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Eliza Macy
Macalester College, emacy1@macalester.edu

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**Don't Bite the Hand that Feeds You:
Environmental and Human Exploitation Sold as Prosperity**

Eliza Macy

Abstract: In this article I focus on corporate power and the false jobs versus human rights dichotomy, extending it to include jobs versus human rights. Using the coal, prison, and oil pipeline industries as examples, the paper explores the ways in which corporate industries gain and maintain local power. I discuss the false narratives and language that industries use to convince people of their importance, showing how they exploit poverty and unemployment to become the single industries dominating localities. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates the fallacy of the jobs versus environment and human rights dichotomy and demonstrates the ways that the coal, prison, and oil pipeline industries feed off of and rely on each other to create a corporate state that depends on environmental and human exploitation. The paper ends with examples of resistance to corporate power that fights for an alternative vision.

Keywords: *Corporate Power, Corporate Capitalism, Carceral State, Jobs Versus Environment, Jobs Versus Human Rights*

Area of Study: *American Studies*

Introduction

Like many towns in Appalachia, Wheelwright, Kentucky was born and raised on coal. Elkhorn Coal Co. established the town in 1916, and provided almost all of the local jobs for 65 years. Wheelwright was completely dependent on the industry. When the company dwindled and left, however, the town became dependent on a 600-bed prison. It was the only other option. I heard this story in the documentary, *Prison in 12 Landscapes*, that explores a wide variety of impacts that prisons have across the U.S.¹ I have spent time thinking about this town, and what it means for one extractive industry to rule a community, only to leave and give way for another extractive industry to take over - but this time the extraction being people. The story of Wheelwright is in no way unique. Across the U.S., corporate capitalism has created countless

¹ *Prison in 12 Landscapes* (Independent Lens, 2016)

communities that are passed on from one industry to the next, locked into a cycle of corporate power that depends on local economies, people, and environments to make profit and gain power. Although the presence of corporations and industries around the nation and world are ubiquitous, this paper focuses on the coal, prison, and oil pipeline industries to explore how corporate capitalism manifests in real places and communities across the country, and the power dynamics that play out as a result of their presence.

I've chosen to focus on the three industries of coal, prison, and oil pipelines because they each demonstrate different and critical manifestations of corporate capitalism, and all require each other to maintain power. In this paper, corporate capitalism is defined as a capitalist nation that is ruled by corporations and industry, where everything and everyone is expendable.² Although the connections between the coal, prison, and pipeline industries might not be immediately obvious, they each create, depend on, and replicate a system of corporate power that requires the exploitation of people and the environment, and depend on each other to do so. In discussing prisons, I am talking about the broader carceral state that prisons are part of, which in this paper, is defined as the mass system of policies, prisons, corporations, and law enforcement that function to incarcerate and punish millions of people, violating human rights (and disproportionately the human rights of Black, Brown, and poor people) in the process. It does not refer only to prisons themselves, but to the social and political systems that enforce policing and require prisons to function.

This paper explores corporate power through the construction of the jobs versus environment dichotomy and incorporates the ideas of inverted totalitarianism and wastelanding

² Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (New York: Nation Books, 2014)

to understand how corporate capitalism functions, as well as the tactics industries use to establish and maintain power. The paper is divided into different sections that explain processes of power establishment and maintenance. The sections are Economic Depression and Industry as Savior, Jobs versus Environment and Human Rights, Creating and Manipulating Cultural and National Identity, Community Divisions and Keeping People Powerless, and finally, Activism Prevails! Throughout the paper, I argue that industries depend on economic hardship to establish local power and construct the jobs versus environment and human rights narrative. By exploiting this dichotomy, industries engage in cultural and social manipulation to convince people of their benevolence while ultimately exploiting workers, community members, and the environment in order to gain power and profit. Against this grim reality, communities on the front lines of corporate capitalism and environmental and human rights abuses are fighting - and in some cases winning - against corporate greed and destruction.

Jobs versus the environment is a false dichotomy used by industries and business leaders that frames environmental policies and advocates as threats to jobs and the economy. To succeed, corporate capitalism requires human and environmental degradation and exploitation, and must work to naturalize corporate power and destruction. The jobs versus environment dichotomy works to convince people that corporate power is natural, and that in order for a community to secure jobs, they must sacrifice their natural and physical environment, as well as their human rights. Through this trade-off, industries convince people that intensive resource extraction or the prison state are the best avenues to economic stability, and that environmental protection is a threat. Using the word “environment” is a method of naturalizing the division between people and their environments, distracting from the fact that environmental abuse often

translates to human rights abuse. It also presents environmental concern as an unnecessary wealthy liberal issue that is detached from the working class reality. In this paper, I extend the jobs versus environment trade-off to include jobs versus human rights, because in sacrificing environmental health, people also sacrifice their rights to clean water and air. In the case of prisons, people sacrifice their wellbeing in being responsible for another person's unfreedom. In many cases, people are forced to choose between survival and their environment, as the jobs versus environment/human rights narrative is heavily present in working class places facing economic hardship.

Traci Brynne Voyles' idea of wastelanding helps contextualize and historicize this dichotomy. In her writings about mining on Navajo land, she explains that wastelanding is a process through which certain lands and the people who inhabit them are deemed pollutable and disposable, often leading to severe environmental degradation and human rights abuses.³ Wastelanding is rooted in settler colonial epistemologies that render Indigenous land as either valueless or valued only for what can be extracted. The U.S. was founded on this notion of wastelanding, and settler degradation of the land has become understood as natural and unquestionable. The devastating impacts on the people who inhabit wastelanded environments (who are almost always poor and/or of color), then, are seen as a normal consequence of economic growth. This ideology helped create the jobs versus environment dichotomy. The trade-off legitimizes the idea that the economy can only thrive through extraction, therefore legitimizing wastelanding and allowing corporations to exploit Indigenous, Black, Brown, and poor people. Wastelanding requires the jobs versus environment dichotomy, as it works to

³ Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015))

convince white workers (but as I will show it impacts non white workers as well) that demolishing landscapes is necessary for their wellbeing. Given that wastelanding is rooted in settler colonial ideology that rejects Indigenous claim to land as legitimate, the jobs versus environment dichotomy also rejects Indigenous claim to land by presenting “environment” as either uninhabitable and/or valueless to people.

