



OVERBURDEN CURRICULUM: POWER + PRIVILEGE
TWO-DAY WORKSHOP



**PARE LORENTZ
DOCUMENTARY FUND**
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THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL



POWER + PRIVILEGE WORKSHOP



Locals gather for a candlelight vigil three days after the Upper Big Branch mining disaster.

CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES

The OVERBURDEN team worked to create a film that (1) humanizes important issues that affect not only Appalachia but other disenfranchised regions in the U.S., (2) creates a conversation about corporate responsibility and economic justice, and (3) focuses our attention on the “othering” of the Appalachian people enabling the region to become a sacrifice zone of resource extraction.

Of course a prevalent conflict in the film is the coal industry’s destruction of the land through the mining process called Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining. Although this is an important issue, with more than a million acres of land destroyed since 2000 and the general consensus in the industry being that this is an acceptable “cost of doing business,” we will not delve too deeply into this environmental issue. Instead the intent of this curriculum is to explore the forces that cause the mindsets that allow this kind of destruction and ultimately the economic oppression that exists in Appalachia. To that end we will be exploring three major themes: Appalachia identity, economic justice, and corporate responsibility. By exploring these themes we hope to evade the typical environment versus industry debates and uncover not only the “Why?” behind issues affecting Appalachia but also some new ideas on how to avoid replicating the same mistakes in other communities around the country.

SESSION GUIDE

Session 1: Stereotypes and Identity

Exercise: Drawing Exercise
Discussion: Representation of the people of Appalachia
Video: Media clips of Appalachia stereotype
Discussion: Stereotypes, real or imagined?

Session 2: Film and Discussion

Film Screening, Overburden (65 minutes)
Break (10 minutes)
Discussion Prompts

Session 3: Economic Justice

Video: Hidden America Coal Segment
Video: Bill Price on economic justice: "Why are we so poor?"
Discussion Prompts: Poverty and the Mono-Economy
Exercise: "Yes, and..."

Session 4: Corporate Responsibility

Discussion: People versus profit
Discussion Prompts
Exercise: What if you are the CEO?

Session 5: Beyond Coal

Exercise: Learning from Mistakes
A Cautionary Tale: Fracking
Discussion Prompts: What have we learned?

ABOUT THE FILM

OVERBURDEN is a disarming and powerful new film that shows the human stories from coal country – including stunning events that will either divide or unify a community, its coal workers and their families. The story, unfolding over eight years, follows a fiery, pro-coal right-winger and a tenacious, environmentalist grandmother as they join forces to take on the most dangerous coal company in America. According to The Guardian, the coal industry is in a "terminal decline," leaving these communities facing an uncertain and dire future. OVERBURDEN is the first film of its kind to document the end of the age of coal and celebrate the heroes who are standing up to rebuild their fractured communities.

Learn more about the film:

www.overburdendocumentary.com



OVERBURDEN protagonist Rory McIlmoil stands atop an excavating machine on a surface mine site during the first protest held on Coal River Mountain in 2009.

MEET THE CHARACTERS



Lorelei Scarbro
Community Organizer

Scarbro, the daughter and granddaughter of coal miners, works in her community to bring people together in support of the Coal River Wind Campaign.



Betty Harrah
Pro-coal Advocate

Harrah, also the daughter and granddaughter of West Virginia coal miners, is a staunch supporter of the coal industry and advocate for mine safety.



Rory McIlmoil
Project Coordinator

After dreaming up the idea to build a wind farm in coal country, McIlmoil moves to West Virginia to lead the Coal River Wind Campaign.



Don Blankenship
CEO of Massey Energy

Blankenship was convicted of conspiracy charges after the Upper Big Branch mining Disaster of 2010.

SESSION ONE: Stereotypes and Identity

- **Exercise: Drawing exercise**
- **Discussion: Representation of the people of Appalachia**
- **View: Media clips of Appalachia stereotypes**
- **Discussion: Stereotypes, real or imagined?**

Exercise:

Draw a picture as you would imagine a person or place from Appalachia. (Or a “hillbilly” or “mountain people.”) Include the setting as well. This could be a home or landscape.

Discussion Prompts:

What are some of the ideas we hold about people from Appalachia? How did these come through in your representations of the people and the place?

What has formed these ideas of Appalachians and Appalachia?

Describe what you think a coal miner would be like. What do they care about? What issues are important to them?

Is “hillbilly” a derogatory term? What makes a label negative? How and who can use a term like this?



- 1) Charles Kuralt’s Christmas in Appalachia Intro, which aired in December 1964
- 2) Mountain Dew commercial (later reference in Hidden America Coal segment)
- 3) Aqua Teen Hunger Force Jiggle Billy
- 4) Simpsons Cletus character clip
- 5) Hidden America: Football Player (establishes poverty and drugs)

Discussion Prompts:

“What we see depends partly on what is there and partly on who is looking.” - James P. Carse

How do these videos make you feel about people from this region? What adjectives would you use to describe them? Give me one word. How are they different from you? How might they be like you?

What does it mean to “other” a person or a community?

