to establish its Planning Commission and to develop a planning habit of mind.[46] Secondly, the comprehensive study that the Planning Commission undertook to be eligible for urban renewal was ready to reap the rewards as the high tide of national liberalism crested in the middle of the 1960s. Urban renewal was upstaged by opportunities that targeted places like Picher more directly, and they accomplished many of the things that urban renewal was billed to do. Consultation with state and federal officials helped build the planning wherewithal to quickly adopt codes that both made Picherites materially safer and gave the city agility to apply for new federal money as soon as it was available.[47] Instead of official urban renewal, Picher got much more.

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[46] "Irish Pennants," March 29, 1962; "Urban Renewal," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1963.
[47] "City Adopts Set of Codes," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 19, 1965. This tracks with what Appler found among small cities and towns in Kentucky. Appler, "Changing the Scale," 205, 207.

When locals defended urban renewal as a "helping hand" rather than a "hand-out," they anticipated the language of those new federal programs cresting on the wave of liberalism. As early as the night after Kennedy's assassination, one of his economic advisors described to the new president, Lyndon Johnson, an anti-poverty program they had been working on. "That's my kind of program," Johnson replied. "Move full speed ahead." They did, so that by January 1964 Johnson could declare in his State of the Union address, an "unconditional war on poverty in America." In February he tapped R. Sargent Shriver, the head of the Peace Corps (and a Kennedy brother-in-law), to craft legislation for the program. Like the New Deal remedies Johnson hoped to emulate, the result was a mishmash of ideas Shriver felt would be broadly popular and politically tenable, like early childhood education, job training, small business and rural development loans, a Neighborhood Youth Corps that would create jobs for young people, and a domestic corollary to the Peace Corps that would send volunteers into poverty-riddled communities (Volunteers in Service to America, or VISTA). It would be at once a fitting tribute to the late president and a winning political maneuver to display Johnson's leadership and tact with Congress in that election year. It was the manifestation of liberals' faith that government had the ability and, thus, the obligation, to solve such problems. Comfortable majorities in the House and Senate confirmed their hopes, passing the legislation and creating the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). As "security" had been the buzzword of the New Deal, and "cooperation" the word of Truman's Fair Deal, "opportunity" conveyed the Johnson administration's hopes for "a hand up, not a handout," as Shriver repeatedly put it (with "welfare" already a naughty word, even among idealistic liberals). The legislation coined the

phrase "community action," an idea that impoverished local people would help shape their own programs.[48]

Six months after naming its Urban Renewal Authority, and three months after passage of the War on Poverty legislation, 82 percent of Picher voters chose Johnson in November 1964.[49] Combined with the broadly unpopular campaign of his Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater (the only western Senator to oppose the 1960 Small Producers Bill, Picherites might have remembered), and alongside the Civil Rights Act, liberal optimism as reflected in the War on Poverty sounded fine in Picher.[50]

The landscape these programs entered in the mid-1960s could appear unchanged from the one national audiences came to know through the 1940 silicosis crisis, although the chat piles were higher and the town's economic straits were worse: Ninety percent of homes registered as "deteriorated and dilapidated" and 23.5 percent of local men were unemployed. Policy-bound to include impoverished representatives on the local Community Action Agency board, the OEO had no trouble. The board was composed of local merchants and professionals, and yet of the thirty-five, "only two make any sort of a decent living," the OEO found: the owner of a salvage yard and a mortician, macabre suggestions for how to thrive in a dying town.[51] The governor's office named Picher "the No. 1 Poverty Problem in the State of Oklahoma."[52]

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[48] James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York, 1996), 533-539. David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994), 538-9.
[49] "Picher Vote on the 'Big 4'," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 5, 1964.
[50] Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 106-7; "Senate Passes Mine Bill It's Up To Ike Now," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 25, 1960.
[51] Crook to Jim Galvin, "Highlight Memorandum: Application for Grant Under Title II-A," RG 381 Community Services Administration, OEO-Southwest Region, Records Relating to CCA Committees, 1966-69, Oklahoma, Box 41, Folder: Ottawa County Nelson Amendment, NARA Fort Worth.
[52] Ronald Sparkman, "Attachment 3, Supplemental Data," Sept. 19, 1966, NARA Fort Worth, RG 381

Picher was poor, but its civic leaders were ready and industrious. Alleged to have been the first community to apply to the OEO—before there was even a desk, one representative quipped—from the summer of 1965 forward, federal grants animated Picher's civic life and its social reproduction infrastructure of education, childcare, housing, and workforce skill building. First came a grant of $71,768 for the Lion's Club to set up the town's multi-service center, the headquarters for administering all OEO programs. That allowed for the inauguration of Head Start, complete with a flag-raising by the mayor, and the opening of a daycare soon after. Then $12,000 for a two-month work study program for high school students; $7,600 for preliminary planning to explore a public housing project; then a fresh $20,256 for Head Start and $91,000 for the Multi-Service Center to operate in 1966; and finally, approval for a $512,000 grant to build 38 public housing units. All these were possible because of the city's comprehensive plan. "The people of Picher have worked untiringly in an effort to help themselves," wrote Governor Henry Bellmon in approval of a Picher application. The town was "typical of the meaning of Community Action" and "the spirit of Oklahoma."[53] "The most remarkable thing about Picher," Sargent Shriver declared to Congress, "is not its poverty, but its citizens' firm determination to survive as a community."[54] The state and federal governments seemed equally determined.

Almost immediately, OEO programs in Picher bore fruit, sometimes quite literally. Alongside the pursuit of urban renewal, Picherites had been campaigning for "beautification" haphazardly since the late 1950s (this, too, was common in the national story, where beautification joined urban renewal in racialized "blight clearance" and "slum removal"). With

[53] Henry Bellmon to Sargent Shriver, June 1965. RG 381 Community Services Administration, Box 41 E. 381-10, Ottawa County, Highlight Memo folder, NARA Fort Worth.
[54] Shriver's quote from the Congressional Record of Sept. 25, 1965, quoted in Ron Sparkman, "Attachment 3, Supplemental Data."

an OEO grant of almost $18,000, however, the sporadic efforts of women's groups and garden clubs were redoubled by the hiring of unemployed young men to perform work vaguely falling under the realm of "conservation." The money came from an amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act inserted by Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson. The Nelson Amendment, too, had an urban impetus: a federally funded program to employ jobless people would combat "the problems of cities" and "the problems of conservation" simultaneously. It would both remove idle men from the streets, and improve the blighted conditions that, in urban renewal discourse, made communities seem disposable, replaceable. In Picher's case, a five-man Nelson Amendment crew spruced up the U.S. Highway 69 entrance to town at the Kansas state line, giving the "Welcome to Oklahoma" sign a semblance of earnestness. They planted 75 pine trees from nearby Delaware County in local parks, with another 75 donated to private households.

As their most significant work, the crew also entered the "fenced-in area" of the 1950 downtown collapse scare and redeemed it as a bird sanctuary. The spot "once called Picher's graveyard," as Genevieve Craig reported in the Miami *News-Record*, soon bloomed with iris, day lilies, cannas, lilacs, daffodils, chrysanthemums, and other flowers. It yielded grapes and raspberries within, and Montmorency cherries at the entrance. This hard work—matched as it was by community donations of labor, equipment, and materials—reveals both the environmental sensibilities and the commitment to Picher's permanence shared by many leaders and ordinary citizens. Those leaders, as the CAP board's income figures revealed, *were* ordinary citizens, struggling to make ends meet in a place they refused to leave. Through federally subsidized beautification they rewrote the meaning of an overgrown lot surrounded by chain link, a part of town that had been "a source of 'resentment'." They not only improved on its appearance but gave it a material use for nonhuman nature as a bird sanctuary. And they

committed to Picher's permanence by planting trees, those slow-growing markers declaring for their planters, *We were here*.

The programs bore fruit in less literal ways, too, by organizing community life around shared goals and dreams. A junior- and senior high essay contest and elementary poster contest helped spark interest in beautification. The subject was, like urban renewal a couple of years prior, a mainstay of local news and meetings. The Picher Beautification Committee selected a "Beauty Spot of the Week" beginning in the Spring of 1966. Their award justifications revealed a wholistic, all-encompassing nature, from homes' structure and physical upkeep to gardens and garages. Their reasoning revealed the anxieties of a postindustrial town where junked cars, overgrown yards, and abandoned properties had long drawn the ire of C. Allen Matthews and his correspondents. The committee frequently cited how well-kept homes "enhanced the beauty of the area," as though the community aspect was most important: the beautification of the winners' homes would exert positive pressure on the owners of surrounding properties.

Beautification went on as the loans rolled in. The large ones built public housing: ten brick duplexes and a community building north of the Baptist Church and nine brick duplexes on South Connell Avenue in 1966, plus forty more units in 1969.[55] They also refurbished, at long last, Picher's sewer and water system for $400,000 as the federal government's share.[56] Other loans came to "educate low income [sic] women in the need and advantage of family planning" ($32,055); for "work-training"; as "Opportunity Loans" for low-income families with little access to credit; a Neighborhood Youth Corps program ($326,350 for the nine-county area of

[55] "Housing Project on 'Schedule,'" *Tri-State Tribune*, June 15, 1967.
[56] "Water-Sewer Big Approved," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 9, 1970.

northeastern Oklahoma); and neighborhood service centers, Head Start, and family planning (again, $43,487), among many, many others.[57]

This is the thin, mostly unremarkable record of the War on Poverty in the official archive: form letters, applications, approvals, and occasional inter-bureaucracy memos recommending the Picher programs be funded. Those were where Shriver and Governor Bellmon lauded Picher's quickness at applying for the programs, and the town's embodiment of "community action." These arguments continued throughout the life of the War on Poverty, as officials virtually always endorsed applications by this Community Action Agency, the Picher Lion's Club, which was "one of our better CAP agencies in Oklahoma."[58] That commitment was community wide, as citizens and the City of Picher gave "overwhelming support" to community action programs and had the federal government's full trust that they would "cooperate … to the maximum extent possible" in developing the programs "to improve the socio-economic level of the Picher community."[59] Picher was a model for what community action could achieve through the War on Poverty.

These plaudits for Picher are instructive alongside the rest of Oklahoma's OEO archive. Differences between the reception of programs in Picher, on the one hand, and in Oklahoma City, on the other, again point up the tension between a rural War on Poverty and its urban public

[57] "County Grant Announced," June 29, 1967; "Work-Training Employs 14," June 29, 1967; "Opportunity Loans Available," Aug. 24, 1967; "Nine County Grant Approved," Sept. 7, 1967; "Federal Grant for Programs," Aug. 8, 1968.
[58] John E. Gleaton, analyst, to Walter H. Richter, OEO Southwest Regional Director, March 29, 1967, RG 381 Community Services Administration, Ottawa County, Oklahoma Osage County (PT)-Ottawa County (PT), OEO-Southwest Region, Records Relating to CCA Committee 1966-69, Community Services Administration, NARA Fort Worth.
[59] Richter to R.R. Morrison, Director of Southwest area Economic Development Administration, March 29, 1967, RG 381 Community Services Administration, Ottawa County, Oklahoma Osage County(PT)-Ottawa County(PT), OEO-Southwest Region, Records Relating to CCA Committee 1966-69, NARA Forth Worth.

face. When the OEO performed annual "Summer Inspections," it only surveyed its largest cities.[60] Its central concern was race relations, preoccupied by "incidents" and querying local power brokers about their views of "the poverty program"—a phrase unused in the Picher archive. Inspectors found a high degree of support for OEO programs in Oklahoma City, including among surprise supporters such as the mayor and police captain. With some worry about "immorality" among VISTA workers, city officials were generally confident that OEO programs were having their desired effect of reducing "tensions," the nefarious though nebulous things that were causing urban uprisings in central cities around the country by the mid-1960s. The OEO investigators also, however, sought out sympathetic interview subjects and were conscientious not to speak with opponents. For there were opponents, and the differences among them revealed the contradictions on which liberalism foundered during the 1960s. Of the notable dissenters, one was president of the local NAACP branch, Henry Floyd, who criticized CAP for serving middle-class whites and not fulfilling its promises to truly impoverished non-white Oklahoma City residents. The other was his foil and drew the opposite conclusion.[61]

That more influential opponent of the "poverty program" was G.K. Gaylord, editor and publisher of Oklahoma City's most important newspaper and owner of the local television station. OEO inspectors knew enough of his views that they needed no interview: the 92-year-old "conservative Republican" was "generally suspicious of the poverty program." His managing editor gave fair coverage to the OEO in the news and feature sections, but the editorial page was a different story. The inspectors chose a representative sampling from one edition of the *Sunday*

[60] "Summer Inspection 1967, Southwest Region," RG 381, OEO-Southwest Region, Records of the Director, Central Files, 1967-69, Box 4, Report on the Success of OEO Programs folder, NARA Forth Worth. The inspection included Baton Rouge, Dallas, New Orleans, Little Rock, San Antonio, and Corpus Christi, in addition to Oklahoma City.
[61] "Summer Inspection, 1967."

*Oklahoman*. "Roits [sic] Spread as Spending Rises," claimed the headline for an article rebuking eight Republican governors for joining Democratic "'poverty warriors'" in a "clamor" for federal funding to combat "urban racial disorders" via a "'Marshall Plan' for the slums." Never mind that local OEO leaders worried about their inability to incorporate "Mexicans and Indians" into their programs, or that civil rights leaders criticized the OEO for serving white residents. The problem, to Gaylord's *Oklahoman*, was that government antipoverty spending seemed to grow in step with "urban racial violence"—that is, Black people acting violently towards property. Gaylord's mouthpiece succinctly equated cities with Black Americans, Black Americans with poverty, and government welfare and antipoverty efforts with Black unrest. Black urbanites were undeserving and, as revealed by the uprisings, unappreciative. In Picher's War on Poverty, of course, nobody mentioned "the subversives, the arsonists, the snipers and the looters" taking federal welfare money. Alongside this, the *Oklahoman* ran Mrs. John Turnbull's letter railing about "subsidizing crime and riots, … turning our heads on treasonists." The Johnson administration, she quipped, "calls it a 'Great Society.' For whom? I'd like to know!" As Mrs. Turnbull understood it, "Communist-inspired rioters are paid for rioting with money I've worked for, and had taken from me as 'taxes.'" The reckoning would come at the polls, she warned.[62] It was a portent of the turn toward what Lawrence Glickman has called "taxpayerism," a rhetoric about public provision where the taxpayer—coded white oppressed—replaced the New Deal citizen in the political imagination, and the goal of politics to protect the taxpayer, rather than provision the public good.[63]

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[62] "Summer Inspection 1967"; "Roits [sic] Spread as Spending Rises," *Sunday Oklahoman*, Aug. 13, 1967; "To the Editor," *Sunday Oklahoman*, Aug. 13, 1967.
[63] Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 294; Glickman, *Free Enterprise: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 229-254.

While Mrs. Turnbull might have considered that the residents of Picher, Oklahoma, were enjoying something of the Great Society, back in Picher C. Allen Matthews was likewise growing uncomfortable with urban unrest and federal taxation. Matthews, however, champion that he was for Picher's War on Poverty, failed to connect the poverty spending and urban riots so explicitly. He did so implicitly through two recurrent themes in his commentary during the late 1960s: complaining about high taxes and excessive government, on the one hand, and griping about protests against the Vietnam War and for civil rights, on the other.