The jobs versus environment dichotomy and wastelanding are pieces of what philosopher Sheldon Wolin calls “inverted totalitarianism,” which describes a nation that is expressed through the corporate state.⁴ In classic totalitarianism, politics overpowers economics, but the word “inverted” in this idea refers to the fact that in the U.S. (a corporate state) economics overpowers politics. While Nazi Germany, a totalitarian state, worked to instill a sense of collective power and strength in the public, an inverted totalitarian state requires a disempowered and “politically demobilized” society.⁵ Although corporate systems claim to honor the Constitution, electoral politics, and American nationalism and patriotism, it deems citizens powerless. The worth of both people and the natural environment is determined by the market, and under inverted totalitarianism, both will be exploited until their destruction.⁶ As such, inverted totalitarianism emphasizes the inherent relationship between economic crisis and environmental crisis. In this paper, I demonstrate how the prison crisis (which is part of the carceral state) is also an environmental and economic crisis that is deeply connected to the jobs versus environment and human rights dichotomy. Wastelanding and inverted totalitarianism construct land and people as belonging to corporations. They are ultimately what construct the

⁴ Chris Hodges, accessed December 2019, <https://wallstreetwindow.com/inverted-totalitarianism-explained>)

⁵ Sheldon Wolin, “Inverted Totalitarianism,” *The Nation*, June 29, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/inverted-totalitarianism/>)

⁶ Chris Hodges, accessed December 2019, <https://wallstreetwindow.com/inverted-totalitarianism-explained>)

mountains in Appalachia as belonging to coal companies, a predominantly Latinx town in California to the prison industry, and Indigenous land in the Midwest to oil pipeline companies.

Economic Depression and Industry as Savior

Industries and corporations respond to economic depression and collaborate with local and state governments to establish themselves in places with high poverty and unemployment as the solution to economic crises. The Appalachian mountains are rich in coal, and have been under the grip of coal companies for generations. The area has often been called a place of “rich land, poor people,” which is the ideal combination for wastelanding.⁷ For generations, coal companies have exploited local poverty, instability, and unemployment to become the single industry of many communities. In West Virginia, coal mining has been a leading industry for decades, and many towns were founded around the jobs coal provided.⁸ During the late 1800s and early 1900s, coal companies owned entire towns in Central Appalachia, including streets, houses, schools, water systems, churches, recreational facilities, doctors offices, and company stores where people bought everything they needed.⁹ Coal was the center of life, providing not only jobs but all of the necessary resources for a town and community to survive. Companies have exploited poverty and the need for economic stability in these areas for generations, creating dependence on the industry. Dependence and desperation makes people living in poverty more complacent with the wastelanding of their environments, because it becomes the only option. The coal mining that many towns were founded on required human miners to work

⁷ Sam Adler-Bell, “Appalachia vs. the Carceral State,” *The New Republic*, November 25, 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/155660/appalachia-coal-mining-mountaintop-removal-prison-fight>

⁸ Shirley Stewart. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004* (Morgantown, W. Va.: West Virginia Univ. Press, 2007)

⁹ Shannon Elizabeth. Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016)

below ground to extract the resource - gruelling and dangerous work that was wastelanding of the body to allow for wastelanding of the environment.

While the coal mining that many towns were founded on required many human miners to work, there has been a shift in the past decades towards MountainTop Removal (MTR) mining, a more intensive coal extraction process in which entire mountain tops are blasted away.¹⁰ With technological advancement, many coal mining jobs have become obsolete, leaving the towns that were established alongside coal industry jobs with a surplus of labor and in worsened economic hardship. Coal companies funding and creating entire towns made the industry a lifeline for residents, without which local economies were unable to sustain themselves. Although coal has always been destructive, it provided an idea of jobs and economic stability that people were in search of. MTR is more destructive than typical coal mining (which is already dangerous and environmentally destructive), and residents of towns that have generations of dependence on coal were no other options. Desperate for work and any opportunity to rise out of poverty, people had little to no choice but to not protest and instead comply with MTR, the next iteration of coal extraction, in order to maintain the industry that had sustained their communities for over a century.¹¹

Despite minimal job opportunities through MTR and its devastating environmental and health impacts, coal company representatives feed off of economic desperation to establish local power and present themselves as saviors. Coal companies convince those who do hold mining jobs that any shift away from MTR would mean the complete removal of all coal jobs. This solidifies the understanding of coal companies as the lifeline that keeps communities afloat. In

¹⁰ Shirley Stewart. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004* (Morgantown, W. Va.: West Virginia Univ. Press, 2007)

¹¹ Ibid.

the book, *Bringing Down the Mountains*, author Shirly Stewart Burns outlines three stages of power relations that are played out in communities impacted by MTR. In Stage 1, community members trust that companies are motivated by communities' best interests. Company representatives use language about reviving communities and providing jobs for hardworking families, convincing people that companies are invested in their livelihoods. Therefore, people regard companies as saviors who will end economic crises and transform their towns.

Community members welcome the jobs they are promised and the tax revenues MTR will produce.¹² This stage is critical for MTR companies to establish a grip on local economies, and is crucial in setting up the jobs versus environment narrative. Manipulating economic depression and community needs for survival lays the groundwork for companies to create the illusion that they are the only avenue to prosperity, even if they create environmental and health hazards.

Similarly, in California, the prison industry was employed as a solution to an economic crisis that stemmed from land and labor surpluses. The town of Corcoran, California is a majority Latinx, former agriculture town that was hard hit by economic crisis, and is now the site of one of California's public prisons. During the first decades of the 20th century, cotton became a huge production in Kings County, where Corcoran lies. In 1925, California legislatures passed a law making Alcala cotton, a particular strain of the crop, the only legally cultivable strain in the county. Small farmers struggled to maintain their own farms in the face of the huge industry, and began to work for the large cotton companies. Decades later in the late 1970s and 1980s, big agricultural companies were devastated by floods, followed by drought. Harsh environmental conditions in conjunction with high debt resulted in 150,000 acres of irrigated county acres going

¹² Ibid.

out of production between 1982 and 1992.¹³ Both farmers and growers suffered the consequences of agricultural loss, and the farmer unemployment rate during that decade stayed between 30 and 50 percent.¹⁴ Although Corcoran once had a successful retail economy, the decline in farm work employment, combined with a rise of big box stores in nearby towns caused these places to go out of business. The tax base subsequently declined as retail businesses and paychecks were devastated.