If we see someone as different from us, does that allow us to distance ourselves from their experience and perhaps any negative impacts our lifestyles may have on their lives ?

How can stereotypes maintain the status quo? How do these stereotypes, often perpetuated by television and film, hinder productive responses to the issues that plague the communities?

Do stereotypes permit exploitation?

Appalachia is the second leading producer of coal in the U.S. Coal is often synonymous with Appalachia and the term “King Coal” is heard often in the region. Is it fair that one region and its people to bear the burden of energy production? Is this okay to do? Is this exploitation? Why or why not?

If we don't understand or relate to a people and their place, is it easier to exploit the land and the people?

What are stereotypes others may have about you, your family, your community?

What extent is your identity determined by where you are from, the money you make or the way the rest of the world views your community?



SESSION TWO: Film and Discussion

- **Film Screening, Overburden (65 minutes)**
- **Break (10 minutes)**
- **Discussion Prompts**

 **View: Overburden (65 minutes)**

Discussion Prompts:

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM

What did you learn from this movie? What insights did it provide?

Is this a positive film? Why or why not?

What if any resolutions did you see achieved in the film?

How is the story you saw in this film different from your original ideas of what Appalachia is like? Did it change your perceptions of the people and places of Appalachia?

How are the people and culture like those where you come from? How are they different?

Was there anything that you saw or heard in this movie that changed the way you think about Appalachia, West Virginia and coal miners?

Who are the people you identify with the most? Are you surprised this and why? What is it about them that lead you to relate to them or their experience?

If you could ask one of the people in the film a question whom would you ask and what would your question be?

Which character surprised you the most and how?

Was there a specific moment in the film that moved you or that you found troubling in some way? What was it about that scene that you found particularly compelling?

Think of three facts you learned in the film and explain how each fact relates to an important theme in the film.

Do you think the filmmaker is from Appalachia? Did you feel you were able to see what it's like to be an "insider" versus an "outsider" in this culture?

How are the issues presented in *Overburden* relevant to people living outside of Appalachia?

What themes in the film challenged you or had you asking further questions? With the complexity of the stories and situations presented, how might you respond to help move these communities forward in positive ways? What lingering thoughts do you have as a result of viewing this film?

What do you think of when you hear the term: “the common good”? In what ways does the actions of the coal company reveal a conflict between individual/private rights (which includes corporations) and the common good?

Think of a natural space that is important to you. Describe the connection you have to that place. How would you feel if that place was destroyed? Would it be worse if it was destroyed by humans instead of a natural cause? Why?



BETTY HARRAH

What was your reaction to Betty in the beginning of the film?

How did your feelings for Betty change by the end? What caused those changes?

What did you learn from Betty? Did she make you think differently about the issue?

Why do you think Betty is so committed to coal and the culture of coal?

Do you feel that Betty is blind to the realities of coal? Why?

Is there anything in your own life that you may not have realized that you are blind to?

Why would one choose to ignore harsh realities?

RORY MCILMOIL

Did you relate to Rory more than any other character? If so, why?

What were Rory's strengths? His weaknesses?

Why might someone like Rory not be accepted into the community?

If you wanted to get involved in community organizing and action, as Rory did, how would you approach relating to and connecting with community members?

LORELEI SCARBRO

Did you like Lorelei? Why or why not?

Lorelei was raised in coal country and is a coal miner's daughter, like many in Appalachia. Why do you think she took a stance against the coal industry?

Lorelei speaks of the "mono-economy" of Appalachia? What do you think this means and why is it such a critical issue in this region?



In the very last scene, when Lorelei and Betty are sitting at the table, what was your reaction to their realization that you have to discover "what you agree on" and work from there? How might you apply this to conflicts in your own community?

DON BLANKENSHIP

Don Blankenship, the CEO of Massey Energy, was indicted and then convicted on conspiracy charges. He is now serving one year in prison. Do you think this is justice? Why or why not?

Do you feel CEOs should be held responsible for the safety and lives of their employees?

Is it possible to safely run a company - even in a dangerous industry like coal mining - and still make a profit?

Is it okay to make less money to make a safer work environment?

SESSION THREE: Economic Justice

- View: A Hidden America: Coal Segment
- View: Bill Price on economic justice: “Why are we so poor?”
- Discussion: Poverty and the Mono-Economy
- Exercise: “Yes, and...”



- 1) A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains with Diane Sawyer: Coal segment
- 2) Bill Price on economic justice: “Why are we so poor?”

Discussion Prompts:

Inevitably unemployment, lack of education, poor health care, drug addiction, and inadequate housing are the reasons given by news organizations for why there is persistent poverty in Appalachia.

The media focuses intensely on poverty as the story of Appalachia but there seems to be little to no examination of why there is poverty, especially, as Bill Price states, “in a place that is so rich in minerals.” So who is profiting here anyway?

Okay, the coal industry is profiting. That’s okay right? Isn’t that the point of capitalism? Trickle down economics, provide jobs, lift the poor up, right?

What’s the minimum wage? \$7.25/hour most states. Little higher in Northeast. If you worked a 40 hour work week, you’d make \$14,500/year.

How much do you think coal miners make? Starting salary is \$60,000/year. They make about \$30/hour.