Revealing the strain on New Deal liberalism as the 1960s turned into the 1970s, Matthews's positions were increasingly untenable as a coherent set of politics, unless viewed through the lens of race in the longer history of the Tri-State district. It was "regrettable" that Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Matthews claimed. But "even more regrettable" was the "insaneness … in the aftermath," the riots that swept the country in righteous indignation over the civil rights leader's murder. "It borders on the ridiculous," he averred, "to see … animals masquerading as human beings, smash store windows, set fires, destroy, burn and loot," while police and troops looked on. "Why is it wrong to shoot a looter, a murderer, an arsonist? Why can't the property, rights and lives of citizens be protected?"[64] A couple of months later Matthews, staunch New Deal Democrat, was flirting with the presidential campaign of George Wallace, arch segregationist. Matthews assured readers that he was ideologically opposed to Wallace, but that the candidate did seem to be saying a lot of what people were thinking, and that the two major parties had better listen up.[65] Humphrey defeated Nixon in Picher by a landslide in 1968, redoubling the district's long commitment to mainstream Democrats, and proving, if

[64] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, April 11, 1968.
[65] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 11, 1968; Irish Pennants, Aug. 1, 1968; Irish Pennants, Oct. 31, 1968.

momentarily, that Matthews was ahead of the curve.[66] In 1972, he renewed the warnings in stronger language, appreciating Wallace's pledge, if elected, to "wade through the red tape, the bumbling bureaucracy, … with fists swinging, and clean house." Americans, Matthews claimed, were tiring of "paying more and more taxes, for more and more government, we don't need." The "plain old country folks" were "weary of inefficiency, sick of coddling tactics … of riots, … of protest groups …. Marches …. School burning .. etc., etc., and etc..[67]" By linking excessive taxation and "over-government" to "coddling tactics," riots, and protest, Matthews did the bidding of conservative forces that would undo the welfare state sustaining Picher.

These ruminations on the illegitimacy of antiwar and Black protest, further, stood in stark contrast to Matthews' elegies to the "Pickhandle Parades" of the 1935 labor troubles.[68] A riot was right when white folks marched through the streets of Picher, Treece, and Galena. When the pickhandlers flouted the law by union busting (and skull-crushing), Matthews did not judge them "coddled" by the criminal justice system, even though the police materially aided them by storing and distributing the pick handles. Conversely, Cassius Clay was coddled when allowed to dodge Vietnam service, Matthews argued.[69] Inmates at Attica Prison in upstate New York rebelled in 1971 because the criminal justice system was giving the "soft glove" treatment.[70] Police had their hands unfairly tied because the Supreme Court, in the 1966 *Miranda* case, forced them to read suspects their constitutional rights when apprehending them for a crime.[71]

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[66] "Picher Favored Democrats," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 7, 1968.
[67] Irish Pennants, *Tri-State Tribune*, June 1, 1972. Ellipses in original.
[68] Irish Pennants, *Tri-State Tribune*, June 4, 1970.
[69] Irish Pennants, July 1, 1971.
[70] Irish Pennants, Sept. 16, 1971. On the very much un-coddled prisoners at Attica and their rebellion, see: Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy* (New York, 2017).
[71] Irish Pennants, Feb. 25, 1971.

The demonstrations of the 1960s had elevated the rights of "minorities"—political and racial, he seemed to mean—above the rights of the sensible, patriotic majority that still held onto "the principles that made this nation."[72] "While we're on the subject of demonstrations, etc.," Matthews wrote, decrying the student protests of 1970, "we had a good one in Picher, 35 years ago last week …. 'The Pick Handle Parade.'"[73] He counseled younger readers to ask anyone over fifty to "enlighten" them. He turned subtext into text, placing the illegal union and its extralegal violence—a movement that defined itself by its aggressive whiteness—alongside the multi-racial protests of his present day, which he deemed illegitimate for their lack of old-fashioned patriotism.

The past Picher celebrated—that of the Pickhandle Parade—was long gone, but fading too was enthusiasm for the activist federal government that had sustained the town through the 1960s. In 1972 Matthews inaugurated a new series: "Citizens of Tomorrow." It paired photos of local toddlers with captions giving their names, ages, parents, and addresses. It jived perfectly with the *Tri-State Tribune*'s devotion to the community's social reproductive capacity as underwritten by the War on Poverty. But alongside his George Wallace curiosity ("you may be amazed at the vote he will draw in Picher"), the series rang with dissonance.[74] Just where did Matthews think Picher would get its citizens of tomorrow if not through the daycares, schools, and nurses bankrolled by federal taxation and spending, the federal subsidy for Picher's social reproductive infrastructure?

The appeal of Wallace's rhetoric to a long-time War on Poverty supporter like Matthews makes it no wonder that, upon taking office in 1973, President Nixon could take aim at the

[72] Irish Pennants, Jan. 15, 1970.
[73] Irish Pennants, June 4, 1970.
[74] Irish Pennants, Oct. 31, 1968.

Office of Economic Opportunity.[75] "WHY?" cried C. Allen Matthews about Nixon's plan to "[slam] the door on the entire Picher program and hundreds of other like programs over the nation." Matthews cited the administration's claims that the OEO was wasteful and failed to achieve the War on Poverty's goals. Also, that "somewhere in the maze of double-talk, mention was made of the Black Panthers," Matthews reported, hinting that he did not buy the administration's reasoning. The administration, Matthews failed to admit outright, used the same formula as he had himself in juxtaposing taxation and government with racist gestures toward who was receiving the benefits. Matthews' own ruminations on Wallace and his belief that the country wanted something new was born out in that election, although not by the town's support for Wallace; Picher chose George McGovern over Nixon by only 22 votes in 1972, the closest call for a Democrat since the early twentieth century. "Mr. President," Matthews pleaded in early 1973, "I invite you to take a look at the Picher program." It had done exactly what it was meant to, "to organize the community for action." "PLEASE, Mr. President, don't destroy these communities on one hand," Matthews closed, "and 'rebuild' North Vietnam with the other."[76] As ever, Picher's local fight for survival was bound to the racialized economics of domestic and global politics.

When the War on Poverty ended, a longer running redistribution of the nation's wealth was reshaping regions and giving the Picher area one more shot at a future, its residents one more chance to stay in the area. As federal poverty programs were the localized response to

[75] Nixon ended most federal programs of the Great Society, devolving urban renewal funding to local control in the form of community development block grants, moving cities to profit-driven public-private partnerships that eschewed the Great Society's social justice or poverty reduction aims. Dylan Gottlieb, "Hoboken Is Burning: Yuppies, Arson, and Displacement in the Postindustrial City," *Journal of American History* 106, no. 2 (Sept. 2019), 399-400.
[76] Irish Pennants, March 1, 1973.

industrial restructuring after World War II, deindustrialization's wider political-economic expression was the shifting of public and private investment across the national map. Where urban renewal responded to the decentralization of industry from northeastern and midwestern cities, a broader geographic shift took industry from the old industrial heartlands toward the South and West. An interplay between local civic boosters within cities and the "metropolitan preferences" of federal investment from the New Deal forward, this transition helped create an amorphous, sprawling new region that, by the end of the OEO, increasing numbers of commentators were coming to call the Sunbelt.[77]

The term described an elongated horseshoe at the bottom of the U.S. map from the Carolinas to Southern California, united loosely by the pursuit of low taxes, lax labor law (and low rates of unionization), and other tenets of what boosters called a business-friendly landscape. The Sunbelt was also, critically, made by federal investment: a concerted effort to decentralize defense industry production, to grow modern sectors such as technology and aerospace, through pro-business subsidies again building out from the New Deal. The Sunbelt was the future that would replace the industrial heartland as that place's staid status quo of labor and management accord fell on hard times when profit margins shrunk by the 1970s. The Sunbelt's landscape of subdivisions, strip malls, and shopping centers staffed by nonunion service workers, and of expansive city limits placing suburban-style development under the aegis of central-city government, became the vernacular for most people across the second half of the twentieth century. Oklahoma's cities became Sunbelt cities.

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[77] "metropolitan preferences" is from Needham, *Power Lines*, 7. Kevin Phillips coined the term "Sun Belt" in his controversial description of Nixon's "Southern Strategy" and 1968 presidential election victory: Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969).

Even more than a coherent region, then, the Sunbelt was a mode of metropolitan development. Rapid Sunbelt growth drew off surplus population from the restructuring industrial countryside. Yet that was not the only way that its growth was connected to its rural periphery. There, as well as in cities, the processes of deindustrialization and the shifting investment to the South and West catalyzed the invention of new regional orientations. The Sunbelt's *urban* development promoted, in circumscribed ways, a *rural* sunbelt. The extended reach of Sunbelt cities into their rural hinterlands, especially for water and energy, reshaped the ways that large parts of the rural Sunbelt perceived of their relationship to metropolitan America. Again, federal investment helped cultivate the landscape for this postwar change. And just like in other Sunbelt subregions, the money shaped more than economic fortunes. It remade lands, waters, and politics.

Just like most places American settlers have seen moving water, a dam on Grand River had been a dream since its earliest viewers believed they could feasibly do it and connect its product to people who needed it. The Grand River dam's feasibility was first surveyed in 1906. During World War I, mining operator L.S. Skelton made a serious proposal for a hydroelectric dam to power his new process for separating zinc and lead ores from chat, a classic technological fix aimed at sustaining mining into the future. That fell through, but when the New Deal gave big dam projects a boost, Skelton's former associates were at the head of promotion. "My faith has never changed," wrote one of them in 1935, reflecting on Skelton's death. "The sparkling waters of Grand River will, during this great Roosevelt Administration, be harnessed." He predicted thousands of new jobs in factories as well as "power and light for the cities and farms" of the

mostly remote and rural region.[78] The dam booster's membership in the Tulsa East Side Democratic Club was representative of early Grand River dam promotion: urban merchant-class interests recognizing the power-generating and water-providing capacities of the monumental technology. Alongside such voices, though, came people in pursuit of flood control, drought relief, and relief work. Together they represented a "comprehensive" vision for dams' usefulness that the Roosevelt administration preferred.[79] Everyone in Woody Guthrie's part of the state was thinking like the singer, who commanded one famous western waterway, "river while you're ramblin' you can do some work for me."[80]

On the one hand, that work would be natural. Dam promotion was peppered by language like "wealth-producing possibilities which are almost limitless," and "continuous, never-ending," "forever," and "inexhaustible."[81] When World War II dawned on the horizon the dam's utility shifted from a general potential to diversify industry, towards war production specifically. Still its energy made northeast Oklahoma a "natural" site for increased investment in the patriotic war contributions it had always made with its minerals. Now, though, as Etta R. Bruton wrote to Senator Elmer Thomas (D-OK), they should get munition plants because they had "unlimited"

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[78] W.D. Ford to Elmer Thomas, Nov. 26, 1935. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 14, Carl Albert Center Congressional Archives, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. Hereafter cited CAC.

[79] C.A. Babb to Elmer Thomas, Aug. 17, 1935, and Thomas to Babb, Aug. 20, 1935. Elmer Thomas Collection—Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 14, CAC. Thomas believed the project had a good chance at success with the administration precisely because it was for "power as well as for flood control."

[80] Woody Guthrie, "The Grand Coulee Dam," *Woody at 100: The Woody Guthrie Centennial Collection*. On the distinctively settler-colonial nature of that expression and its narrative power to support the primacy of settler water uses over Indigenous ones see: Jane Griffith, "Do Some Work for Me: Settler Colonialism, Professional Communication, and Representations of Indigenous Water," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 7, no. 1 (2018): 132-157.

[81] W.D. Ford to Thomas, Nov. 26, 1935. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 14, CAC.

underground storage space for explosives "in the worked out caverns of the Tri-State mining district."[82]

On the other hand, the river's work was political. Waterpower was preferable to fossil energy because it didn't "face dangers arising from anti-trust legislation; labor disputes; … [and] serious accidents."[83] Or, from Bruton again, when the dam's energy created defense-industry jobs, the population could supply the labor demand because of the decline in mining and, what's more, it was "not highly unionized." The Blue Card Union proved that it could "be handled effectively through specialized unions," she stated, euphemistically acknowledging that the company union manifested as no power for workers at all.[84] The "idle machines in the Tri-State Mining Industry," wrote a Northeastern Junior College (Miami) instructor, "and the number of trained workmen" made it incumbent upon the federal government to create jobs and "allow" northeastern Oklahoma its "small part in the War program."[85] Such promoters—and these were not miners, obviously—were glad that hydropower could perform an end-around on the organized power of fossil fuel workers because it ran, in this telling, without human labor. The factory work created by that frictionless power could be performed by workers inured to the equally frictionless labor relations of company unions: the former Tri-State miner who saw his interests in alignment, not conflict, with his bosses. Similarly, promoters drew on the district's historical "patriotism" and the readiness of these "genuine Americans" to "combat subversive

[82] Etta R. Bruton to Elmer Thomas, April 17, 1941. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 30, CAC.
[83] Ford to Thomas.
[84] Bruton to Thomas.
[85] E.F. Gorton to Elmer Thomas, April 17, 1941. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 30, CAC.

influences."[86] In lobbying first for a Grand River dam, and then for the federal defense-industry use of its energy towards industrial development for their part of the state, boosters could only imagine the energy of the future in relation to the mining district's accreted natural and political meanings.

This was how the Sunbelt was made, dam by dam, reservoir by reservoir, linking disparate pieces of the South and West and myriad subregions. To make a body of water was to make a region.[87] Making a new region, though, is messy. Some people hoping for the federal government to underwrite further industrial development through the war expressed this comedically, mixing the "Tri-State Defense Program" and "the Four State Defense Area Project" in their letter writing campaigns (adding Arkansas to the old Tri-State assemblage). "They all mean the same thing and would be a big help to the middle west," wrote the owner of a Vinita funeral home, adding yet another regional moniker but no more clarity.[88] Another campaigner, from Afton, must have agreed when he declared that "the Four State try [sic] State area" was "entitled" to federal help securing a cantonment ("We all appreciate the $22,000,000 Grand River Dam," he also wrote). "Thanks for your earnest cooperation in this project.".[89] Regardless of the confusion, some of this boosting was realized: a "powder" plant near Pryor; a B.F. Goodrich tire factory in Miami, and other smaller concerns in the region.

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[86] J.F. Allred to Elmer Thomas, April 15, 1941. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 31, CAC. This was a sort of form letter from many Pryor, Oklahoma, residents lobbying Senator Thomas.
[87] This idea owes much to Needham, "A Region of Fragments," in *Power Lines*, 23-52.
[88] Tom C. Burckhalter to Elmer Thomas, April 13, 1941. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 32, CAC.
[89] J.S. Atchison to Elmer Thomas, April 14, 1941. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 27, CAC.

There was a more serious conflict at the core of the humorously garbled appellations for the new region: region-making in real-time was about the differences in top-down and bottom-up understandings of place and struggles over what—or whom—the new region would serve. Dam promotion and then its administration were always divided about purpose, whether the dam should be managed for flood control or for power. Flood control meant non-optimal power generation at times, but also the protection of downstream agricultural property. Peak power generation meant sacrificing downstream farmland at other times, but maximized the capacity for the dam to fulfill the dreams of its loudest promoters by spreading energy around northeast Oklahoma. There was also the question of who should own that power; the New Deal had been a moment for "public power," and the Grand River Dam was built in that tradition, with some hot moments throughout the war, when it was temporarily federalized in the interests of military preparedness.[90]

Then there was a more abstract question, the purview of boosters, about what sort of future the dam and its power would make. The Miami Chamber of Commerce's Grand River Dam promotion illustrated the transition of Grand Lake from an industrial cog, a technology that created energy and jobs, to something else altogether, purportedly less grounded in material nature. In their glossy brochure, from fifty miles upstream of the dam site, the Miamians placed the dam at the progressive end of their civic narrative. From pioneer cattle town and mining boomtown, the dam would make Miami a modern agricultural and industrial hub, serving the "most Diversified Area in the Great Southwest." The dam was "forerunner of the surge of industry that Miami anticipates." It was also, at the same time, harbinger of a new and less

[90] Richard Lowitt, *Twentieth-Century Oklahoma: Reflections on the Forty-Sixth State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 211-217.

industrial future. “Miami is at the foothills of the Ozarks,” they claimed, in a turn never made in early mining district promotion. “Clear streams and lakes … scenic drives … excellent hotels, restaurants and clubs … for the tourist and vacationer.”[91] Suddenly the area was turned toward “The Land of a Million Smiles,” the tagline for the Ozark Playgrounds Association, based in Joplin. Out on the margins of the Ozark Uplift, by the 1950s the association published tourist maps color-coding the “playgrounds of the Ozarks” to include Joplin and even two tiers of counties into Oklahoma, circumscribing Grand Lake.[92] The Miami promoters believed the dam could build a future both industrial and recreational. That, however, was a slightly ahistorical dream, a snapshot in the moving stream that is history. One vision was in the process of supplanting the other.