The town of Corcoran ultimately asked for a prison. With child poverty rates at 30 percent, the town's city council - which was majority white at the time despite the town's majority Latinx population - turned to the state's only form of aid. Already locked into a cycle of corporate power through cotton, the prison industry became the next iteration of the local corporate economy. The California government could not provide assistance to the town because despite its "legal capacity to issue debt for public works, it lacked the tax base to pay off such loans."¹⁵ Instead, the state acted as a corporation and deployed the California Department of Corrections (CDC) to promote the prison industry and "save" Corcoran. To initially establish local power, industries send representatives to towns to discuss the benefits of hosting said business - in this case, a prison. In California, CDC officials work hard and spend large amounts of money to spread the narrative of prisons bringing economic success. Local government officials often sponsor town halls where prison representatives discuss the benefits of prison facilities, and local newspapers and shops are filled with articles and flyers about potential prison

¹³ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007)

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

projects.¹⁶ At the center of this beneficial narrative is the promise of jobs when a prison is built, which will in turn create more jobs as other industries follow. The CDC outlined a plan in which 950 people and 353 households would come to Corcoran within the first two years of the prison opening, as well-paid employees settle in the town and revitalize its “social and economic profile.”¹⁷ Essentially, residents were promised salvation, as “prison doors would unlock” the community from poverty and create a thriving economy, as one CDC community relations professional explained.¹⁸ However, salvation never came. Workers who were expected to move to the town and help revitalize it preferred to commute, so new buildings that anticipated a population increase went vacant, and less than 10 percent of Corcoran residents secured prison jobs. Poverty rates continued to increase.

Corcoran is not the only town impacted by the loss of agricultural land and labor, but was part of California’s much larger prison project to deal with surplus land and labor and economic crisis. Between 1982 and 2000, the California prison industry grew by 500%, building 24 new major prisons (which are all public with the exception of a few 500 bed private prisons) and creating the largest prison project in the world.¹⁹ Reflecting the story of Corcoran, however, California used the CDC to deal with an enormous surplus in land and labor caused by drought, floods, and competition with the global food market that left the state in economic crisis. Severe drought followed by dramatic floods significantly reduced the amount of agricultural land that was productive, decreasing the amount of farmers needed, and creating an excess of land that

¹⁶ Tracy Huling, “Building a Prison Economy in Rural America,” in *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* (The New Press, 2002)

¹⁷ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

could not be used. As a result, “18 out of 24 of the new prisons were built on formerly irrigated agricultural lands.”²⁰ Unlike coal, where a for-profit company seized the opportunity of economic depression to assert power and gain profit, California attempted to create an industry that acts like a corporation in its size and power. Given that the state was already locked into industrial, corporate agricultural power, the solution became a prison industry that mimics the large scale power, impact, and industry of corporations. It gave the state an opportunity to not only deal with its surpluses, but to assert state police control. In need of economic stability, prison expansion provided California with the opportunity to use bodies - particularly Black, Brown, and poor bodies - to make a profit. Getting out of crisis meant locking people up en masse. A state ruled by big agriculture turned to big prisons and mass incarceration.

Oil pipeline companies similarly exploit lack of economic stability and the need for jobs. In the Midwestern United States, pipelines carry oil from the tar sands in Alberta, Canada, and from shale oil fields in the U.S. to refineries around the country to be exported abroad. Both forms of oil are harmful to the environment and climate, but tar sands oil in particular is the dirtiest oil in the world, releasing more carbon dioxide in the process of being burned than any other form of oil.²¹ While oil pipelines have been around for decades, projects to carry even more oil through the Midwest have sprung up in recent years. Notably, the Keystone XL Pipeline, the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the proposed Line 3 Pipeline have recently been sites of propaganda and protest. Each pipeline violates treaty rights with Indigenous tribes, threatens water sources,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ David Biello, “How Much Will Tar Sands Oil Add to Global Warming?,” *Scientific American* (*Scientific American*, January 23, 2013), <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/tar-sands-and-keystone-xl-pipeline-impact-on-global-warming/>

and exacerbates the climate crisis. Pipeline companies, therefore, work to convince people of their importance and distract from their destructive nature.

Appealing to working class workers and unions, companies frame pipelines as necessary opportunities for jobs and the economy. On the Dakota Access Pipeline's website, the company, Energy Transfer, states that "The pipeline has been paying millions in property taxes to states each year" which have gone towards supporting "schools, hospitals, emergency services and other critical ongoing needs."²² They make a point to say that they remain active in the communities where the pipeline traverses, presenting themselves as a benevolent company that is centered around the wellbeing of impacted people. Energy Transfer did donate to a number of public services in counties along the pipeline route. This includes \$20,000 to the emergency responder departments in each county the pipeline crosses, \$250,000 the FFA foundation across four states, and \$1 million to City of Mandan, North Dakota to name a few.²³ These donations solidifies pipeline companies presentation as saviors for communities. Pipeline websites also emphasize the large amounts of jobs they create, failing to address the fact that almost all of the jobs are temporary. In news articles about pipeline projects, companies are framed as being motivated by workers' needs and a desire to promote the common good, not to gain profits and power.²⁴ Presenting companies as interested in improving lives is key to the industry as savior phenomenon that lays the groundwork for the jobs versus environment dichotomy.

Jobs Versus the Environment and Human Rights

²² "Dakota Access Pipeline Facts," Home, accessed December 17, 2019, <https://www.dapipelinefacts.com/>)

²³ Dakota Access Pipeline Facts, "Safety - Dakota Access Pipeline Facts," Home (Dakota Access Pipeline Facts, March 8, 2018), <https://www.dapipelinefacts.com/Community.html>)

²⁴ Erik Kojola, "(Re)Constructing the Pipeline: Workers, Environmentalists and Ideology in Media Coverage of the Keystone XL Pipeline," *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 6 (2015): pp. 893-917, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920515598564>)

Established as saviors to the economic crises they depend on, industries solidify the jobs versus environment narrative. I extend this dichotomy to include jobs versus human rights, as human rights are often compromised in processes of environmental degradation, and in situations when industries value profit over the rights of their workers. The word “environment” in the common “jobs versus environment” phrase distracts from the fact that environmental abuses often translate to human rights abuses. Coal and pipeline industries employ the language of jobs versus environment, feeding a disconnect between people and the environment which hides some of the real, devastating impacts of these industries on people. Prisons, while not what one might typically think of as fitting the jobs versus environment dichotomy, directly impact the community environment they are a part of. They also rely on abusing the human rights of those who are incarcerated, creating an industry that harms the social environments of the places where they are sited, the communities from which incarcerated people are taken, and abuses the human rights of prisoners. I will now explain the varying ways that the three chosen industries (coal, prison, and oil pipelines) employ and exacerbate the jobs versus environment and human rights dichotomy.

A lead lobbyist for the West Virginia Coal Association told the EPA at a meeting about mountaintop mine permits that, “Today’s hearing isn’t about streams, it’s about jobs, and families and kids, and a way of life.”²⁵ Coal companies work to emphasize the benefit of coal for the economy and every day families. In that statement, the coal representative created the illusion that in not talking about streams, the company is focusing on what is actually important - people who are suffering and in need of jobs. What the statement hides, however, is the fact that the

²⁵ Shirley Stewart. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004* (Morgantown, W. Va.: West Virginia Univ. Press, 2007)

stream that is left out of the conversation is the canary in the mine, signaling contamination in larger water sources that sustain life for residents. People living in areas near active MTR are exposed to toxins in their water and air. As one woman explained, “You’re a prisoner in your own home, breathing coal dust 24 hours a day.”²⁶ Coal slurries, where coal waste is held in enormous quantities, are often held in small towns. Slurry spills in the past have killed over one hundred people and put 300 million gallons of slurry into waterways.²⁷ These disasters have serious implications. A woman in West Virginia told the story of eating a fish she caught in a stream near her home only to get severely ill with symptoms of nausea, dizziness, loss of balance, and memory loss that lasted weeks.²⁸ The same toxins including arsenic, mercury, and dioxin found in streams also leach into groundwater, further contaminating water sources. Subsequently, people who live near MTR mining sites have increased rates of cancer, birth defects, and chronic heart, lung, and kidney disease.²⁹

Despite the glaring environmental and subsequent human rights abuses that are ubiquitous around MTR, people fear speaking out and destroying their only economic lifeline. In an interview, one woman explained, “You’re so concerned [about jobs], and you don’t want to bite the hand that feeds you.”³⁰ Another person added that “[MountainTop Removal] is a heartbreak to any hillbilly, I would think. But if that’s the only way some people can work, their work means more I guess.”³¹ Although the environmental and human destruction of MTR breaks

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Shannon Elizabeth. Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Sam Adler-Bell, “Appalachia vs. the Carceral State,” *The New Republic*, November 25, 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/155660/appalachia-coal-mining-mountaintop-removal-prison-fight>

³⁰ Shirley Stewart. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004* (Morgantown, W. Va.: West Virginia Univ. Press, 2007)

³¹ Shannon Elizabeth. Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016)

people, the dichotomy between jobs and health, wellbeing, human rights, and the environment is so ingrained that it prevents people from defending their loved ones from the dangers of coal they see to be true. Given that coal companies actively exploit the lack of jobs to position themselves as the option for economic stability, questioning human rights and environmental abuses holds the threat of unemployment, allowing the industry to use the jobs versus human rights dichotomy to exploit workers, residents of nearby communities, and the environment. As a result, wastelanding goes on unquestioned, as the mountain landscape and the people who inhabit it are devastated. People are terrified to bite the hand that feeds them, even if that hand is feeding poison.

Similarly, oil pipeline companies exploit the jobs versus environment narrative to convince people that pipeline jobs are the only option, hiding alternatives that support both the economy and the environment like renewable energy jobs. Media - both liberal and conservative - are important in helping spread that message. Pipeline companies and the media oversell the benefit that pipelines would have on the economy while failing to cover the environmental devastation they cause. In a sample of 214 news articles discussing the Keystone XL pipeline, over two thirds framed the pipeline around creating jobs and building the economy.³² On the flipside, opposition to the pipeline to protect the environment was framed as directly “costing jobs” and hurting the economy.³³ However, pipeline companies create a cover story that presents companies and projects as being environmentally friendly, fooling people into believing that the jobs versus environment dichotomy is not at play. On the Dakota Access, Keystone XL, and Line

³² Erik Kojola, “(Re)Constructing the Pipeline: Workers, Environmentalists and Ideology in Media Coverage of the Keystone XL Pipeline,” *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 6 (2015): pp. 893-917, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920515598564>

³³ Ibid.

3 Pipeline websites, each include a statement on the home page about the environmental safety and responsibility of the respective pipelines. However, when real environmental issues like oil spills that contaminate water or the climate crisis are brought up, companies frame those concerned as a threat to jobs. Environmentalists are presented as wealthy radicals who do not understand the need for jobs, creating a class divide. In reality, most unions were opposed to the Keystone XL pipeline, and some worked to emphasize the importance of green jobs, especially given the fact that working class people feel the impacts of environmental harm and climate change more than the wealthy. Pipeline companies and the media did not give attention to those unions, however, feeding the narrative that environmentalism is only for the wealthy few. The jobs versus environment dichotomy works to convince the working class of their need for pipelines and the damage of environmentalists, ultimately allowing companies to build pipelines that directly threaten the short and long term health of workers.

Consequently, the prison economy in California, and specifically the story of Corcoran, demonstrates what happens when there is no longer enough land to exploit. Wastelands go too far, and rather than using the land for profit, the inverted totalitarian state turns to people. Instead of a jobs versus environment dichotomy, then, it becomes jobs versus human rights. While coal and pipeline companies put forth the idea that the economy will thrive through environmentally destructive practices, the prison boom in California is the result of environmental devastation creating a surplus in labor. The story of drought and floods leading to agricultural depletion demonstrates that it is impossible to maintain an economy when the environment is exhausted. Because of environmental devastation, the majority Latinx and impoverished town of Corcoran was forced to support an industry based in racism and classism.