In the postwar period, more stakeholders agreed that the Grand River Dam should be operated for maximum energy production, which in turn fed another argument that answered the booster’s question: if the dam’s operation for power generation created a stable pool level, then the lake’s purpose should be recreation. Consistent lake levels meant better fishing, safer boating and water sports, and more certain investment in lakeshore real estate.[93] Even if managing the dam for power generation theoretically maximized the pool of energy to serve industry in northeastern Oklahoma, the reality was a new sort of economy built on domestic consumption. Lots of energy did power a diversified industrial sector, to be sure, but the result of a dam on Grand River was that the more lasting regional orientation for northeast Oklahoma was not a Tri-State or Four State “Defense Area,” but a tourist destination.

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[91] Miami Chamber of Commerce, “Miami, Oklahoma: Serving the Most Diversified Area in the Great Southwest,” ca. 1940. Elmer Thomas Collection, Projects Series, Box 6, Folder 35, CAC.
[92] “Playgrounds of the Ozarks: Official Map,” Ozark Playground Association, n.d. G.H. Wilson Collection, Maps, Origin Unknown, CAC.
[93] Lowitt, *Twentieth-Century Oklahoma*, 217.

From the 1950s forward, investment around Grand Lake built a threshold between it and the Tri-State mining district: call it the labor-leisure divide. At the north end of Ottawa County was the mining district. At the south end, Grand Lake. Matthews recognized as early as 1954 how the "northern end of the county" was "conveniently forgotten" by politicians until campaign season came around, when candidates recalled the strong turnout of the Picher area and got around to "'mending' fences.—Or perhaps 'straddling fences' would be the word," he joked, turning the saying to a new purpose by indicating that the fence was between the mining district and the southern part of the county near the lake.[94] Later that year, in the same issue of the *Tri-State Tribune*, Picherites could follow the miner's diaspora *and* the town's more local repositioning in the new region. They could read about Thelma Wilkerson and her son, Jack, leaving to spend the Summer in Kellogg, Idaho, with their miner husband and father, and about a local pastor moving to a new church in Grove, down on Grand Lake. Losing the pastor's "fine family," in the paper's telling, carried a sadness never conveyed in the articles about the miner's diaspora to Kellogg or Grants. The miners' move to Kellogg or Grants, and the white collar (or black collar, as it were) move to the lake town illustrates the changing meaning of making a living in northeastern Oklahoma, and of being a manual laborer in the deindustrializing, rural, postwar United States. Even with C. Allen Matthews, Grand Lake's "northeast Oklahoma playground" ("domain of the cabin cruiser, fishing boats and water enthusiasts," something for "all price brackets"!) took increasing pride of place in the Picher news.[95] It was the place where Picherites fished on the weekends, and where local news sometimes happened (like when the Commerce High School principal drowned on a fishing excursion).[96] But more fundamentally,

[94] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Jan. 28, 1954.
[95] "Inside Oklahoma!—Your State in Review," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 6, 1952.
[96] "Search Goes on [for] The Body of Commerce Man," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 22, 1956.

Picher's decline and southern Ottawa County's ascent also compelled Matthews to chase that wider geographic area for subscriptions and advertising dollars.[97]

The labor-leisure threshold between the mining district and the lake was not only geographic, semantic, or economic, it was also temporal. Where David Riesman found white workers vanishing like "the Sioux" in 1950, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, in a bestseller of 1958, posited their foil in a "New Class," highly educated and thereby released from toiling in the earth. In an age of affluence, Galbraith argued, the country must move beyond the accumulation of private wealth to create public wealth through investments in the common good, such as education. Education and the jobs that would follow could root out such persistent pockets of poverty as the Appalachians and Ozarks, he argued. A district defined by its manual labor in the earth was the past. Like Riesman, Galbraith was another ostensibly sympathetic viewer of such "islands" of "insular poverty" as the Picher Field, but still blamed that poverty on the "homing instinct" of the people who lived there. They were "ill prepared … for mastering the environment into which they were born." Everything about poverty, in fact, was reducible to "environment," but it was an immaterial, ideational environment that Galbraith carried in his head. He marveled at how Connecticut was rich although it had few resources, while West Virginia was poor despite being richly endowed. The economist understood neither how capital investment and resource extraction worked, nor the way that those things bore on "the frustrations of environment" that caused insular poverty.[98] If such celebrity intellectuals as Galbraith recognized the change over time catching Picher in its grips, they were not to be the mining district's salvation, alas.

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[97] Matthews admitted as much, and his masthead changed around this time to include a banner, "Featuring local news from Picher, Treece, Cardin, Quapaw, Commerce, North Miami."
[98] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 250-55.

The break with the old way of making a living in the earth could seem so complete as to transcend extraction altogether. A region for recreation in nature by white-collar, college educated types was the future. Clean hydroelectric power, like the purportedly clean high-tech industries of the metropolitan Sunbelt, helped the new lakeside communities—at least rhetorically—transcend the old extractive past. The New Class's work was likewise separated from nature, while its leisure was to reconnect—harmoniously—with it. But what developed around Grand Lake while the Great Society and War on Poverty waxed and waned in Picher was a sprawling constellation of what were effectively rural suburbs, that most energy intensive form of reproducing human life, at a most distinctive time and place in history. Curving, car-centric streets took metropolitans to their large contemporary second homes on expansive lots. Boats carried them on fishing jaunts, pleasure cruises, and waterski runs with cumulative horsepower that put the mining district's early twentieth-century dewatering efforts to shame. Tourism was an extension, not a betrayal, of the region's status as a landscape of intensification; almost as soon as the reservoir filled, the Grand River Dam Authority, which oversaw the reservoir's administration, had to purchase coal to supplement their hydroelectric power in the satisfaction of regional demand. In a way, then, the Miami dam and reservoir promoters were right that they would have it both ways, industrial and recreational, because modern life remained tied to industry someplace.

The most durable regional name probably turned out to be the Oklahoma Green Country. It was a vision placing Tulsa at the gateway to an ill-defined eastern Oklahoma playground "typified by lush rolling hills, lakeside resorts and a multitude of diverse cultural attractions" (the

lake's popular, if not official, name is Grand Lake O' the Cherokees).[99] Just as it had been at the forefront of Grand River Dam promotion, Tulsa (with Oklahoma City and Wichita) also became the prime source for Grand Lake's retirees, vacationers, and investors in the growing business of lakeside mega-resorts. The best known, Shangri-La, by the 1970s included 36 holes of championship golf, thousands of acres, hundreds of luxury homes, condominiums, and hotel rooms, hundreds of thousands of square feet in conference space, and its own "air park"—an airport at which people lived with their private planes.[100] If this all served the New Class, defining the modern U.S. by certain forms of labor and leisure, it also expanded another form of work. That was another iteration of the care work that became so important in Picher as the population sickened and aged. Around Grand Lake, that care work was what came to be called "service work," affective labor of making visitors feel comfortable and special: the work of cleaning rooms, scooping ice cream, cooking dinners, and manicuring the natural landscape while staying out of the way of purportedly authentic customer experiences. Vague as its usage could be, the Oklahoma Green Country followed on the Miami civic boosters' gestures toward "clear water" as descriptions of the natural experiences to be enjoyed in northeast Oklahoma. In reality, these were not so abstract.

Neither Picher nor the Grand Lake area, in fact, could achieve any distance from the extractive past. In Picher, the mining history carried too much meaning to be so swiftly disavowed. And too many people still lived there, unmoved by the miner's diaspora or the Green Country, sustained just enough by the postwar welfare state and odd jobs in nearby towns. Down

[99] "Oklahoma: Six Countries in One," *The Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), April 26, 1992. https://www.oklahoman.com/article/2392484/oklahoma-six-countries-in-one
[100] "Shangri-La History," https://shangrilaok.com/top-resort-hotel-in-oklahoma-shangri-la/shangri-la-history/.

at Grand Lake, the postindustrial life of leisure not only failed to transcend extraction, but it also intensified it, displacing its effects further afield (or into the atmosphere). In either place, the poisoned soils and waters of the mining past continued to do their work, the Grand River watershed sitting poised like a funnel draining the mines' water into the serpentine lake. The postindustrial reservoir still existed in material space, its water arriving from the mining district that could not be relegated to the past. Just ask the millions of fish being stocked each year by the middle of the 1970s to make Grand Lake a world-class fishery.[101] They—as much as human communities—were at the center of things at the end of the 1970s when people began to wonder, "Why is Grand Lake murky?"[102]

[101] "'Good Fishing' Ahead in Grand Lake Is Hope," *Tri-State Tribune*, June 19, 1975.
[102] "Why Is Grand Lake Murky?" *Tri-State Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1980.

# 5. GHOST CREATURES, ZOMBIE MINERS, AND THE RETURN OF THE POOR MAN'S CAMP

"The damned mines," George Mayer muttered to himself the instant he saw it. "The mines are full, and the water's finally coming out." It was 1978, and red-orange water burbled up from a bore hole in his pasture between Commerce and Cardin. The underground water was acidic from contacting iron pyrite, one of the minerals left in the abandoned mines. As Mayer realized, ten years after the miners shut down their underground pumps, the mines had filled and were releasing their toxic tenant. Mayer's purebred Arabian horses were the bellwethers, their roan hides turned orange and their fetlocks burned bare by the acidic liquid.[1] The mines were coming back to life in the Picher Field, but not the mining industry. As was so often the case in the district's history, more-than-human actors drove the humans to a reinterpretation of land and the meaning of their labors in it. The state and federal response to George Mayer's red-orange pasture—a flurry of scientific studies and hopeful remedies over the next three decades—coincided with the inauguration of local mining history commemorations that raised "the Tri-State miner" from the silicotic's grave to a new place in a revived poor man's camp. At the same time, Picherites' remembrances whispered of the white man's camp that their idealized miner had made, revealing new anxieties about national deindustrialization amid global competition in their own time. And at long last, current events in the 1990s cut through the commemorations' singular focus on men, as widespread evidence of lead poisoning brought attention to women, the labor of social reproduction, and children, the oft-heralded future of the mining district at a time when town futures looked tenuous.

[1] "Tar Creek Pollution: Oklahoma's Environmental Time Bomb?" *Tulsa World*, November 28, 1982.

Mayer's was just one version, a dramatic story fit for the major metropolitan news. More than the burned fetlocks of Mayer's horses, however, it was an *absence* of animals that led humans to realize that they had a problem; many of the 100,000 bore holes in the Picher Field, poked to search for thick veins of lead and zinc, became the plumbing for an ecological nightmare. "Interest in Tar Creek," the *Tulsa World* remembered in 1982, "was sparked in 1980 when all the fish and most of the aquatic life in the stream disappeared."[2] Between Mayer's horses in 1978 and a flurry of Tar Creek news in the early eighties, the timing and real causal force pushing people to a reckoning is hard to place. These and later sources conflicted in their interpretations, but they agreed on two things: over the last few years of the 1970s and into 1980, nonhuman animal life grew quiet in the Picher Field's small waterways; and the missing animals made people do things.

The mining district had always been a more-than-human place, its story made by multiple relations, among many species, materials, and voices. Minerals had made people move. Their arrangement in earth led people to organize their industry and communities in certain ways, and to reorganize the minerals to make things, on the one hand, and waste, on the other, all with consequences for the health of all creatures living in the area and far beyond. At the dawn of the 1980s, the silent streams made them act.

Silence in the water had been the norm during the mining field's productive life. When early miners pumped the underground beginning in the 1910s—recall their obsession with "beating back the water" to open mines—they had routed polluted mine water into streams, rendering aquatic life virtually inert.[3] A 1930 ornithology textbook reported a mass die-off of

[2] "Tar Creek Cleanup May Take 20 Years," *Tulsa World*, Sept. 30, 1982.
[3] "Tar Creek Pollution."

mallard ducks on the Spring River near Riverton, Kansas, attributed to poisoning by lead-laden sediments.[4] Quapaw litigants brought suit against mining companies in 1937 for polluting the Spring River.[5] To the federal agents administering mine leases, the mining men hiring and doing the work, and most settlers in the boomtowns, it all was an acceptable cost of doing business in the early twentieth-century mining industry. Only after the mines closed and the pumps went out did animal and plant life return: bass, perch, catfish, the aquatic plant life on which so much depended, and "even a beaver or two," according to some.[6] The 1970s were a raucous decade for red-eared slider turtles, mosquito fish, and the mosquitos that early miners believed were kept at bay by the bad water.

When mine water returned to the surface, however, its contents permeated local wildlife. Swans and other waterfowl continued to ingest metal-laden sediments with their fare on the creek bottoms. Northern bobwhites and mourning doves gleaned food from the ground, ingesting grit for their gullets. In the Picher Field that grit was chat. The brown thrasher fed on soil and litter organisms. Robins and cardinals browsed for fruits, seeds, grains, and insects, all of which were awash with the surrounding pollution. Virtually all of them carried enough zinc and lead to disrupt enzyme activity, impairing biological functions.[7] Red-eared slider turtles, conversely, had

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[4] W.N. Beyer, et al. "Zinc and Lead Poisoning in Wild Birds in the Tri-State Mining District (Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri)," *Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology* 48, no. 1 (Dec. 2004), 108-17. The text was Phillips and Lincoln, *American Waterfowl: Their Present Situation and the Outlook for their Future* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1930).
[5] H.A. Andrews to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Dec. 2, 1937. RG 75, Miami Agency, Okla., NARA Fort Worth. Anderson Collection Box 4, Folder 4, WHC. See Chapter 1, note 1 for explanation of Anderson Collection and NARA records.
[6] "Tar Creek Pollution."
[7] Beyer et al. "Zinc and Lead Poisoning."

normal blood lead levels but their load of cadmium caused aneuploidy, an abnormal number of chromosomes indicative of genetic disorders and birth defects.[8]

The absence of these creatures—or their oddness, where they were present—led local people to act, perhaps indicating the shifting values they held about nonhuman nature.[9] Their beautification efforts, especially the bird preserve in the "fenced-in area" during the 1960s, prefigured this turn. Indeed, birds were among the most vulnerable to the mining environment, suffering anew the fate of those 1930s mallards. Picherites extended this proto-conservation work in the 1980s. Oklahoma's only known colonies of bank swallows nested directly in chat piles, and, therefore, carried heavy loads of metal in their bodies. The swallows were research material for Picher-Cardin High School biology instructor Paul Wilson and the school's science club. They earned Wilson the Oklahoma Conservation Educator of the Year award and student Buddy Dunning a Youth Conservationist of the Year award in Oklahoma. With help from world-renowned University of Oklahoma ornithologist George M. Sutton, the pair published findings in the Oklahoma Ornithological Society Bulletin. Wilson was a sought-after speaker and sidewalk resource for local people with creature questions.[10] The community's attention to nonhuman neighbors is a stark reminder of the recency of the alignment between conservatism and anti-

[8] Kimberly Hays and Karen McBee, "Flow Cytometric Analysis of Red-Eared Slider Turtles (*Trachemys scripta) from Tar Creek Superfund Site*," *Ecotoxicology* 17, (2007): 353-361.
[9] A rural counterpart to what Adam Rome identified as a catalyst for environmental protection: the suburban expansion that cut into the countryside: Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[10] "Picher 'Bank Swallows', a First for Oklahoma," *Tri-State Tribune*, March 12, 1981; "Picher Nesting 'Bank Swallows' Update Given," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 16, 1981; Paul Wilson, "Heron and Cattle Egret in Colony near Picher," *Tri-State Tribune*, August 20, 1981; "Oklahoma Educator of the Year," *Tri-State Tribune*, February 4, 1982.

environmentalism.[11] People in Picher, mostly conservative in their way, were alert to the changes in the organisms around them and motivated to counteract those changes. Some of the absent and endangered animals were charismatic (beavers and songbirds), some useful (fish and fowl), and other organisms were downright ordinary or invisible to people, but collectively, the creatures' contamination set people in motion for recourse to the pollution problem.

Of course, concern for human life also spurred environmental action. Every update revealed worries about the human inhabitants of the district: that the acid water would penetrate into the Roubidoux Aquifer, the source of municipal drinking water; and "fear that contaminated Tar Creek eventually could pollute the Neosho River and Grand Lake," the new anchor of the Green Country's regional tourist industry and another regional drinking water source.[12] The investigations that ensued from the acid mine drainage brought some clarity to the earlier sewer and wastewater challenges. Picher and other towns burned through pumps and other infrastructure during the 1970s because the water was eating their metal fittings. Understandably, residents questioned how safe their water was, despite constant reassurances that they were not in "immediate danger."[13]

Outside help arrived in northeast Oklahoma at the behest of ordinary people, amplified through their political representatives. One of the area's staunchest supporters and most reassuring voices was the young U.S. representative from Muskogee, Michael Synar (D-OK). Elected in 1978 at age 28, Synar immediately began "sidewalk tours" of the towns in his district. In Picher and elsewhere, he heard about abandoned mine shafts threatening to swallow

[11] Brian Allen Drake, *Loving Nature, Fearing the State: Environmentalism and Antigovernment Politics before Reagan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).
[12] "2 Solons Say EPA Labels Tar Creek Worst Waste Site," *Tulsa World*, Nov. 14, 1981.
[13] "2 Solons Say."

wandering children, sewer and water problems, and cave-ins (one of which killed a 34-year-old Joplin man in 1979 when his truck rolled after hitting a small chat pile that was blocking a cave-in on East A Street in Picher).[14] Then Synar held a special meeting at Vicky's Café, where about 50 locals told him more.[15] At the same time, southeast Kansas representative Bob Whittaker (R-KS) was hearing similar stories around Baxter Springs, Galena, and Treece. In the summer of 1979, Synar and Whittaker conversed with Bureau of Mines representatives in Washington about possible solutions, and by the fall the representatives had secured $300,000 in the 1980 budget for studies to find the most pressing issues and potential solutions.[16]

In June of 1980, Oklahoma governor George Nigh (D) announced a Tar Creek Task Force. With representatives from area groups such as the Ottawa Reclamation Authority and Grand Lake Association, state departments of health and the Water Resources Board, and federal administrators in the Bureau of Mines, Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and others, Nigh asked the task force to "guide the investigation and provide technical assistance in solving the acid mine drainage problem." Picher's journalist C. Allen Matthews dropped that last phrase, "the acid mine drainage problem," as though it were a household name, even though he'd never mentioned it before. "Potentially," Nigh wagered, "this may be the most serious environmental problem the state has ever faced." The Task Force quickly outlined a four-step survey program during the summer of 1980 to collect data and guide future recommendations. The steps included: 1) monitoring water

[14] "Abandoned Mines Peril Eyed, Says Cong. Synar," *Tri-State Tribune*, August 2, 1979; "Cong. Synar to be in Area Next Week," *Tri-State Tribune*, April 3, 1980; "Joplin Man Dies At East 'A' Cave-In Site," *Tri-State Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1979.
[15] "Cong. Synar Attracts Good Turnout Monday," *Tri-State Tribune*, Feb. 8, 1979.
[16] "Abandoned Mines Peril Eyed"; "$300,000 Earmarked for Mine Study," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1979.

quality, sediments, and benthos (flora and fauna on the creek's bottom) in Tar Creek; 2) investigating the groundwater situation to figure out how it was flowing through the Boone aquifer and into the mines; 3) measuring the pH and conductance (metal content) of the water at various depths in the mines; and 4) biological monitoring of fish from the Neosho River, Tar Creek, and Grand Lake, to determine the amount of contamination moving downstream and the minerals uptake by various species. The task force spent most of the next year gathering data. It revealed that groundwater was entering the mines mostly in the upper Tar Creek watershed, in Kansas. Fish were carrying heavy burdens of metals at Tar Creek's confluence with the Neosho (Grand) River. There was certainly concern for drinking water. And Oklahoma Water Resources Board consultant John Mott worried that a heavy rain could wash the metal-rich sediments—three feet of "sludge" already accumulated in Tar Creek's bed—all the way to Grand Lake. The task force engaged a Colorado-based consulting firm to analyze the findings. That firm recommended diverting groundwater to a treatment facility so that it couldn't enter the mines. This could take twenty-three years and more than $20 million. With the price tag in hand, the state of Oklahoma asked the EPA to put it on its list of major toxic sites.

At the same time as citizens reported their fears to state and federal authorities, Picherites were reading something else on the landscape. "How much longer will the familiar chat piles … of Picher be with us?" C. Allen Matthews wondered at the end of 1978. It sounded like someone pondering the mortality of a close relation. Since mining ended, immeasurable amounts of chat had been hauled away for use as railroad ballast, as fill for construction or roadbeds, and as gravel for driveways, among other uses. The piles were noticeably shrinking. "More than mere piles of chat," Matthews went on, "they are monuments!" On the one hand, they memorialized "the fulfilled dreams, hopes, [and] accomplishments, of men, women, and families, who

pioneered a booming mining settlement early in this century." Those were a "special breed of people" who'd built the camp into a city. But, he persisted, they also marked "disappointments, adversities, tragedies, failures, blood, tears, [and] sweat, of countless others," such as "the miners who coughed out their lungs." Here, as in days of old, the robust "breed" that built the city was juxtaposed against the sick ones who died, a complicated story simplified by gazing on the chat pile monuments. Regardless of the contested nature of the people the mounds immortalized, the chat piles were "not tombstones." Their important work was simply to remain although "the mines have gone." They stood as mute "monuments to a 'town that refused to die,'" Matthews closed, undermining his optimism with a jarring turn to the past tense.[17]

Matthews's chat pile paeon generated a "generous,… surprising" response from readers near and far. That became a dialogue on the relationship of the piles to the town's past and future, and what else the town might need to remember. One correspondent suggested preserving one of the piles in all its original mass, perhaps as a state park.[18] A couple from Glendora, California, described how the piles lived in their memories. And Matthews reported a rumor circulating about a possible mining field reunion. He heard it from a woman in Boron, California. Although he didn't know anything about it, Matthews figured "it may not be a bad idea to toss around a bit."[19] The idea for an organized mining reunion grew up alongside chat pile nostalgia, all while the piles shrunk and the land itself came under investigation by outside experts.

Getting Tar Creek onto the EPA's list meant accessing the Superfund, the colloquial name for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980

[17] "Irish Pennants," Dec. 28, 1978.
[18] "Irish Pennants," Jan. 11, 1979.
[19] "Irish Pennants," Feb. 15, 1979.

(also CERCLA). Superfund arrived at the end of a decade of rising concern for environmental issues such as air and water quality. Its most immediate catalyst, however, was a series of catastrophes in the late 1970s involving toxic waste dumping sites. In 1977, a chemical reaction and a welder's spark sent a Bridgeport, New Jersey, chemical-waste treatment center up in flames, killing six people and hospitalizing 35. In 1978, residents in a neighborhood of Niagara Falls, New York, called Love Canal, grew aware of a worrisome frequency of skin ailments, birth defects, and miscarriages among local people. Love Canal, it turned out, held toxic waste buried beneath its homes, lawns, and parks, the result of early-twentieth-century industrial production. It became the most famous among a series of toxic waste calamities, something like a household name, which continued through House and Senate hearings on the issue in 1979, and, finally, the passage of CERCLA in 1980.[20] Love Canal was among the first sites at which the law applied. The Superfund was exactly that: a big pile of money generated from a tax on petroleum and chemical companies to pay for remediation of toxic pollution caused by their industries so as to avoid the kinds of disasters that had plagued the 1970s.

Therein was the problem for Tar Creek: It was a hard-rock metal mining district, not a petroleum or chemical industry site. Still, the EPA agreed to investigate. Cleaning up Tar Creek, however, moved slowly from 1980 to 1983. Synar charged the EPA with dragging its feet.[21] Lots of locals agreed with him, as the agency's predilection for more studies reinforced Picherites' growing consternation with government.[22] The charge of foot-dragging comported with the Reagan administration's then inchoate vision of the "New Federalism," a shrunken federal

[20] United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Superfund History," accessed Nov. 3, 2022. https://www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-history#5
[21] "EPA Inaction Blasted in Tar Creek Cleanup," *Tulsa Tribune*, Nov. 17, 1981.
[22] "Tar Creek Pollution," *Tulsa World*, Nov. 28, 1982.

government that diminished its regulatory enforcement and handed responsibilities off to state and local jurisdictions (the federal budget did not, in fact, shrink under Reagan, as military budgets skyrocketed to more than offset domestic and welfare spending cuts). The stalling allegation seemed accurate, given the administration's foxes-guarding-the-henhouse approach to regulatory agency appointments (Ottawa County went for Reagan in 1980, but the mining towns did not).

At the EPA, Reagan tapped Anne Gorsuch as administrator, a young former Colorado representative and lawyer. Politically, Gorsuch grew up on Reagan's transition team and became a devotee of his New Federalism, committed to rolling back regulation and handing off oversight to the respective states. Some critics, further, felt the Reagan administration was protecting friends in the petrochemical industries. Many in Congress agreed with the claims by Picher Field residents and representatives. An investigation publicized documents indicating that, indeed, the EPA was moving deliberately at Tar Creek. Agency spokespeople claimed its slowness was not born of cruelty for northeast Oklahoma or anything so sinister, but rather was guided by prudence because CERCLA was not created for or funded by the metals mining industry. Allowing Tar Creek access to the Superfund could open the program to numerous expensive cleanup missions without a guarantee that it could recoup money from the mining companies that were the historical polluters; there were some half a million abandoned mines in the United States.[23] Despite its delays, the EPA agreed to add the Picher Field to its National Priorities List,

[23] "Tar Creek Pollution," *Tulsa World*, Nov. 28, 1982; "half a million abandoned mines" is a more recent estimate, but it is true that most historical mines in the U.S. were closed by the 1980s. See: U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Abandoned Hardrock Mines: Information on Number of Mines, Expenditures, and Factors that Limit Efforts to Address Hazards," https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-238.

making it the Tar Creek Superfund Site. Soon thereafter the agency placed Tar Creek at the top of its National Priorities List and continued its studies.

Meanwhile, Picherites matched those studies with their own close gaze at the Picher Field. Two years of Matthews' chat-pile dirges and reader correspondence, plus many street-corner discussions, no doubt, manifested in the first Picher Mining Field Reunion in August of 1980. The official program included horseshoe pitching, a penny pinch, a fiddling contest (cash prizes!), a presentation by retired mining engineer Frank Cuddeback, pie eating contest, live music, a parade, pony pulling, the coronation of a reunion "Queen," square dancing, and more.[24] The real attraction, as it turned out, was the impulse that had motivated the ideas in the first place: getting together to talk about the hustle and bustle of the mining days, the men who built the district, and the particularities of place—the sensory experience, unique lingo, and remembered geography of boomtown Picher. The display of photos and mementos from the field's "dramatic" early history fulfilled expectations "to be a popular attraction."[25] From its inaugural weekend, that aspect of the reunions became the main attraction. Mining remembrances brought home the miner's diaspora, attracting attendees from 22 states by 1983.[26] Each iteration, plus its coverage in the *Tri-State Tribune*, which reached subscribers in 38 states, tightened and revealed anew the "mysterious" and "undefinable, unexplainable bond" that developed among people who had been a part of the Picher Field.

Through the 1980s, the annual *Tri-State Tribune* Picher Mining Field Reunion editions became backward gazing kaleidoscopes of town history. They held the blinkered

[24] "Mining Field Reunion Slated for Aug. 14, 15, 16," *Tri-State Tribune*, June 26, 1980; "Reunion Program Revealed," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 3, 1980.
[25] "Mining Field Reunion."
[26] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 18, 1983.

autobiographical remembrances of old-timers who had been small children when their families arrived in Picher via covered wagon. They included sympathetic profiles of early town characters and leaders, and memories of mud, everywhere mud. The reunion editions ran reams and reams longer than the regular weekly paper. They were peppered with personal advertisements in memory of deceased former district residents, and stories submitted by current and former Picherites. C. Allen Matthews and Pat Schuck, a *Tribune* staff writer, put together the pieces for months before the reunion each August, soliciting entries from anyone brave enough to put their memories into writing, and offering to help them edit their ramblings into publishable form.[27]

Despite the reunion committee's effort to make it an inclusive affair by naming it for the whole mining field, by the first year almost everyone took to calling it the "miners' reunion."[28] It was "the miner"—almost always singular—that gave the rest of the town its character. "He was the Hard Rock miner," Matthews opened his 1984 reunion-edition Irish Pennants column. "He was labeled a 'peculiar breed' of man—and he was. He was declared a 'rugged individual'—he had to be. He was called, 'individualistic, rough, and tough'—no doubt he was." Building this portrait, Matthews also made a pivot characteristic of miner remembrances: in addition to his roughness, being "a heavy drinker, itching for a fight, frequenter of the bar rooms, carouser," there was "another side of the coin." "He raised his family" against conditions as tough as he was. His children "went out into the world" to take "responsible positions and places in society." He "kept them in school, … developed family ties, … took care of his own." And he "paid taxes, … supported his community, …established churches, … supported fraternal and social

[27] Pat Shuck, "Yelp for Help," *Tri-State Tribune*, July 18, 1985.
[28] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 21, 1980.

organizations, … attended PTA, football games, band concerts, and church picnics." He voted religiously, and politicians coveted his vote.[29]

Other writers similarly celebrated that "peculiar breed of people—the hardrock miners' families."[30] And the front page of that 1984 edition—"The Hard Rock Miner… We Salute You!"—gave a real face to the verbose sketch: a square-jawed, burly white miner in overalls, hard hat, and headlamp stood stoic with hands on hips. The image was "intended to represent the thousands of men who worked the mines of the Tri-State Field during an era spanning over 50 years."[31] One story profiled a participant in the pickhandle parades, pictured triumphantly with his pickhandle upraised, forty-five years after the occasion.[32] A Quapaw resident juxtaposed her immediate family of "Blue Carders" against two uncles who were "union men," implying that the Blue Card was not, in fact, a true laborers' union.[33] Together, these illustrated *which* miners Picherites had in mind in their reunion remembrances: the ones that made their cross-class alliance in whiteness and joined the Blue Card Union to put down a true worker-led union that was pushing for environmental and labor reforms.

Beyond the composite character of the Tri-State miner, only a couple of individuals received repeated commemorative treatment, zombie miners raised from the dead to revive the poor man's camp. The best remembered was Tom Kiser, who entered Picher's history most forcibly in the 1950s and 1960s, lobbying as OPA president for the Small Producers Bill to subsidize marginal operations like those in the Picher Field. His family's 1983 ad declared him "Last of the Independent Mine Operators," while another in 1985 listed a fuller legacy: "A Good

[29] "Irish Pennants," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1984.
[30] "Faye Allgood, a Portrait of Courage and Determination," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1982.
[31] "The Hard Rock Miner. We Salute You!" *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1984.
[32] "The Pickhandle Parade Recalled by Arnold Speaker," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 14, 1980.
[33] Imogen (Hilburn) Cornelison, "'Growing Up in Picher'," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1984.

Man; A Good Miner; A Good Father; A Good Citizen."[34] As Matthews and others had done with Mike Evans back in the waning years of operation, these ads compressed two subjects that, in most mining locales, would have been antithetical: operator (the local vernacular for a mine owner) and miner (a workman). In a period with the potential for a drastic rethinking of the mining legacy—faced with real environmental fallout and its public health implications—the reunions instead redoubled the district's historical commitment to the anti-union mine owners as the only real miners.

Dewey Sims was even more emblematic of the revived poor man's camp. "Dewey Sims was a hard-rock miner with deep roots in the Tri State district and proud of it," declared an advertisement in the 1983 reunion edition. Like Matthews's composite "miner," Sims was also "a sensitive man" who "dreamed hard and made sacrifices … for his four children."[35] An accompanying article by Sims' son, Dean Sims, elaborated on these themes of the miner as hardworking family man. Dewey started his family in 1920s and '30s Picher, but moved the family to Carlsbad, New Mexico, while the Picher Field experienced widespread shutdowns. In New Mexico he worked as a "house-man," or servant, for a banker's family, and then in nearby potash mines. The family returned to the Tri-State shortly before World War II, whereupon the "chairman" of the National Bank in Baxter Springs, a "widow named Jessie Cardin, took a fancy" to Dewey. She eventually "staked him," in the local lingo, to his first mine, meaning she loaned Dewey the startup capital to operate. As Dean told it, Dewey "made some money" re-running the tailings pile at that mine, as newer milling technology allowed for the extraction of

[34] "In Memory of Tom Kiser (1912-1982), Last of the Independent Mine Operators," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1983; "A Tribute to Tom Kiser," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1985.
[35] "Dewey Sims was a hard-rock miner…" ad, *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1983.

some profit from the old, discarded ores. "I needed it to go to college," Dean declared of that money.[36]

Dewey Sims's "big break" came when he partnered with Eagle-Picher executive vice president George Potter. Potter had been profiled in *Fortune* magazine and was "the true sophisticate of the Tri-State," according to Dean Sims. Dewey and Potter made about $6,000 a day "after taxes" in 1948, strip-mining near Oronogo, Missouri. They turned that income into a "dream property" in New Mexico, which "they knew some day … would be worth something." Sims also owned another Picher mine that was "up-and-down in fortunes" while "the field was running out," as Dean Sims recounted it. Ultimately, Dewey's emblematic figure was of the missed opportunity of a poor-man's-camper: the New Mexico "dream property" was 60,000 acres that by the time Dean wrote, twenty years after Sims and Potter's deaths, was a thriving gold mine also being explored for oil and gas. The gold mine was "a living tribute to [Dewey's] dedication—and intelligent intuition for what lay beneath" the surface.[37] Dewey Sims was just too early to realize the truly massive fortune.