Without other options, residents had no choice but to support and actually *ask* for the expansion of the carceral state, which inherently threatens human rights, and particularly the human rights of poor, Black, and Brown people. The California Assemblyman who cited the prison in Corcoran, as well as two others, also co-authored criminal law including the “Three Strikes” act of 1994, a sentencing law that adds significant time to the prison sentences of “certain repeat offenders convicted of serious or violent felonies.”³⁴ Through policies like the “Three Strikes” act, the state created severely carceral criminal law, providing prisoners to prisons like the one in Corcoran. The state and industry rely on desperate, impoverished people, who in the case of Corcoran are majority Latinx, in order to propel its mass incarceration agenda that locks up mostly poor, Black and Brown people. In severe poverty, residents of places like Corcoran had no choice but to take the only option for promised economic growth. Without adequate land to exploit, the state turned to abusing people for the sake of the economy, forcing economically desperate residents to comply.

It is important to note that California is not the only place where prisons have taken the place of depleted land. The prison boom that occurred in California and led to the prison in Corcoran was felt across the country, even in coal country. In the past three decades, 29 prisons, both state and federal, have been built across Appalachia, in many cases near or atop old mines. I focus on California as an example of an entire state that embodied a prison corporation and discuss the town of Corcoran as one example, but the connection between environmental depletion and the construction of prisons is in no way an issue isolated to one state, it is a national phenomenon. In places dominated by large industries, surplus labor as a result of

³⁴ “California Three Strikes Law and Proposition 36 Reforms,” Shouse California Law Group, accessed December 17, 2019, <https://www.shouselaw.com/three-strikes.html#1>)

environmental degradation and mechanization has been used as an opportunity to put desperate people “to work imprisoning the urban poor.”³⁵ I do not intend to demonstrate that ending environmentally extractive industries necessarily translates to feeding the carceral state, and I will later discuss examples of community activism that rejects local industrial power and demands alternative opportunities for economic stability that do not rely on environmental and human abuse.

Creating and Manipulating Cultural and Nationalist Identity

Through manipulating cultural identity, industries maintain power by naturalizing their presence, convincing people that the jobs versus environment and human rights dichotomy is normal and actually part of their identity. Although coal has been part of West Virginia’s economy for generations, it is becoming obsolete as the world attempts to wean itself off of the dirty form of energy, and mechanization greatly reduces coal jobs. In reality, coal provides minimal and fairly insignificant jobs to the state and broader region. To combat the industry’s demise, companies engage in “manipulative socialization” wherein they convince people of the importance of coal using important cultural values, in turn shaping cultural identity and ensuring their presence remains naturalized.³⁶ The West Virginia Coal Association created a campaign called “Friends of Coal” to retaliate against anti-coal grassroots organizations. Friends of Coal’s mission statement reads:

The Friends of Coal is dedicated to inform and educate West Virginia citizens about the coal industry and its vital role in the state's future. Our goal is to provide a united voice for an industry that has been and remains a critical

³⁵Sam Adler-Bell, “Appalachia vs. the Carceral State,” *The New Republic*, November 25, 2019, <https://newrepublic.com/article/155660/appalachia-coal-mining-mountaintop-removal-prison-fight>)

³⁶ Shannon Elizabeth. Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016)

*economic contributor to West Virginia. By working together, we can provide good jobs and benefits for future generations, which will keep our children and grandchildren close to home.*³⁷

At the heart of Friends of Coal's agenda is to convince West Virginians that coal companies have their best interest in mind and to distract from the reality that they are wastelanding the environment and people. To spread its mission, Friends of Coal "appropriates" West Virginia cultural icons and establishes a visual presence in the cultural landscape through stickers, yard signs, and sponsorship.³⁸ College football is important in the state so the group created a "Friends of Coal Bowl" to connect the cultural love for football with a love for coal. People could even download a cellphone ringtone from a football related coal advertisement that sings, "When we go down deep through the dark today, we come up with the light for America. Coal is West Virginia!"³⁹ Important to naturalizing coal's presence is to target children as well. Friends of Coal hosts "Coal Fairs" at schools around the state where children can enter contests where winning projects receive large cash prizes from coal companies, and some people even receive scholarships for a few West Virginia colleges.⁴⁰ This tactic socializes children to understand coal as a natural and essential part of their state and their own identities, and continues to solidify coal companies as saviors. Not only does coal provide jobs, it is a path to success for youth. Friends of Coal naturalizes the message that coal is inseparable from life, culture, and pride in West Virginia. Companies convince people that without coal they would lose an essential part of themselves and their communities, and never suggest that alternatives exist. This dramatically

³⁷ "About," Friends of Coal, accessed December 17, 2019, <https://www.friendsofcoal.org/about-foc/who-we-are.html>

³⁸ Shannon Elizabeth. Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016)

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

supports the jobs versus environment dichotomy because people are socialized to see coal opponents who are concerned about the environment as direct threats to their identity and livelihoods.

Further, both coal and pipeline companies manipulate and perpetuate nationalist ideology to gain and maintain power. Coal companies uphold a narrative that connects coal to national triumph and security, representing coal as an important defender of the U.S. In a Friends of Coal advertisement, a retired Air Force general tells viewers that “West Virginia coal miners are modern day pioneers... If these miners didn’t produce coal, our nation would be in trouble.”⁴¹ A narrator in another commercial states, “Without West Virginia Coal, our nation’s economic status as a leader would be in jeopardy.”⁴² Pipeline companies engage in similar practices of equating the industry to national strength, connecting a sense of heroism and American pride to the industry. Pipeline companies and news sources that cover pipeline projects use words like “we” and “the country” to evoke patriotic and nationalist ideology and classic “American values” of expansion and domination.⁴³ The sense of unity that is produced is intended to target white working Americans and create a sense of power over Indigenous and international nations. Not only does this rhetoric garner support for U.S. efforts to dominate countries abroad, it relies on the rejection of Indigenous claim to land and actually presents it as a threat to American strength and power. The word “pioneer” in the coal commercial elicits an image of white settlers taking control of “unused” Native land to make the U.S. triumphant, and it demonstrates that

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Erik Kojola, “(Re)Constructing the Pipeline: Workers, Environmentalists and Ideology in Media Coverage of the Keystone XL Pipeline,” *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 6 (2015): pp. 893-917, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920515598564>

white power over Indigenous land must continue in order for coal, and thereby the country, to thrive.