Like other poor man's camp remembrances, Dean's paeons to his father were productive fictions. True enough, Dewey's start was meager and his fortunes vacillated. But even before moving to New Mexico Sims was a superintendent in the Picher mines, the type of managerial position that in most mining districts would give him a tenuous claim to the title of "miner" and a tumultuous relationship with the men digging the ore. As a boy, Dean Sims was arrested with three friends for breaking streetlights in Baxter Springs. When the Empire District Electric Company night watchman came to the jail, however, he let the police send the boys home

[36] Dean Sims, "The Best of People and the Worst of People," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1983.
[37] Sims, "The Best of People."

because two of them (including Dean) were the sons of mine operators, one belonged to the postmaster, and one was the son of a partner in a major local company.[38] In this quartet, Dewey Sims's boy could walk free because of his father's position, even though the boys had been destroying streetlights for four nights running. Conversely, Dean twice recalled a most singular memory: "Who was the 12-year-old boy who bled to death from a Picher policeman's bullet downtown?" he asked in the 1985 reunion edition.[39] Who, indeed? His fate, both in life and in death, meant he was likely not the child of a well-placed father. Maybe he was the son of a common miner, even a temporary resident, the child of the miner's diaspora.

For one final mystification in the retrospective making of these poor man's camp miners, both Tom Kiser and Dewey Sims were remembered for their country affect more than for their class position as workers, which they were not. Locals and national politicians judged Kiser an authentic representative of the district because "Kiser talked like a country yokel who had just fallen off the turnip truck."[40] There may have been "a little 'mule skinner's language' mixed in" while he lobbied in Washington, but "Mr. Kiser … was undoubtedly one of the most intelligent self-taught men I have ever had the pleasure of calling friend." And when he got done talking, "everyone [in a Senate committee] knew what he was talking about." Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY), pressing Kiser about his lobbying practice, wanted to know where the Oklahoman was lodging in the capitol city. The Shoreham? Watergate? No, Kiser replied, he had a basement room at Mrs. Stuart's Boarding House, where they "throwed in breakfast of coffee and a roll." Apparently satisfied that his intentions were pure, the committee immediately sent the bill to the

[38] Dean Sims, "Hats Off to Dewey Sims," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1985.
[39] Dean Sims, "Acres of Memories of the Mining Field!" *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1985.
[40] Ben Moody, "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field: The United States Trade Deficit," *Tri-State Tribune*, Dec. 14, 1989.

full senate for a vote.[41] Chroniclers credited Kiser's down-home language and proclivities for the district's (temporary) legislative salvation.

Dewey Sims also used his country credentials for lobbying success in Washington. An Arizona "mining man" recalled how Dewey lobbied solo, separate from the mine industry delegations with which he traveled, because his "smile and common sense [sic] anecdotes" made him popular with legislators. "He was better than Will Rogers, a real homespun," the mining man claimed, likening Dewey to the famed Oklahoma humorist.[42] Dean Sims's stories, though, revealed that Dewey merely knew how to posture as a "real homespun." The genius of Oklahoma native Will Rogers, after all, was his studied delivery, the ability to convey deep meaning through folksy aphorism that only masked the cutting intellect underneath. For Sims, homespun was a lobbying strategy. Homespun was a claim to authenticity in hardscrabble Tri-State or New Mexico mining circles. Dewey often had huge sums of money saved (and died sitting on a gold mine!) but took pride in *not* buying art like his business peers. He valued education highly, recognizing its power to spare subsequent Sims generations from a mining district life of unpredictable payoff. "Hell, I dropped out in the 8th grade," Sims would quip, "and my kids use better English than I do—but I bought it for 'em."[43] In this way Sims played the uneducated homespun, but it was his favorable opinion of higher education that helped elevate his children and grandchildren.

The Sims family story was not the Tri-State miner's diaspora, but the intergenerational upward mobility enjoyed by the descendants of a mine owner and operator. Dewey Sims's

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[41] Ben Moody, "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field: Tom Kiser," *Tri-State Tribune*, June 2, 1988.
[42] Sims, "Hats Off."
[43] Sims, "Hats Off."

servant-to-mine operator life story did allow future Simses to escape hard labor and the mining district. Then in death, his affect helped rectify the poor man's camp in the commemoration years of the 1980s. Dean's recurring stories gave the impression that anyone could—and probably should—have similarly raised their offspring up and out of Picher through education. Dewey and his wife, Mary Viola Porter Sims, "left four children and thirteen grandchildren, all beautifully educated and successful far beyond the dreams" of the elder Simses, Dean wrote. It was only possible "because of the parents' achievements in Picher" and because "they were determined to work and sacrifice to educate us."[44]

Dean quickly contradicted himself and admitted the success for his own generation and that of his children was precisely within Dewey and Mary's dreams. The grandchildren, who "live all over the U.S., are widely traveled around the world, hold academic achievements and advanced degrees, speak several languages," had "generously fulfilled the dreams of the grandparents." And the most telling sign of their success, to Dean, was that "they have no concept of their roots in the Tri-State district." That was a good thing, Dean averred. "Why should they?"[45] It was a contradictory note in the reunion edition, where so many other writers marveled at the strength of these ties, how the diaspora kept returning to Picher in larger numbers each year for the reunion (it's unclear if Dean attended the reunions; many reunion edition contributors merely mailed in their articles). Dean's odes to Dewey pointed up the gulf between most working-class former Picherites and the smaller number of upwardly mobile former operator families, which the Simses characterized. Dewey Sims was the last poor man's camp success, the stories implied. He was the shred of truth that had always sustained the myth

[44] Sims, "Acres of Memories."
[45] Sims, "Acres of Memories."

beyond its nineteenth-century reality. Because he'd been "staked" to his first mine, because he was close to destitution many times, his progeny's higher learning and geographical distance from Picher illustrated a final victory of the poor man's camp. The bootstrapping miner didn't just become an operator, he got his kids out of dodge as the mining industry collapsed after midcentury. Dean's real purpose in writing for the reunion editions, it turned out, was to generate support for a monument to Dewey in Picher, to have something named after him.[46]

In time, the reunion edition of the *Tri-State Tribune* spilled over into year-round columns of recollections. Searching for a sustainable publishing program and in the absence of a lot of conventional news in Picher and its surrounding communities, Matthews saw dollar signs in mining nostalgia. The biggest and longest running feature was "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field," by former Tri-State miner, mill man, and Eagle-Picher administrator Ben Moody. "Yester-Year" was from about 500 to more than 1,000 words, sometimes on a seasonal and historical theme—"Springtime," "April Fools in the Mining Field," "Bad Weather,"—and other times on whatever subject Moody happened to have called up in his memory—"The Powder Box," "The Hoist," "The Blacksmith" or "Chat Piles All Over the Mining Field." Moody took on the project because people often asked him to record his 63 years of experience in the field. He chose the *Tri-State Tribune* as his platform because of its subscriptions in 38 states and global reach with servicemen in several foreign countries. Readers would write to correct him if he misremembered anything—he was 77 years old, after all—keeping him accountable.[47] It was a sort of miner's diaspora peer review, a process that C. Allen Matthews had long used.

[46] Sims, "Hats Off."
[47] Moody, "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 11, 1988.

Needing to fill the paper for fifty-two weeks per year while the area towns shrunk and slowed down, these columnist-eulogists moved beyond mining minutiae with increasing frequency by the late 1980s. Amid Picher's denouement they turned to *history*, an analytical and explanatory pursuit distinct from their initial subjects in mining antiquarianism. Current events pressed them to reckon with how the past had made the present, and their interpretations were telling in the long context of Picher's undoing, subtly raising anew the white man's camp alongside the poor man's camp revival of figures such as Kiser and Sims.

While the Tri-State district was wracked by the process of industry closure and offshoring by the 1940s, only in the 1980s did that process get a name: deindustrialization. Coined amid a recession and existential crisis for American heavy industry, deindustrialization interpreted the shifting site of investment in global capitalism, and in the 1980s that location was Japan. Matthews was the first to voice the unease rising by 1989, something "hard to digest," and harder for him to understand the clearer its outlines grew. It was that Japanese interests had been buying up American real estate, corporations, and other properties at a rapid clip, doing with money what they hadn't accomplished with guns in World War II, extending their empire. "What do we do and where do we go, when they decide to call in the mortgage… or issue the eviction notice!"[48] What's more, the United States had subsidized Japan's recovery from the war. Ben Moody issued the historical lesson three weeks later: The fate of the British Empire should have warned the United States not to try and be the world's peace maker and over-extend its global reach.[49] This aligned with the district's conventional critique of the federal government's role in undoing the domestic mining industry through postwar minerals policy and flooding the market

[48] "Irish Pennants," Feb. 9, 1989.
[49] Moody, "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field: History Lessons from the Old Mining Field," March 2, 1989.

with foreign ores. Moody's point was military; the United States stationed troops around the world to protect even the places he deemed to be taking U.S. jobs, such as Korea, West Germany, and Japan. The United States was a "second-rate power" like the British Empire since granting its colonies independence, Moody argued, mixing his critique of U.S. empire with the lesson that an empire shouldn't give up its possessions so softly.[50]

Later that year Moody extended his historical lesson about the rise of Japan. Teaching about "the United States Trade Deficit," he described how, after World War II, Picher's mines were "completely mechanized" and the most efficient in the world. Then, however, the State Department began the practice of bringing mine operators, engineers, and miners from other countries to tour the mines and learn how they achieved such efficiencies. German, French, Finnish, Russian, and other industry representatives made their tours, but "It was not until 12 Japanese arrived" that Eagle-Picher miners "rebelled." They threatened that the twelve Japanese might go down into the mines, "but it would be a wonder if there were only two or three that would come out." Tom Kiser, however, often the iconoclast despite his being a Tri-State exemplar, offered his mines for the Japanese tour, assuring the visitors' safety.[51]

To Moody in 1989, this process of educating the world's miners killed the Tri-State industry. Japanese mining, especially, took its lessons in efficiency, and brought richer ores into the global minerals markets by applying its own culturally specific innovations. Contrasting American freedom, Moody argued, and characterizing American stereotypes of Japanese subservience, their mines soon employed closed-circuit video technologies to surveil workers. Managers could shout, remotely by loudspeaker, at workers who sloughed off. American

[50] Moody, "Yester-Year," March 2, 1989.
[51] Moody, "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field: The United States Trade Deficit," Dec. 14, 1989.

interlocutors couldn't ascertain how well Japanese miners were paid, as the U.S.-trained Japanese managers dissembled and muttered about the miners being supplied with housing and job security for life.[52] Moody's streamlined story did not elaborate on or support his claim about the Picher mines' efficiency (recall the operators' overweening fear about their marginality and the low grade of their product by the 1950s). Nor did he recall how the Tri-State's efficiency had been spurred by the coercion of the "piece rate," workers paid by production and not by their time. In either setting, the same motivation: work or starve. Nor again did Moody consider what mechanized efficiency had meant: a shrunken mine and mill workforce, an industry that supported decreasing numbers of Tri-Staters and, with only the wartime exception, trended that way since the 1920s.

Finally, Moody avoided the fact that the Picher miners' resistance to the Japanese miners wasn't economic, it was racist. If the Picherites assented to the training of various European miners but not the Japanese, they weren't showing ingenious foresight or economic analysis. They were announcing their prejudices. They didn't even rebel against having Germans, late the representatives of an aspirational, world-encompassing fascism (and here we might recall the district's earlier anti-Semitism). Yet Moody's historical lesson implied that in drawing a line in the Pacific—where some Eagle-Picher miners had encountered the Japanese during World War II, helping to explain their hostility—the miners were onto something smart. They saw a process only visible to other Picherites, such as Moody, by the 1980s, when many commentators were fearing Japanese economic influence over the United States because Japan was "seen by many in Washington as the archetypal unfair trader," according to the *New York Times*.[53] Yet two weeks

[52] Moody, "Yester-Year," Dec. 14, 1989.
[53] Clyde H. Farnsworth, "U.S. Resentment Grows on Japan Trade Barriers," *New York Times*, March 30, 1987. Another example illustrating a theme from the period includes Ronald

after his anti-Japanese analysis, Moody referred off-handedly to the Picher Field's mines having "closed down" because the ore "has all been mined out," not because of any outside influence such as Japan.[54] The contradictory remembrances of Picher mining were often contemporary anxieties looking for a historical explanation.

*Tribune* staff writer Pat Shuck, who also often filled her columns with subjects linking current events to the district's mining history, revealed this present-minded anti-Japanese tack. "Time to Brush Up on Your Japanese," Shuck warned in a late 1989 headline. "Since our country is rapidly going to the Japanese," she thought readers might like to learn a little about "this small but powerful country" that had just purchased Rockefeller Center. Shuck trotted out a litany of racist stereotypes to explain the shifting heartlands of global capitalism: Japan was a small country, but that was no worry since the Japanese were small people, not by choice but by their diet of a "thin soup" made of rice, water, and boiled abalone heads. This "new breed" arisen from the formerly war-torn country was "a surrogate of a pocket size transistor and a can of sardines." Frugal and money-hungry, Shuck claimed, they wore their pajamas all day to save on clothing. The country's emergence from "crowded, dark living quarters with insufficient sanitary facilities," of course, was thanks to "the generosity of the United States." That generosity was paid in government loans and repaid in Japan's world-leading position as manufacturers of cars, electronics, machinery, and chemicals, "forcing the USA to relinquish its leadership" in those areas. Mulling the 100% tariffs that the United States imposed for perceived "unfair trade practices," Shuck closed by considering whether, "if New York City and San Francisco has [sic]

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Brownstein, "Zen and the Art of Japan-U.S. Fighter Plane Building," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1989. Brownstein described American anxiety over the "trade deficit" with Japan as the first such situation since "the days of Sputnik and the 'missile gap'" during the early Cold War.

[54] Moody, "Yester-Year in the Picher Mining Field: Entering into the 1990s Decade," Dec. 28, 1989.

been bombed"—a fine use of the passive voice to avoid agency—"instead of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, would they have been as kind to us as we have been to them[?]" If the Japanese came to power in the U.S., which looked imminent, she figured she'd better quit her rant before assuring her place as "one of the first to face a firing squad." At least, Shuck quipped, "they wouldn't bomb the U.S. [T]hat would be like blowing their own possessions to smithereens."[55] The Japanese were small, dirty, greedy, and too ambitious to be trusted, according to Pat Schuck. They rose to world prominence (and cleanliness?) on American generosity, but would not reciprocate except in violence.

Although she was little concerned with the Japanese mining industry, Shuck extended Moody's finger-pointing to make Japan the retrospective location of the whole country's undoing, not only that of the Tri-State district. The "new breed" Shuck saw rising from postwar Japan—diminutive, dependent, poorly paid—contrasted starkly with the "hardy breed" of American miners crowding the newspaper's pages in the mining remembrances. Connecting Shuck's characterization of the Japanese to Moody's description of latter-day white man's camp defense, the history of the district illustrates how the targets of Tri-State xenophobia changed over time, and not only through material, mining-industry competition. Even in mining remembrances, the white man's camp came alive again. Only by the 1980s did Tri-Staters learn a lexicon of deindustrialization and globalization that allowed them to fit the rise of Japan into an older story of the mining district's betrayal.