Further, the media and pipeline companies establish a narrative around the need for the U.S. to produce its own oil in times of international turmoil and economic recession.⁴⁴ A New York Times article that covered the debate over the Keystone XL summarized supporters' main points, that America needs jobs, and that "the oil would be coming from a friendly nation" so that the U.S. can maintain oil independence in a time of international turmoil.⁴⁵ In the article, "(Re)constructing the Pipeline," author Erik Kojola explains that framing Canada as the friendly nation feeds militaristic anti-Islamist ideology, presenting pipelines as an opportunity to dominate the Middle East and demonstrate American triumph. Both industries equate themselves to military heroism, expanding the jobs versus environment narrative to be national identity and American power versus the environment and human rights. Given that these communities that face economic and social depression have been further disempowered and manipulated by companies, a sense of power over something is especially appealing. Companies provide rhetoric that fulfills this desire. Neither industry acknowledges that the oil and coal being extracted are sent abroad, not even fueling American homes or making the country independent. This rhetoric allows companies to secure local control and power under the beneficial narrative of their benevolent efforts to keep America safe and strong. What people do not see then, is that the companies are actually gaining local militant control in order to compete on a national corporate playing field.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kirk Johnson and Dan Frosch, "A Pipeline Divides Along Old Lines: Jobs Versus the Environment," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 28, 2011), <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/29/us/rancor-grows-over-planned-oil-pipeline-from-canada.html>

In California, the media, government officials, and policy advisors “endlessly refer to the public’s concern over crime and connect prison growth to public desire for social order” to convince people of a crisis around crime that will in turn encourage them to support prisons.⁴⁶ In reality, violent crime rates in California have remained fairly steady and low in the past 50 years. During the 1980s and 1990s - at the time of the state’s prison boom - violent crime had risen only slightly and property related crime (i.e. theft) was falling.⁴⁷ A number of research studies find that attention to crime in the media and through officials results in increased public support for more police and prisons.⁴⁸ The state manipulates public perceptions of crime, instilling unnecessary fear in the public in order to increase support, or at least compliance, for building the prison economy. Although the prison industry does not draw on explicitly nationalist rhetoric, it plays into a public desire for safety, and an othering of the “bad prisoners” - which is inherently racial and anti-Black and Brown - who threaten the strength of communities and the state. Crafting a narrative around high crime allows the industry to present prisons as the solution to the state’s demise through crime, drawing on American values of protection, security, and strength to build the prison state.

Cultural and national identity manipulation is important because it allows for the creation of a corporate prison state, where corporations and police work together to punish opposition and further the power of each industry. Established as essential to the national desire to dominate nature, the global economy, and the world, coal and pipeline companies are able to get away

⁴⁶ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007)

⁴⁷ “Crime Trends in California,” Public Policy Institute of California, accessed December 17, 2019, <https://www.ppic.org/publication/crime-trends-in-california/>

⁴⁸ Kenneth Dowler, “Media Consumption and Attitudes Toward Crime and Justice.: The Relationship between Fear of Crime, Punitive Attitudes, and Perceived Police Effectiveness,” *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 2003, pp. 109-126)

with policing opponents who are represented as threats to this crafted American identity. Making the public believe that opponents to these industries are anti-American through the jobs and national strength versus environment narrative normalizes punishment for people who resist these companies. Further, inverted totalitarianism instills fear in the general public through the corporate economy's tendencies to downsize or privatize Social Security and health benefits, which most directly harms the poor.⁴⁹ Inverted totalitarianism, then, works to convince the working class that resistance against corporations is a grave threat, ultimately supporting corporate policing.

The peaceful protests at the Standing Rock Reservation against the Dakota Access Pipeline, which violates treaty rights by crossing through Indigenous land and threatens water sources, was met with militant backlash and felony sentences for some protestors, known as “water protectors.” In response to Native people protecting their land from pipeline invasion, the governor of North Dakota called on the state's National Guard to assist local law enforcement, and police used tear gas and sprayed water protectors with water cannons in below freezing temperatures.⁵⁰ A reported range of dozens to hundreds of people were injured, some severely.⁵¹ Native resistance threatens wastelanding and corporate capitalism. For the pipeline industry to maintain power it must continue the war against Indigenous people, which is where capitalism and wastelanding began in the United States. In a less violent event, 67 demonstrators were arrested at a coal plant in New Hampshire in September 2019 for standing outside the plant and

⁴⁹ Sheldon Wolin, “Inverted Totalitarianism,” *The Nation*, June 29, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/inverted-totalitarianism/>

⁵⁰ Merrit Kennedy, “Police, Protesters Clash Near Dakota Access Pipeline Route,” *NPR* (NPR, November 21, 2016), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/11/21/502865857/police-protesters-clash-near-dakota-access-pipeline-route>)

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

demanding it be shut down.⁵² In August 2019, a small group of people in Tucson, Arizona, who gathered outside an Adult Detention Facility to sing and chant loud enough for those locked inside to hear are now facing the charge of felony riot.⁵³ Companies rely on the prison state, through which they are able to injure and incarcerate opponents, to maintain power. In turn, these companies support the prison industry by upholding and relying on its carceral punishment. People who have been convinced by the state of the necessity for prisons to stop crime are then more likely to believe that the incarceration of water protectors or coal opponents is justified. There was notable national outrage over police action at Standing Rock, but cultural and social manipulation that convinces people that coal, pipelines, and prisons are natural and important gives these industries an alarming amount of impunity.