The commemorators' dalliance with the present still avoided a real reckoning with Picher's day-to-day environment. Finger-wagging about Japan was a macroeconomic explanation that left the colorful micro-stories to the past. Characteristic of the reunion editions,

[55] Pat Schuck, "Time to Brush Up On Your Japanese," *Tri-State Tribune*, Nov. 9, 1989.

Jim Jones of Norman, Oklahoma, claimed that many people wondered "why God would put the greatest people in the world in an area where the health and living conditions were not the best." Perhaps, he speculated, that question had it backwards. "Maybe the conditions were precisely "why residents of the Picher Mining Field were the greatest people in the world."[56] Like so many in the reunion editions, he hinted in euphemism—conditions were "not the best"—at the truly harsh reality Picher residents faced in the past. But, as with those others, the conditions were romantic, creating the "mysterious bond" among Picherites. Alternatively, in the issue with "The Hard Rock Miner" on the front page, Imogene Cornelison began her article, "There's so many memories of by-gone years, growing up in Picher. Our father was a victim of the mines. He died of silicosis, when he was only 48 years old."[57] Relegated to the past, reunion reflections even allowed such a stark memory, calling to mind the 1940s images of bed-ridden tuberculars and silicotics. But these memories said nothing about people living in Picher in the present. Whether the environment had killed Picherites or made them great, the singular focus on men, their work, and their greatness obscured how present and critical were the dangers of the 1980s and 1990s.

One final postindustrial manifestation of the miner's diaspora was beginning to change that, joining the ghost creatures' silence and the zombie miner's cacophonous resurgence in the 1980s: the researcher's laboratory. In their study of lead poisoning in wild birds, a set of scientists referred obliquely to "other sites" comparable to the Tri-State: Leadville, Colorado, and the Coeur d'Alene River Basin in Idaho.[58] Other papers similarly linked these sites through their citations. This postindustrial laboratory mirrored the geography of early twentieth-century industrial hygiene researchers who connected the Tri-State to other mining districts, only this

[56] Jim Jones, "The Hardrock Miner… [ellipses in original]," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1988.
[57] Imogene (Hilburn) Cornelison, "Growing Up in Picher," *Tri-State Tribune*, Aug. 9, 1984.
[58] Beyer, et. al. "Zinc and Lead Poisoning."

time in the study of animals. In study after study, with little comment on the history linking them, investigators hinted at the toxic migrations that Tri-Staters made as scabs in the early twentieth century, as temporary migrants looking for work in Picher Field downturns, and then as more permanent residents after midcentury.

The early 1980s research flurry that established Tar Creek's status, however, slowed by the end of the decade. In EPA's Superfund parlance, an Operable Unit is "a discrete action that composes an incremental step toward comprehensively addressing Site problems." The first Operable Unit at Tar Creek, or OU1, was the effort to stop the flow of surface water into the mines, its further flow down into the area's drinking water source, and that water's subsequent emergence on the surface and back into Tar Creek. The agency completed construction and closed out OU1 in late 1986.[59] At a celebratory news conference on the edge of town including EPA and state officials, the governor deemed it a "shining moment in the state's history." Having cost $7 million, OU1, it turned out, mostly failed to stop the water.[60] The EPA continued discovering and closing abandoned wells but took on no new Operable Unit. Its work was done.

While those peripatetic poor man's campers were long dead (despite being raised up in remembrances), they had been replaced in time by a new figure: the Chat Rat. Born as an epithet—residents who grew up in the 1960s recall area athletics rivals using the term—in time the Chat Rat became a badge of honor. Or, the same way that residents claimed the now-dangerous landscape as the most important marker of their home territory, Chat Rat became a term of endearment. It incorporated the results of the landscape's entry into their porous bodies

[59] "Tar Creek (Ottawa County) Ottawa County, OK, Cleanup Activities," https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Cleanup&id=0601269#bkground. Accessed Aug. 22, 2022.
[60] "Who Will Save the Children of Ottawa County," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), Dec. 9, 1999.

into Picherites' very identities. It was also more youthful. Used locally, and like the "gym rat" of various sports, the Chat Rat described kids who played habitually on the chat piles. As small children they drove toy trucks in their world's largest sandboxes, then they rode their bikes and sledded down the piles. As they grew older, they drove motorized dune buggies, three-wheelers, and dirt bikes, all the while kicking up the lead-laced, carcinogen-laden dust. Despite C. Allen Matthews's fears of dwindling chat piles, Picher was still surrounded and overshadowed by them a decade into the EPA era. And Picherites still used them as they always had, not only for recreation, but as a convenient source of fill for driveways and, yes, even home sandboxes.

So although it had been around for at least a generation, the Chat Rat took on new salience in the 1990s. Doctor Shirley Chesnut at the Miami Indian Health Clinic became alarmed at how many parents were presenting their children with attention deficit problems and learning delays. All were coming from near Picher. A nurse, Carol Barnett, told Chesnut, "Well, it could be lead." After a decade of research at Tar Creek, nobody had yet studied whether toxins were affecting people. By May of 1994, Dr. Chesnut's informal study revealed lead poisoned Native children far beyond normal national rates. Follow-up studies confirmed and extended the findings to children of all description.[61] Even testing by the mining companies that had operated near Picher—concerned for their own culpability, and not exactly prone to overstatement—found 38.3 percent of Picher children (31 of 81) carried lead concentrations in their blood exceeding 10 micrograms per deciliter, the widely accepted "threshold" at the time for governing bodies like the EPA and Centers for Disease Control (CDC).[62] In the town of Quapaw, 9 of 67 children

[61] United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Declaration, Tar Creek Superfund Site, Ottawa County, Oklahoma, Residential Areas Record of Decision," 1997. Hereafter OU2 ROD.
[62] Today, the CDC says "no safe blood lead level in children has identified," illustrating a (perhaps slowly, haphazardly) shifting paradigm in toxicology.

breached that mark (13.4 percent), and in Cardin, 62.5 percent, fully 10 out of 16 kids, carried blood lead levels over the limit.[63] For Oklahoma, the average was below 2 percent, although more than 12 percent of children on Medicaid held the dubious distinction of elevated blood lead levels, three points above the national average.[64] Picher-area Chat Rats were far more likely to be burdened by lead than even their poor counterparts elsewhere.

The Chat Rat's cultural valence also deepened, illustrating its transgressive nature. By claiming it, locals talked back to outside reinterpretations of the mining landscape. Just like the way the town reacted to EPA investigations around 1980 by inaugurating the mining reunions, in the summer of 1994 commemorative Chat Rat t-shirts appeared on the local market as if in defiance of the child blood-lead findings. "I'm a Little Chat Rat from Picher, Okla.," declared the shirts available at the Picher Express convenience store, with an illustration of a girl rat and a boy rat dancing.[65] Others were available by telephone order both locally and in Modesto, California. "Summer is Reunion Time!" blared their classified advertisement, indicating the intended use for these declarations against the new investigations. At the reunion, celebrants could be seen and slapped on the back for their willingness to take on the mantle of the Chat Rat.[66]

Meanwhile, however, Picher's rivals coined a new epithet: Lead Head. Where the Chat Rat had become a self-claimed title for Picherites prideful about the mining landscape, the Lead Head was no such thing. The Chat Rat hearkened to something locals chose to be by playing on

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https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/health-effects.htm. See: Max Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 97, 100-101.
[63] For statistics ("38.3 percent of Picher children…"): OU2 ROD.
[64] "Lead Screening Proposed," *Daily Oklahoman*, Feb. 16, 1995.
[65] Picher Express advertisement, "Wishing All a Warm Miner's Welcome," *Tri-State Tribune*, August 11, 1994.
[66] Classified advertisement, "Summer is Reunion Time!" *Tri-State Tribune*, July 7, 1994.

chat piles. The Lead Head described what they *were*: lead-poisoned bodies. The Lead Head pointed to the dire long-term physiological and psychological consequences of the Chat Rat's lifestyle. As if processed for human uptake, chat's physical nature made its lead even more bioavailable than it was in its native rock form of galena (the rich original veins and namesake of a Kansas town in the district).[67] As chat dust, lead blew more swiftly on the breeze, and it nestled more easily under windowsills and door frames to enter homes. Chat's lead also clung more readily to the hands of playing children and gained entry to their bodies when they brought their hands or other objects to their mouths. For these reasons children under six were more likely than older people to be exposed, and they experienced more harmful health effects because their bodies were growing faster. Adverse effects to the brain and nervous system; slowed growth; learning, behavioral, hearing, and speech problems all led to lower intelligence quotients, decreased attention span, and, naturally, academic underperformance. Extended exposure also led to long-term effects, as lead bioaccumulates, especially in bones, where it can take decades to diminish.[68] For these reasons the EPA and the state jumped into renewed action, testing lead in soils at what they called "high access areas" (HAAs) where children played, such as daycare centers, playgrounds, and schoolyards. Then they moved into private yards, too.

For some area residents, the Lead Head explained what they had long intuited in their observations of area residents, especially school children. It was fitting, then, that a Miami High School counselor was among the first area adults to champion the cause. In 1995 Rebecca Jim helped found the Cherokee Volunteer Society, a service-learning project through which students took charge of lead education in northeast Oklahoma. They produced artworks about hygienic

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[67] OU2 ROD.
[68] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Health Effects of Lead Exposure." https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/health-effects.htm

practices to avoid lead exposure, organized an annual conference, led "toxic tours" of the Tar Creek Superfund Site, and they even hosted facetious fishing derbies to publicize the ongoing absence of life in the area's waterways.[69] Jim's was a rare voice willing to declare the chat piles the underlying (overlying?) problem. "I see them gone," Jim, a Cherokee citizen, imagined about the piles. She foresaw a future where chat piles no longer defined the area or its people. She established the Local Environmental Action Demanded (LEAD) Agency in 1997 to bring that future closer by educating residents and organizing cleanup actions.

The lead poisoning revelations, community action, and investigations spurred the EPA into a new Operable Unit, OU2. Where OU1 had homed in on groundwater, OU2 took aim at soil in residential properties. Having identified lead in soil as the top human health risk at Tar Creek through their investigations, the agency resolved to reduce that risk by bringing soil levels below 500 parts per million lead. To do so, they dug out residential yards in six-inch increments until finding soil below the threshold, trucked the dirt to approved disposal sites around Tar Creek and beyond, and replaced it with clean soil.[70] The agency began this work in June 1996. It started at 300 homes with children under age 6 carrying elevated blood lead levels, and homes without children but with soil lead exceeding 1,500 parts per million lead.[71] Just like the first operable unit, OU2 persisted for years as the EPA continued gathering evidence. By 1999 it had spent $40 million more to remediate about 2,000 residential yards.[72]

Contests over lead's path to human bodies, its effects on those bodies, and the EPA's response framed every part of Picher's life after the mid-1990s. On the one hand, no matter the

[69] "Scars of Lead Poisoning," *Daily Oklahoman*, Dec. 11, 1999.
[70] OU2 ROD.
[71] OU2 ROD.
[72] "Another Broken Promise," *Daily Oklahoman*, Dec. 10, 1999.

weight of evidence, residents frequently held out hope that the lead was coming from sources other than the chat. Even Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality workers surmised that it could be plumbing or paint.[73] On the other hand, residents frequently doubted certain EPA findings and, thus, its solutions. During the public comment period for OU2, residents displayed diverse and conflicting sentiments. Sometimes they searched for hopeful explanations beyond the chat piles. Other commenters—probably Rebecca Jim's collaborators and students, although the comments are anonymized in EPA records—revealed hard-won local knowledge that contradicted EPA investigations.

The central confrontation from the mid-1990s forward, given the EPA's solution to dig up so many yards around Picher and Cardin, was about the chat piles themselves. Didn't they represent the greatest threat to human health, and shouldn't they be removed? Or, some individuals and community groups asked, shouldn't Picher and Cardin residents, surrounded by chat piles, be relocated? The EPA's dependence on one key finding both answered the questions and set the agency's own trap for ongoing distrust by area residents. No, the EPA answered, such drastic measures were not necessary because their ambient air tests indicated that chat was not airborne. "If air quality is pretty good," quipped the next commenter, "then how did the residential areas become contaminated?"[74]

What seemed a "gotcha" moment the EPA evaded with technical speak about the air tests and by shifting blame. The representative acknowledged that maybe air deposition happened more during the active mining days, but referred again to earlier comments about the air testing procedure to assure listeners that the dust was no longer an ambient threat. Then they continued

[73] "Play Area to Receive Lead Tests," *Daily Oklahoman*, Aug. 5, 1994.
[74] OU2 ROD.

by blaming residents. EPA claimed that the bulk of residential contamination was caused by owners transporting it there themselves for use in driveways and as fill. "Are the chat piles remaining in the area any danger to the public?" followed another commentor. Again, the EPA respondent cited the air quality tests as confirming that even near chat piles, that route of recontamination was unlikely (same for water runoff, but the EPA would monitor it).[75] "I think you'll find there's already new contamination," declared a prescient Ed Rodgers, Quapaw tribal chairman, in 1999. "I beg to differ with the EPA when they say chat doesn't blow in the wind."[76] After all, he continued, the finest dust had the highest metal content.[77] Earl Hatley, the Quapaw tribe's environmental director, agreed, predicting that many yards would be recontaminated within two years of remediation. "The EPA still doesn't have a vision for what to do. This is a Band-Aid approach, and the Band-Aid doesn't have any stickum."[78] Both Rodgers and Hatley were right, it turned out. Studies soon confirmed their locally informed hunches. A University of Oklahoma team predicted recontamination rates at nine months, while a local group found unacceptable lead levels on some properties within eleven days post-remediation.[79] The expense and bureaucratic process of EPA solutions—digging holes simply to fill them in!—began to look downright silly.[80]

Still, outside of the public comment meetings residents commented with their feet, or their wheels, as it were. Fresh dune buggy tracks continued to appear on most chat slopes and

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[75] OU2 ROD.
[76] Rodgers quoted in "Another Broken Promise."
[77] Rodgers's sentiment quoted in "Another Broken Promise" was supported by EPA reporting in OU2 ROD.
[78] "Who Will Save the Children?"
[79] Thomas Shriver et. al. "Mining for Conflict and Staking Claims: Contested Illness at the Tar Creek Superfund Site," *Sociological Inquiry* 78, no. 4 (Nov. 2008): 558-579.
[80] Love Canal's high profile and status as a groundbreaking Superfund case probably played into Picherites' perceptions of the EPA and Superfund.

teens reported habitually visiting "the beach," as they'd taken to calling the chat piles, where they would bury one another to the shoulders and sled down on car hoods they welded together. As Mark Coleman of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality put it in 1999, there remained "a mindset that chat won't harm you." Even James Graves, founding chairman of the mining reunion committee, convener of the reunions that generated so much chat-pile veneration, recognized the folly in his generation's belief that "lead isn't going to hurt anyone because it hasn't hurt them." He wished, in hindsight, that he and others would have pushed harder for a buyout back at the beginning now that the problems were showing themselves to be so stubborn.[81]

What else remained stubborn, though, called up the deep mining history of operator power inflecting community opinion. The companies liable for historical mining were also public commenters for OU2. Backed by slick consultant research, they contested the chat piles' role in the lead poisoning crisis, despite the statistically irrefutable (and entirely intuitive and reasonable) results showing that children living in areas with the richest concentration of chat had the heaviest burdens of blood lead. The companies' "comments" seemed intent on getting listeners to forget about mining entirely, citing poverty and, as always, the potential presence of lead-based paint (they made no effort to explain why the Picher area would have so much more lead-based paint than any similar town).[82] Residents argued about cause and effect in good faith, but the companies entered to further muddle those debates. Coleman of the state DEQ, in comments that could have spoken for the EPA as well, lamented that the agency was constantly criticized for doing either too much or too little.[83] They did not take things seriously enough, did

[81] "Another Broken Promise."
[82] OU2 ROD.
[83] "Scars of Lead Poisoning."

not have a comprehensive plan to finish the job (indeed another of their justifications for leaving the chat piles was that the piles were outside of the purview of OU2 and would have to be addressed later), or were wasting money by trying. It was impossible to garner community-wide support when the entire mining history, its memorialization, and present meaning remained so complicated.