Community Division and Keeping People Powerless

The jobs and cultural identity versus environment and human rights dichotomy is further used as a tool to pit communities against each other to distract from the root issue of corporate power and labor and environmental abuse. The second stage of power relations and corporate seize that Burns explains in *Bringing Down the Mountains* involves some community members becoming shocked and dismayed by the real impacts of the industry, while others remain confident in the jobs narrative. Companies use this division as an opportunity to reduce community power by turning people against each other. At a hearing about an MTR mining expansion project in West Virginia, the coal company incited rage in their employees by sending notices attached to their paychecks with a note reading, “There will be people who don’t want

⁵² Mark Osborne, “67 Protesters Arrested for Demonstration at New Hampshire Coal Power Plant,” ABC News (ABC News Network, September 29, 2019), <https://abcnews.go.com/US/67-protesters-arrested-demonstration-hampshire-coal-power-plant/story?id=65934030>

⁵³ Natasha Lennard, “Meet the Tucson 12: Under Trump, Protesters Are Being Hit With Felony Riot Charges,” The Intercept, November 22, 2019, <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/22/tucson-12-protest-felony-riot/>

this permit issued... They don't care about your job." They then asked employees to come to the hearing to show support.⁵⁴ By putting the note in with the paycheck, they also reiterated the message that the company is their lifeline, implying that failing to stand against opponents could have its consequences. When that expansion project was halted, some laid off workers acted violently against opponents of MTR by ripping signs from people's hands and throwing eggs at them. The company's language around opponents being anti-job led people to blame other community members, rather than the company that had made false promises. In convincing employees that the blame is on MTR opponents, the company prevented the community from seeing that both sides were united in anger towards the companies and working together to organize against MTR.

In Corcoran, community members were divided in their feelings about the prison, with some people fearing that a prison would bring violence to the town and wishing to protect Corcoran, while others felt there was nothing left to protect and desired an opportunity for economic growth.⁵⁵ This caused conflict in the town, with people shouting at each other at meetings, in restaurants, and in the streets. Often centered in these heated debates were small farmers who worried about competing with the prison for water resources, especially if future drought were to require rationing. While these small growers were mostly seasonal workers who were overshadowed by the cotton industry, proponents of the prison targeted them as people who reaped the benefits of cotton's economy. Racial dynamics were also present in community divisions around the prison, although they were less visible. People talked about prison

⁵⁴ Shirley Stewart. Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004* (Morgantown, W. Va.: West Virginia Univ. Press, 2007)

⁵⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007)

opponents' dismissal of the town's Latinx and Black populations who were in grave need of jobs, implying that anti-prison activists did not care about the wellbeing of those communities, even though people opposed to the prison were not exclusively white.⁵⁶ People who wanted the prison also included white residents, as the entire town - although racially segregated - suffered from severe economic depression and unemployment. Although the CDC itself did not directly feed conflict in the same way that MTR companies did, community anger turned people against each other and distracted from the common frustration at agricultural and prison industrial power that was at the root of conflict.

Beyond the initial implementation of a new industry - whether it be a new MTR mine, a prison, or a pipeline - community division helps maintain compliance with exploitative industries. In *Fighting King Coal*, Shanon Elizabeth Bell tells the story of a woman she worked with in West Virginia who began to recognize the horrific impacts of MTR in her community - from propaganda and false promises to an unsafe environment.⁵⁷ Unable to stay silent, she brought up her criticisms of coal in the civic organization she is part of, only to experience backlash and disapproval. It turned out the group receives funding from local coal companies, and people fear losing that money. Not wanting to be ostracized and isolated, she returned to being silent about the devastating impacts of the coal industry. In this instance, we see how companies create a culture of dependence around them so that resistance within communities is met with condemnation. When coal establishes itself as the only lifeline, community members actually help companies maintain power and perpetuate their narrative of importance because

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Shannon Elizabeth Bell, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016)

people fear being cut off from their life source. As Bell explains, “Powerlessness serves to re-enforce powerlessness.”⁵⁸

Activism Prevails!

Against the power of an inverted totalitarian state that functions through exploiting people and the environment at all costs in the name of progress, people on the front lines of the corporate police state are refusing to accept corporate power and are defending workers, communities, and the environment. From the Appalachian mountains to the great plains of the Midwest and the Central Valley and coast of California, people are awake to what is happening and are rejecting the jobs versus environment/human rights dichotomy and corporate manipulation through creating community power. Wastelands depend on the normalization of destroying environments and the people who inhabit them, and local resistance is a direct threat.

The Line 3 Pipeline is a proposed tar sands oil pipeline that would bring oil from Alberta, Canada, to Superior, Wisconsin. There is already a Line 3 Pipeline, and the current proposed project is coined as a “replacement” project. This is misleading, however, because a significant portion of the project is on an entirely new route, and Enbridge (the company behind Line 3) has no plans to remove the old pipeline, even though it is leaking toxic chemicals into the ground. This is an example of wastelands. The new Line 3 has already been built in Canada and Wisconsin, and Minnesota is the last stand. The pipeline violates treaty rights and threatens Indigenous culture and livelihood in Minnesota, not to mention all people who drink water in Northern Minnesota and all life on the planet that would be harmed by its devastating carbon emissions. In the face of unthinkable corporate greed, the Stop Line 3 movement is a mostly

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Indigenous led movement that is building a statewide, grassroots coalition of tribes, organizations, workers, and landowners to protect people and the environment.

In September 2019 I attended a gathering with almost 1,000 other people in Duluth, MN on the south shore of Gichi Gami (Lake Superior) to protest Line 3 in Minnesota. The event included time for people to speak about the threats of Line 3, a march led by women from the families of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), and a healing circle for the families of MMIW. Pipeline construction is directly related to increases in MMIW, and this event centered the connections between environmental violence and violence against Native women. People spoke about the threats of the pipeline to Indigenous land, water, and communities, as well as wild rice, a critical food in Anishinaabe culture that grows no where else in the world than in the lakes of Northern Minnesota. The event focused on the connection between people and their environments, directly contrasting Enbridge's violent extractive practices that are rooted in the jobs versus environment dichotomy and wastelanding.

Among the hundreds of attendees were U.S. Army veterans who refused to buy into the nationalist rhetoric of pipeline companies that they know first hand is part of the U.S.'s militaristic imperialist agenda that has cost the lives of countless people overseas and at home. Their presence also represented a refusal to believe the anti-Indigenous rhetoric of pipeline industries that frames Native people as threats to U.S. strength and nationalism, and highlighted the connection to imperialist agendas abroad. The Stop Line 3 movement fights the jobs versus environment and human rights dichotomy by centering Indigenous claim to land and focusing on the power of human relationships with our ecosystems. The dichotomy is based in silencing Native sovereignty and rights to land, and rejecting that idea threatens its strength and fabric.

Indigenous leadership and the participation of Army veterans, workers, landowners and city folk eliminate the power of community division that permits wastelanding on Indigenous land.

A couple thousand miles away in Appalachia, community members have been resisting corporate efforts to divide them and successfully fighting coal for decades. Organizations like Coal River Mountain Watch (CRMW) (based in West Virginia in a town a few hundred feet away from a MTR mine) and the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC) in West Virginia are groups of local community members working to foster community strength to create social, economic, and environmental justice through fighting MTR and other environmental hazards in their communities.⁵⁹⁶⁰ What each of these groups have in common is their active rejection of the jobs versus environment dichotomy through highlighting the relationship between environmental destruction and human health, livelihood, and economic stability. They are each rooted in environmental justice, focusing on the people who are most impacted by MTR and its subsequent water and air pollution. The focus on protecting people in relationship to preventing environmental harm makes their efforts more accessible than simply conservation based efforts, and debunks corporate claims that environmentalists are wealthy threats to local livelihoods. CRMW's work is based in educating and mobilizing citizens around environmental justice issues in their communities, and in striving for more "self-sufficient communities that are in control of their natural resources."⁶¹ Emphasizing the need for community power and control over their livelihoods and environments makes the organization more accessible and combats corporate efforts to divide people through separating livelihood and the environment.

⁵⁹ "About Us," Coal River Mountain Watch, accessed December 17, 2019, <https://www.crmw.net/about.php>)

⁶⁰ "About OVEC," [ohvec.org](https://ohvec.org/about-ovec/), accessed December 17, 2019, <https://ohvec.org/about-ovec/>)

⁶¹ "About Us," Coal River Mountain Watch, accessed December 17, 2019, <https://www.crmw.net/about.php>)

Given that industries exploit economic depression and create corporate dependence, necessary to activism work is proposing alternatives and disrupting the naturalization of corporate power. CRMW is establishing a Sustainable Development and Economic Diversification project that is focused on demonstrating and implementing feasible economic and energy alternatives to their community that has been depleted by MTR.⁶² The project includes solar energy and related education around its benefits in contrast to coal. During storms, it provides energy for the small surrounding area when power goes out. The group is also focusing on hemp cultivation, a versatile and climate adaptable plant, to learn and teach cultivation practices that might be a lucrative opportunity for small landowners in the near future.

Coal organizations are also doing community outreach and education about renewable energy sources to combat coal companies' strategies of equating coal to state-wide identity and success. Through OVEC, a former teacher presented curriculum around renewable energy, climate science and solutions, and the connections between resource extraction and students at the West Virginia Science Teachers Association Conference.⁶³ Resources and curriculum are available for teachers to use. In another vein, CRMW has a Coal River Environmental Education for Kids program that brings children outside for hands on learning about their local environment, encouraging self-sufficiency outdoors and an understanding of the importance of a clean environment. Both of these programs directly combat the propaganda of Friends of Coal that works to naturalize coal in school. While these efforts might seem small in contrast to coal companies' enormous power in a corporate state, community based efforts that begin small and aim to create community power, knowledge, and self-sufficiency are crucial. It is clear that

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "About OVEC," [ohvec.org](https://ohvec.org/about-ovec/), accessed December 17, 2019, <https://ohvec.org/about-ovec/>

industries exploit and worsen economic desperation, so local projects are essential to increasing economic stability to reduce the perceived need for corporate intervention and to ensure community and environmental health.

In California during the 1990s, Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (ROC) took form as a coalition of mothers educating and organizing each other and community members around prison justice.⁶⁴ Originally formed in Los Angeles to stop the mass incarceration of young Black and Latino men, the group expanded throughout the decade to become a statewide effort that united mothers in urban and rural places who were impacted by the carceral state, including in the Central Valley where Corcoran lies. The group was multiracial, and focused on the disproportionate incarceration of Black and Brown people, but united along class lines. They worked to educate fellow poor, working women whose lives were impacted by incarceration, and to raise awareness around the connections between poverty, prison construction, and incarceration.⁶⁵ Mothers ROC was one of the first large, statewide organizations that organized against mass incarceration as California's prison economy boomed. Today, prison justice and abolition organizations around California and the broader country work with prisoners and around prison policy to demand justice and community based solutions to the exploitation of human bodies in the name of profit.

Conclusion

Wastelands and the economy versus environment/human rights dichotomy have been centuries in the making. We live in an era where the destruction of the landscapes and the people who inhabit them, as well as the incarceration of poor, Black, and Brown people are understood

⁶⁴ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007)

⁶⁵ Ibid.

as natural to progress. Corporate industries exploit unemployment and economic desperation to secure local power and become the only options for economic stability. In reality, the presence of industries does not provide economic salvation, but often worsens poverty in the places they take power. We stand at a tipping point, where corporate capitalism's desire for more natural and human resources is bringing us deeper into the climate and prison crises. In the face of corporate power that threatens the planet and its inhabitants, people on the front lines of corporate wastelands are rejecting the jobs versus environment and human rights dichotomy through resistance and local solutions. There has never been a more critical moment to fight corporate destruction with community alliances and connection to land.

Eliza Macy (she/her) is from Berkeley, CA and is an American Studies major and Environmental Studies minor. Although she does not know what she'll be doing after graduating, she is interested in doing environmental/climate justice work. She was introduced to some prison activism work in high school in California. Her grandfather and his family is from West Virginia, where they were farmers for generations, but that connection to the state sparked interest in its coal economy. In the Twin Cities she was introduced to the Stop Line 3 movement and has been working with MN350 on their Pipeline Resistance team. That's all to say, this project comes out of different regional connections and interests.

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