Unlike Picher's other reckonings with the end of mining, the lead poisoning revelations finally illustrated how women bore the burden of mining history. Research attention, however, did not always relieve that burden. In their study of the ways that metal mixtures in the environment adversely affected children's health—as opposed to, say, lead poisoning alone—researchers followed decades of prescriptions for the remediation of environmental injustice, usually in racialized, urban groups.[84] Although couched as what "clinicians" could do to keep children's blood lead levels in check, the remedies were all gendered toward the female labor of caregiving. Perhaps, they surmised, nutrition was key; stores of essential nutrients are important for limiting the absorption of toxic metals such as lead and cadmium, so prevalent in Picher. "Probably the most effective public health measure," though, was to reduce the amount of lead in the child's atmosphere. Despite their gesture towards "public health," their list of "interventions" to achieve that were not public measures but personal, individual, and private: "focused cleaning around windowsills and doormats"; use of a vacuum with "high-efficiency particulate air filter" (although they admitted that it would be "more costly" for individual homeowners); vacuuming

[84] Elizabeth Grennan Browning, "Wastelanding and Racialized Reproductive Labor: 'Long Dyings' in East Chicago from Urban Renewal to Superfund Remediation," *Environmental History* 26 (2021): 752.

all horizontal surfaces, plus mopping; emphasizing hand washing, especially after outdoor play.[85] Whether they were watching children's diets, washing their hands, or wiping woodwork, the onus for children's health was on individuals' household habits. No comment on the burden these "scientific" findings were placing on a particular—and particularly disempowered—group of people: young women in an economically depressed region and in an unhealthy environment beyond the thresholds they were supposed to clean so carefully. Even these findings carried rich complexity; researchers from the University of Michigan and Harvard University schools of public health were joined as co-authors by none other than Rebecca Jim. She was the one outspoken local committed to the only big, structural solution that would render the women's dust-fighting unnecessary forever: to remove the chat piles.

These investigations and contests over the poking and prodding of Picher-area lands continued into the new millennium. Doubt about remediation rose alongside the expenditures like rising graph lines that bore no inverse relation to health and safety. The same as it ever was, a team of sociologists in the early 2000s found the unifying thrust beneath community contestations over environmental illness claims: the "internal attribution of causality for illness." Some leaned on their own lives as the only evidence that mattered. They played on chat as kids and seemed to be just fine. Other respondents added their children to that logic. The children were still playing in chat and appeared to have no ill effects, so illness claims couldn't be true. Maybe the lead poisoned kids were eating paint chips. A final group admitted that the mining landscape was the cause of elevated blood lead levels, but, like the public health researchers, scapegoated mothers. "Now, I don't want you to think I'm uppity or anything like that, but it's

[85] Howard Hu, et. al. "The Challenge Posed to Children's Health by Mixtures of Toxic Waste: The Tar Creek Superfund Site as a Case-Study," *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 54 (2007): 155-175.

the people that don't stay clean," one respondent claimed. Another, still seeming dubious about the evidence, blamed supervision nonetheless: "If [playing on chat piles] has something to do with it, keep your kids off the chat piles!" Another similarly called the complaining parents hypocrites for sending their kids to the piles and then bellyaching about the lead poisoning problem.[86] With the widespread denialism about the relationship between chat and blood lead levels, illness claims were as irreconcilable as community ideas about the chat piles themselves.

These fights did not abate when residents faced real, final choices about their allegiance to Picher and Cardin. Motivated in part by the results of LEAD Agency's door-to-door survey of 562 homes in 2004, the state legislature passed a bill for a $3 million program to relocate families with children under age six from the most dangerous areas. In a Picher ceremony backgrounded by children playing on chat piles, Governor Brad Henry signed it that June. Predicted to include 100 families, through 2005 the program relocated 51 families, while five eligible households chose to remain in Picher, mainly because of family ties to the area.[87]

Early the next year, results of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study catalyzed a much larger, more general buyout program. In January the Corps released findings that 54 areas in Picher had a 50 percent chance of experiencing cave-ins greater than 100 feet across at any time and without warning.[88] Residents had always known about, and often underplayed, that risk; by 1986 there had been 59 collapses of at least 95 feet across.[89] That risk was always contested by brash Tri-Staters, but where lead poisoning remained contentious into the twenty-first century, the new collapse concern was not. Perhaps the 91% buyout rate of eligible families in the first

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[86] Shriver, et. al., "Mining for Conflict."
[87] Tar Creek Relocation Bill Signed in Picher Ceremony," *Oklahoman*, June 3, 2004;"Tar Creek Buyout to Cost $20 Million," *Oklahoman*, May 5, 2006.
[88] "Picher Wasting Away," *Oklahoman*, May 4, 2006.
[89] "It Took a Town to Find Help for Tar Creek," *Oklahoman*, July 13, 2008.

program showed that, no matter the justification, no matter their actual worry about collapses, most residents did want to leave, sometimes only because of the economic peril of holding unsalable, uninsurable real estate. Spurred by the Corps's report, which he commissioned and funded as the senate's Environment and Public Works Committee chair, U.S. Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) jumped into action to craft legislation toward a federal buyout and relocation program. Long a frustration to area residents because of his callousness toward the district—in 2003 he said "There will never be a buyout. I promise you that."—in 2008 Inhofe claimed the popular buyout as his single-handed accomplishment in a campaign ad. It was "flamboyant," said the local citizen-researcher Ed Kehely, who had personally convinced Inhofe to tour the district in 2004.[90]

Still, although residents overwhelmingly chose to accept relocations averaging about $65 thousand per home, not everyone was persuaded. As always, ties to their home place motivated resistance, but so too did the years of lackluster government remediation efforts. Some heard a buyout plan as just old rhetoric, and others wouldn't believe it until they had cash in hand. Cardin convenience store owner Alice Garner said the federal buyout proved those "plans were all wrong." "When they cleaned the yards," surmised Bert Payton, a Picher resident since 1980, "they should have moved the chat piles."[91] The final decision was exactly what the EPA declared would be too expensive, and what local environmental justice activists had long called for: to reckon with the chat, even if the only feasible solution was to move everyone away from it. Regardless, like with illness claims, consensus was never possible as the contests roiled the

[90] "There will never be a buyout" and "flamboyant" quotations from: "It Took a Town."
[91] "Tar Creek Area Residents Buck Buyout Plans," *Oklahoman*, May 5, 2006.

generations-long connections to place. The decisions remained individual ones, the buyout programs voluntary.

The Lead Head and the Chat Rat inherited this bitter legacy of individualism from their forebear the Poor Man's Camp miner, even if some didn't want to. That "internal attribution of causality for illness," in the sociologists' words, let neighbors see elevated blood lead levels as "a personal problem, as an issue between patient and physician that required a private, individual solution."[92] The buyout programs were necessarily voluntary, owing to the place's history, attitudes, and place ties. How much did this sound like the anti-union stance of the early twentieth century? Or, perhaps more strikingly, the one-by-one battles of poor man's campers with the operators' clinic in the 1920s? The miner could sink or float on his own efforts and his ability to command concessions by changing jobs. He didn't need a union. Into the 2000s, Picher residents similarly sunk on contestation over local illness and perceived government paternalism and waste: 25 years of work and more than $240 million by 2010, and no clear solutions. Whether the chat piles should go, or the people should go, or the people should stay in a permanent Picher, nobody could decide collectively. Certainly not in a consensus that matched scientific evidence to protect human or animal health and the environmental problems inaugurated a hundred years prior, when enterprising settler-miners dug into Quapaw lands "lying waste."

[92] "Mining for Conflict," 574-5.

# EPILOGUE: "PICHER MAY BE GONE, BUT IT NEVER WILL BE DEAD."

Settler commentary from the mining district's "discovery" in the mid-nineteenth century and from its demise in the twenty-first century share an important common word, or at least forms of it: waste. "Picher Wasting Away," characteristically headlined the *Daily Oklahoman* sports section in May of 2006. It would have been hard to disagree. The rivals who had called Picher kids Chat Rats and Lead Heads were begging off Picher-Cardin High School's sports schedules, citing the Corps of Engineers report on the likelihood of new cave-ins. The baseball team played no home games that spring because their field sat atop one of the risk areas. Teachers and coaches were accepting jobs in nearby communities, including the elementary principal and her husband (Picher High School sweethearts, class of 1976), as well as the athletic director and head football coach (state champions in 1984). With high school sports trickling away, so was much of Picher's identity as residents perceived it. Nonetheless, an optimistic high school girl declared, "Chat is part of what this town is all about. But we will always be Gorillas." The *Oklahoman* reporter had his doubts.[1]

It's likely that no one involved in the making of that headline knew how the idea of "wasting away" tied them linguistically to celebrations about having brought industry to the "lands lying waste" in the Picher area during the late nineteenth century. At the district's "discovery," it was a waste *not* to incorporate a landscape into industrial capitalist production. Waste was Quapaw land before extraction. It was a waste leaving the land to Indigenous occupants. After a century, however, it was the chat piles, the by-products of that industry, that

[1] "Picher Wasting Away," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 4, 2006.

were widely acknowledged as waste. From describing the land outside of industrial production, waste came to describe lands left behind by it. On either side of mining was waste. But the act of "wasting away," according to the 2006 article's pathos, had a deeper resonance that brought the word back alongside its pre-industrialization meaning: Wasting away was the process of a town losing its people—certain people, anyway. Waste was still a place lacking settlers.

By the twenty-first century—and in another lexical transformation that occurred since the Picher Field's establishment—waste frequently equated with pollution. And as the Red River Métis geographer and anticolonial research methods theorist Max Liboiron has put it, to borrow their title, *Pollution Is Colonialism*. Pollution is defined by "threshold" levels for toxins theorized in the twentieth century by the purveyors of what Liboiron calls "dominant science." There is an acceptable amount of pollution before which bad things happen to people, organisms, and ecosystems.[2] As it turns out, that's not exactly true for all pollutants, including lead in children, but it was the assumption through the productive period and restorative efforts in the Picher Field and at Tar Creek. Certainly, the idea of safe thresholds guided the blood lead and soil remediation discussions of the 1990s. Like the way mining interests shaped the industrial hygiene industry of the early twentieth century, pollution was at least in part defined through capital's prerogatives by industry-supported research. Pollution is colonialism because it assumes access to Indigenous lands to dilute, disperse, and, maybe forever, warehouse waste in places acceptable to the bigger and more empowered populations someplace else. Pollution as colonialism describes the past and present while predicting the foreclosure of certain futures on the land.

[2] Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*, 4-5.

The long struggles in Picher indicated to many locals that theirs was such a disempowered, poor place, sacrificed by larger powers little interested in solving the waste challenge. "We're one of the smallest counties in Oklahoma and one of the least populated," said the environmental justice organizer Rebecca Jim in 2002, "but that doesn't mean we don't count."[3] "There is a class system alive and well in the United States," concurred the retired chemist-turned local advocate Ed Kehely in 2008, "and if you are a small rural community that doesn't have a voting bloc, you do not have the same access to federal resources and federal officials."[4] The environmental challenges of pollution remained as unresolved as were the social contests over illness claims and potential remedies. But settlers could move away, disavowing all future commitment to the place, even if they held certain nostalgic attachments.

If this place's story is only about settlers, there's almost no other way to narrate its end than to tell about the tornado. With the federal buyout program roiled by corruption accusations and displeasure about low home valuations, an EF-4 tornado destroyed more than a hundred homes in Picher on May 10, 2008. "Picher may be gone, but it never will be dead," claimed Patricia Williams. C. Allen Matthews and generations of Picher boosters would have been proud of the sentiment.

Williams meant that Picher would live on even when homes were destroyed and if everyone had to move away. It would persist in their memories and in the historic role the town had played outfitting the modern world with zinc-plated metals and lead. She was correct, too. It's been more than a decade since Picher (2012) and its neighbors, Cardin, Oklahoma (2010) and Treece, Kansas (2008), officially shed their status as incorporated municipalities. Yet true to

[3] "Fund Cut Planned for Toxic Sites," *Daily Oklahoman*, July 2, 2002.
[4] "It Took a Town to Find Help for Tar Creek," *Oklahoman*, July 13, 2008.

Williams's prediction, Tri-Staters continue to keep their homeplace alive. They sustain it on the internet. Facebook users in several groups reminisce about growing up in Picher.[5] A few extend their stories into longer blog posts ("Chat Rat Chronicles," one blog is called).[6] And in one of the quaintest corners of the internet, Fredas Cook curates photos with captions and historic newspaper clippings from self-described Cardin Kids (the name of the site), the Baby Boom children of Picher's less remembered, but even more chat-riddled, neighbor. Characterized by clip art, animations, and the haphazard juxtaposition of fonts such as comic sans, the site betrays its founding date of April 9, 2006, but its 2022 updates reveal an ongoing collaborative project.[7] Picher is gone, but in its way, is not dead. Its way of living, though, is only in its postmodern form, immaterially floating above the ground, out of time and place. Perhaps the zombie miners have been laid finally to rest. At least they have had their ability to inflect debates about policy on the land constrained. The zombie mines, however, continue roving around and beyond the district in water and on land, searching for pathways into bodies.

Picher's digital persistence says little about the land left behind, so I'll try to tell a different story about endings and futures. As the historian William Cronon has written, "If the past is the place from which we have come, then memory and history are the tools we use for recollecting that place so we can know who and where we are." I might add, as he does elsewhere, that knowing "who and where we are" also points the way into the future. "Memory

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[5] Just a sampling: "Picher Families" (private Facebook group), accessed Nov. 8, 2022. https://m.facebook.com/groups/1805431636181904/. "Picher families remembering our beloved town of Picher, Oklahoma"; "Picher People" (private Facebook group), accessed Nov. 8, 2022. https://m.facebook.com/groups/178555662155984/. "Picher People group was created to keep those from Picher, friends and family intouch [sic]."

[6] "Chat Rat Chronicles: Adventures of the Dirty Little Glover Boys," accessed Nov. 8, 2022. https://pichergorillas.com.

[7] "This is CardinKids.com," accessed Nov. 8, 2022. http://www.cardinkids.com/002-%20HOME.htm.

and history," those "tools," "turn space into place, investing what would otherwise be a purely biological or geological abstraction with a wealth of human meanings, and thereby turning it into the kind of place we choose to call home."[8]

A town is such a place, as this history has shown, where humans ascribe meaning to that otherwise meaningless space. Cronon's point resonates with the geographer Henri Lefebvre's explanation of how people produce space through their relations of class, race, gender, power, and other forces. They do so with intention, but often with unanticipated results, and the fruits of their labors present both opportunities and constrains.[9] This well describes one of environmental history's main points. In the wider rural Rust Belt Picherites made that meaning by changing the land, the result—think of the chat piles—becoming their own very important meanings. The history I've told here was one of wrestling over how and even whether the space that settlers turned into place would persist.

The history also, importantly, raises a question hiding inside of Cronon's "we." The settlers making these places are the subjects of my story here. This is because we can learn something from the extent to which they believed they were realizing the settler colonial goal of writing a new society atop the Indigenous one they eliminated. Or, at least, we can learn from their anxiety about whether they'd accomplished those settler goals and could build permanent towns. If they didn't look too closely at papers and documents—who still owned the land, the complicated relationship of colonial power and Quapaw persistence—and only gazed around their industry, settler miners and their communities could convince themselves about the veracity

[8] William Cronon, "Why the Past Matters," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 84, no. 1 (2000), 4 (quotations), 6 (on idea of historical thinking allowing people to project into the future).
[9] Henri Lefebvre (translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith), *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991 [orig. 1974]).

of old U.S. settler traditions writing the end of Native people in the face of onrushing settler industry. My choice here isn't meant to further that erasure, but to tell us something about the hollowness of settler stories and what remains after settlers think that everything has gone. "Picher may be gone, but it never will be dead": we can take that as a threat, but it's probably better heard as a mere settler hope. My choice in this narrative is to show how settler extraction, even on its own terms, is prone to overconfidence. It's meant to illustrate how settler colonialism's progressive narratives persisted into the twentieth century and beyond. Since settler colonialism is a structure and not an event, it changes over time and will continue to do so. Who constitutes the "we" of a given place bears critically on the stories that we tell about settlers and in environmental history. Calling this place the wider rural Rust Belt puts it in settler terms and settler processes, but the future is only shaped, not determined, by the past.

This was not and is not only a place for settlers. As the Picher area lost its markers of place for many former residents—the buildings and landmarks trucked to the landfill or dumped in abandoned mine shafts, schools closed, even the chat piles shrinking—it continued to be a place for Quapaw people who were mostly displaced during the mining years. To the lead and zinc industry, Quapaws existed as an administrative problem in leases and royalties, under the wardship of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior. They were not miners in significant numbers. Pushed from the action on their land, Quapaw people had their own diaspora. Some moved to California or other nearer urban centers. Some lived with relatives on the Osage reservation to the west of Ottawa County. Some Quapaw people remained on the tribal lands but in their eastern stretches, away from the richest concentration of mines. Tribal government persisted, unbroken. Regardless, Quapaws' Oklahoma lands remained, by and large, their own, chat piles and all. They had generations of life on the land making relations with the

creatures and landscapes, disrupted but never severed. Those lands were but the far western reaches of even deeper historical homelands around the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers.[10]

In 2008 the Quapaw Tribe announced its historic, present, and future sovereignty on the land and joined a long tradition of resistance by entering court to sue historical polluting companies. Quapaws had always fought through settler courts and used diplomacy for their health, economic, and cultural rights, to enact sovereignty over their own lands and affairs. Threatened by an Indian agent's plan for the federal government to purchase the Quapaw reservation because too few Quapaws, in his estimation, were living there, a faction of men successfully petitioned to stave off the plan. Individual Quapaws navigated the leasing process with varying degrees of (at least) economic success from the 1910s through the early post-World-War-II period. They sued mining companies for polluted water in the 1930s. The Tribe sought remuneration for dispossession of their historic homelands in parts of Arkansas through the federal Indian Claims Commission in the 1950s. It has been a party to the Superfund process since the early 1980s. And its members emerged more fully again as sympathetic figures for wider media narratives in the 1990s child lead poisoning scare. Each of these processes played out under deeply colonial structures shaped by paternalistic, sympathetic, or antagonistic settler administrators that variously upheld or subsumed Quapaw sovereignty. That mutability in Indian law and administration, the shifting settler political winds, and Indian Country's changing place in the political economy characterizes has held out radical potential in times when the federal government has supported the full exercise of treaty guaranteed sovereignty.

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[10] W. David Baird, *The Quapaws* (New York: Chelsea House, 1989), 13-17; Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*; Risë Supernaw Proctor, "Quapaw Tribal Information: Chronological Order," accessed Nov 8, 2022. http://www.quapawtribalancestry.com/quapawtribalorder.htm.

The 2008 case, *Quapaw Tribe vs. Blue Tee Corporation*, revealed the promise in that long, unbroken line of resistance, as well as the drawbacks of its being framed by colonial institutions. Lines of questioning in Quapaw depositions showed the defense's strategies to challenge historical Quapaw environmental stewardship and thus render impotent the Quapaws' contemporary claims to damages over environmental destruction. First, company lawyers pressed Quapaw deponents on historical land uses. Because the Quapaws' charges in the case claimed that they managed agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, and gathering resources since 1839, lawyers attempted to delegitimize the expertise of their non-Quapaw head of the environmental department, Tim Kent, by questioning whether his knowledge could predate the year he started for the tribe, 2002.[11] Kent knew about historical practices from countless conversations with Quapaw people as both an environmental scientist and accomplice in environmental management, but company lawyers worked to undercut the validity of that knowledge.

Historical expert opinion gave another form of credence to the line of questioning that delegitimized Quapaw environmental management through time. One expert asserted that the Quapaws had never been "agricultural," only "horticultural," a subtle distinction about scale and market access. The Quapaw's real economy in the Oklahoma reservation lands had been "a leasing economy," the defense argued.[12] The companies asked research questions of the consultants that allowed them to decontextualize Quapaw environmental management from a wider critical and thematic interpretation of Quapaw history. Asked about the extent to which

[11] "Deposition of Timothy Kent, taken on behalf of the defendants, on June 17, 2008, beginning at 9:16 am in Tulsa, Oklahoma," 36-9, Gary Anderson Collection, Box 7, bound volume. WHC.
[12] Gary Clayton Anderson, "The Quapaw Indians of Oklahoma and the Mining District: An Historical Report, 1800-1970," Anderson Collection Box 6, Folder 14, WHC.

Quapaws "*as an entity*" had "managed, regulated, or otherwise controlled natural resources" through time, one consultant wrote simply that the tribe had "played very little role." They had acted only as individuals in environmental stewardship or land use, such as mine leasing. The second question for historical consultants to consider was the extent to which non-Quapaw governmental entities had managed Quapaw environmental affairs. The federal government and its agencies, the same consultant responded, "were almost entirely responsible" for managing, regulating, and controlling the Quapaw environment and natural resources.[13]

Neither the answers nor the reports' analyses dwell on the question of *why* Quapaw environmental action had been constrained, if that was what the historical documents revealed. Members managed natural resources as individual actors because they had been coerced into roles as individual *economic* actors. They allotted their land to individuals so they could retain more of the reservation in Quapaw hands than if they'd let the Dawes Commission do the job and sell off "surplus" to settlers. The Tribe hadn't managed environmental resources because federal policy did not allow them to take most actions without approval by the Secretary of the Interior. The court wasn't interested in the complexity of a full historical reckoning, only with the most direct answer historical research could provide. The answers were built into the questions, both of which ignored the consequences of colonization and the Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century erosions of Quapaw self-determination. The line of historical analysis helped delegitimize 21st-century Quapaw claims to damages lost from agriculture because they had not performed enough agriculture in the deep past, as though their longest traditions were immutable, as if they could not have adapted to that mode of production as modern *and*

[13] Douglas Littlefield, "A History of the Quapaw Tribe and Its Relationship with Natural Resources and the Environment, 1870s-1970s," 5 (emphasis added). Gary Anderson Collection, Box 7, Folder 25. WHC.

Indigenous people in the twentieth century. The mining boom foreclosed that possibility, but settler court managed to make it Quapaws' own fault for not more seriously pursuing agriculture.

Their lands had been destroyed, as anyone could admit. But what it had cost the Quapaws was impossible to say, at least in settler court. The big trouble in adjudicating Quapaws' loss was that they had been a party to it, profiting from leasing their lands for grazing and mining. This complicity was another line of contestation in *Quapaw vs. Blue Tee*, one gnawing at the intertribal fissures that colonialism had wrought: whether, and how, to incorporate settler modes with Quapaw needs. The companies' lawyers liked to emphasize that the Quapaw allottees and their heirs now entering court had profited by historic mining and signed leases to effectuate it. In fact, however, it was a rather small minority of Quapaws. The schism opened by this differential access to mining windfalls also exposed the tribe to lawyers questioning historic environmental governance by the Tribe *as such*, versus some haphazard environmental management by individual Quapaws. The Tribe assented to mining, they claimed. Again, the colonial structure of near-forced landownership by individual members—the imposition of allotment—created the conditions under which recourse became a challenge in 2008. Quapaw foresight through self-allotment turned against them as the means by which the Tribe failed to exhibit tribal environmental management sufficient to satisfy settler court.

From the 2008 lawsuits to today, there is evidence of positive momentum toward Quapaw self-determination and sovereignty over their lands, waters, and waste piles. It did not always appear thus. Despite the EPA's founding during the era of self-determination for tribes and its avowed commitment to the principle, the EPA's operation has not always realized that claim in practice. While courts have granted it wide latitude to provide technical support and defer cleanup activities to tribes, EPA has interpreted its mandate narrowly, keeping that work

for themselves after incorporating tribes only in lesser matters such as feasibility studies.[14] In a form of condescension familiar to the EPA's settler critics at Tar Creek, the agency often operated in a top-down fashion to wield its form of expertise and epistemological assumptions over Quapaws. And the EPA did little to counter a 2005 power grab by Senator James Inhof on behalf of the State of Oklahoma. Inhof included a last-minute "rider" on an otherwise mundane transportation bill making it illegal for Oklahoma tribes to manage environmental programs without first negotiating with the state. The EPA worked with tribes to operate within that restriction, but did nothing to combat it and prove its claims to supporting tribal self-determination.[15]

In 2012, however, the Quapaws became the first Native Nation in the EPA's Superfund history to lead cleanup efforts at a contaminated site. They earned that right, according to the EPA, through a series of agreements and actions since the 1997 founding of their environmental department, which increased their capacity and ability to complete a remedial action on their own. In 2013 and 2014 Quapaw contractors removed 108,000 tons of chat and restored a natural prairie landscape at what is known as "The Catholic 40," a 40-acre site on which had stood a church and boarding school that many Quapaw people had attended.[16] Remediation combined environmental and cultural remediation practice, just as Tim Kent had testified back in 2008 when lawyers challenged whether his environmental department had "duties … that relate to cultural heritage." At that time he said "The way the tribe views it, they're really not

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[14] Raymond Anthony Nolan, "Tar Creek: The Quapaw Tribe, the EPA, and Tribal Self-Determination, 1980-2010," *Wicazo Sa Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2018), 70-86.
[15] Raymond Nolan, "The Midnight Rider: The EPA and Tribal Self-Determination," *American Indian Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2018): 329-343.
[16] U.S. EPA, "Tribal Leadership, Historic Preservation and Green Remediation: The Catholic 40 Cleanup Project in Northeast Oklahoma," accessed Nov. 21, 2022, https://semspub.epa.gov/work/06/500017890.pdf.

separable."[17] The Catholic 40 project also incorporated preservation of the historic church building to environmental and cultural remediation practice.[18]

In a similar relationship pointing to decontaminated futures, the Quapaw Nation, as it now calls itself, partners with the University of Oklahoma's Center for Restoration of Ecosystems and Watersheds (CREW). Back where it all began for the mines in their zombie state—north of Mickey Mantle's hometown of Commerce, where George Mayer's horses signaled the revivified mines with their stained fetlocks—the two entities and several state and federal agencies have built and managed a passive water treatment system since 1998. Successful beyond any prior EPA action on the water trouble, and at a fraction of the cost, the system's series of pools achieves what the EPA once declared impossible: it reverses "irreversible" water pollution by turning orange mine effluent into clear water.[19]

Back in 2008, the companies' lawyers employed one final line of questioning illustrating the barriers for Quapaw claims in settler courts. They challenged Quapaws to pinpoint what land was destroyed by the actions of what company, a burden of proof necessary for holding the companies accountable. That was, of course, virtually impossible. Chat piles conveyor-belted towards the sky were too large to stay on their original leases. What's more, the innovation of commingling, or central milling, meant that one mine's chat did not remain as one mine lease's problem in the final two decades of productive mining.

It was an impossible task to finger blame, as Quapaw Edwina Faye Busby conveyed in exasperation when lawyers pushed her to produce documents proving the damage to her

[17] "Deposition of Timothy Kent," 35.
[18] U.S. EPA, "Tribal Leadership."
[19] The Center for Restoration of Ecosystems and Watersheds, "Home," Accessed Nov. 6, 2022, https://www.ou.edu/coe/centers/crew.

inherited allotment. “There are no documents. The damages that I know [are] from being a young child[.] I know the damages that has been done [sic] and that continues to be done.”[20] Busby’s great grandfather was what she called “a healer.” Where Tim Kent demurred when asked about specific locations of plant gathering because it was not his knowledge to share as a non-Quapaw, Busby fell into reverie. Amid a testy deposition in which she called company lawyers’ questions “dumb,” she recalled her grandmother healing a rattlesnake bite with items from the land. She reminisced about gathering foods such as dandelion roots, blackberries, wild strawberries, raspberries, and grapes. She remembered remedies for “doctoring your feet” and the bark-derived remedy akin to aspirin. “That’s what they lived off of, that’s where they hunted, that’s where they gathered, that’s where they respected it.”[21] Testimony from Busby and others didn’t explain why Quapaws had not been environmental stewards, as the historical consultants had argued. Instead, Quapaw testimony questioned if that analysis was true at all. Lacking documents to prove the damage, Busby explained why she had not returned in many years to an old gathering site: “There is nothing there.”[22] Later she went on, “The land isn’t usable, the water isn’t drinkable, nothing grows there. … And if you would drive past there, [you could] see for yourself. And it is like a ten[-]minute drive.”[23] In a system little interested in justice, but very interested in certain forms of evidence, we can safely assume the opposing lawyers felt no compulsion to drive up to Picher.

This question of direct responsibility for the destruction of Quapaw homelands forms another eerie echo of the past. It illustrates how the landscape of the poor man’s camp became

[20] “Deposition of Edwina Faye Busby, taken on behalf of the defendants, on October 9, 2008, in Tulsa, Oklahoma,” 15. WHC.
[21] “Deposition of Edwina Faye Busby,” 16.
[22] “Deposition of Edwina Faye Busby,” 34.
[23] “Deposition of Edwina Faye Busby,” 85.

the landscape of impossible recourse for Quapaws. The poor man's camp was a boon to some white miners, but a curse to most. Its natural basis in the shallow, spotty ores led settlers to create a system of small mine leases, numerous mills, and just as many chat piles, spreading chat everywhere. These, as well as the exploitative conditions and the workers' tendency to change jobs frequently all made it difficult for workers to get compensation from operators. These same factors of a social and economic world shaped by local landscape made victory nearly impossible for Quapaws in court. They could not win damages in settler court because of the plausible deniability about whose chat was where, no matter how obvious the results of mining were, no matter what Quapaws knew to be true, and no matter how blinkered Quapaw land uses had become because of the mining past. In the Picher Field's particular structure of settler colonial extraction, manifested unequally in the bodies of settler workingmen, their families, their towns, and on the ability of Quapaws to make relations with one another and nonhuman relatives on their homelands, nobody won.

Different futures are still possible. Zombie mines and zombie miners, true to their form, might never relinquish their power to rise again. But human choices can throttle that potential. The push for a Tar Creek relocation plan, widespread acceptance of buyouts, and the disincorporation of the towns that celebrated the zombie miner have made him much less likely to rear his square-jawed, lamp-bedecked head again, at least in the Picher Field. These choices took many settler stakeholders out of the community meetings and decisions about the future of the land, and put them into the mediated realm of internet nostalgia. The white, masculine miner from other locales, however, remains a stock figure in discussions about climate change and a hoped for just transition away from fossil fuels. I hope this history is a cautionary tale for those

places, the miners in these pages living on as the canaries in many coal mines for the empty promise of hard work dangerous to workers and environments.

The disappearance of the settler towns leaves different human decisionmakers, Quapaw people, in the negotiation over lands and futures at Tar Creek. It looks like they will constrain the zombie mines' ability to come undead. The future that Quapaws have in mind imagines the land as it was and can be, mostly a wetlands, instead of a mining landscape paying tribute to a fading settler past. In some ways, conditions are turning in favor of that future. With the situation still in flux, the body now known as the Quapaw Nation once again reigns over a reservation. Following the bombshell 2020 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, which found that the state never disestablished the five largest reservations in present Oklahoma, the Quapaws earned a similar ruling in a 2021 follow-up case.[24] Henceforth in federal Indian law, the Quapaw reservation is Indian Country. Oklahoma can no longer operate, like it has since statehood, as if its jurisdiction is supreme. While the rulings centered on criminal justice, they hold space for imagining expanded applications. They also create an opening for backlash. As justice Neil Gorsuch reminded readers in his majority opinion in *McGirt*, disestablishing reservations would be a congressional power, and although Congress never disestablished the reservations in this case, they still can if they want to.[25] The national political landscape raises a dark specter for that potential. So, the reinvigorated Quapaw reservation is not some idealized or decolonized utopia. Quapaw governance remains a contested, ongoing negotiation with the agencies of the settler colonial state, including with the federal EPA towards Tar Creek remediation. But the return of

[24] Allison Herrera, "Court Rules that Quapaw Nation's Reservation was Never Disestablished," KOSU, Oct. 21, 2021, accessed Nov. 6, 2022. https://www.kosu.org/local-news/2021-10-21/court-rules-that-quapaw-nations-reservation-was-never-disestablished.
[25] Harvard Law Review, "*McGirt v. Oklahoma*," Nov. 10, 2020, accessed Nov. 6, 2022, https://harvardlawreview.org/2020/11/mcgirt-v-oklahoma/.

the reservation could be another start toward deepened self-determination, and under settler colonialism, that is the place where a future begins.

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