Which job would you want? But...

What if there is was a 1/100 chance that you could be killed on the job?

What if the work you did meant polluting the environment?

What if there is a chance that you could develop a terminal illness, ie Black Lung?

When is it not worth it anymore?

But what about your children? What about providing for your family? What about education for your children - because you want them to have more options than the coal mine or a minimum wage job.



PRIVILEGE DISCUSSION

Now, let's talk about you for a moment.

You have education. Sitting here in this school you are privileged, and you are on a path to being well-educated. Everyone agree with that?

So that has a value, correct?

Now what else do you have? You also have your labor. The work - your life's work - that you decide to put effort into. What are some things you want to do in your life's work? (Get a few answers.)

And what is the value of your labor? Let's say you want to be a doctor and save lives. That should be pretty valuable, right? Give me a number. What's the value of your labor?

Okay, I believe there is value in labor of craft as well. Does anyone want to work with your hands?

What do you want to do? Make furniture?

What's the value of your labor?

What if you want to be a painter? Does anyone want to be an artist? How do we uncover the value of your labor? The hours it takes to create a piece of art? Well, I could make a pretty horrific painting that could take months to make! Why should that have more value than a painting created in 30 minutes?

So, then how do we define value of labor? Perhaps: the quality of the product, the education that it took to get there, the fortune of birth?

If you choose to work a higher paying job, knowing the risks associated with it, then is that ok? It's your choice to make right? You can't blame the company or industry for that, right? What if you live in a place where your only options are minimum wage jobs, unemployment, or working in a higher wage/high risk job? You're technically making the choice on your own, right? But is that ok? Is that capitalism, free will or exploitation?

But what if the company could prevent dangers – like Black Lung disease or explosive materials in the mines? When is the company to be held accountable? And can higher worker pay free them of that responsibility?

If all humans have labor to offer and we do all have something to offer, why does Appalachia have the highest rates of poverty in the country? We are back at Bill Price's question: "Why are we so poor?"

Is it their own capacity to work? Are they lazy? Is it a lack of available opportunities? Does their labor not have value?

Why is the Appalachia region the poorest in the country? Is it because of structural and system



"If we didn't have mining in West Virginia this state would be nothing," Betty Harrah said. "They can't make a living at McDonald's. Seven and a quarter an hour is not going to raise your family."



The daughter of an anti-mountaintop removal activist waits as her mother inspects a reclaimed mountaintop removal site in near Kayford Mountain in West Virginia.

frameworks that have been crafted over the centuries?

What might those systems be? (Coal, politics and the mono-economy)

Appalachia's rural poor have been put under sociological and psychological microscopes many times over the last 150 years. Basically, two theories have been offered for their poverty. The culture of poverty theory directs attention inward to the capacities and habits of the poor themselves. In contrast, a structural theory focuses attention on the relationship between poverty and the corporate economy within Appalachia – especially in its coal regions. (Daily Yonder)



**View Graphic: 1) Poverty Rates in relation to Mining Operations
2) Distressed Counties of Appalachia**

Who gains to benefit if the people in Appalachia remain poor? How would they benefit? Is this fair or unfair to the people living there?



- 1) Christmas in Appalachia Goldie
- 2) Overburden clip of Lorelei mirroring Goldie's quote
- 3) "The world with plenty and us with nothing." Goldie Johnson
- 4) "Carrying the wealth of Appalachia away."

THE MONO-ECONOMY

Once the region was established as a one-industry (coal) economy, the population became dependent on that industry for employment. You have few options in the region. You can work for the coal company- for \$60-\$80K per year - or you can work at Walmart or Dairy Queen for minimum wage.



- 1) Overburden clip: Betty speaks about economic issues

Once the industry mechanized, tens of thousands of jobs were cut leaving the unemployed with very few options. Many people left their homes and moved to the steel belt in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

In the 1990s the mechanization reached a new level with the introduction of Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining (MTR), reducing the need for workers even more and leading to increased environmental degradation. By 2000 over one million acres of Appalachian mountains had been altered, if not destroyed, through the process of MTR.

In the first session we asked you about places you love and how you would feel if they were altered or destroyed. Let's take it a step further: What would you do if your only employment option was to mine coal on a MTR site - blowing up the very place you love. Could you do that? Why or why not?

How could the coal industry do this "the right way?"

Is this situation created solely by the coal industry? Who else may be playing a part in the mono-economy?

Yes, the politicians, the public leaders. How? What role do they play? Why would they create policy

"Coal is life here. Coal is family. Coal is college education. Coal is a way of keeping people off the welfare line. Coal is king here."

– Betty Harrah

and regulations that benefit the industry over the people?

Legendary economist Jane Jacobs suggested that “to seek the ‘causes’ of poverty...is to enter an intellectual dead-end because poverty has no causes. Only prosperity has causes.”

If this is the case, what do you believe the causes of prosperity may be?

And why has prosperity not come to Appalachia?

1) A Hidden America: Children of the Mountains with Diane Sawyer: Drugs Segment

Exercise: “Yes, and...”

Using a “Yes, and...” protocol is a common tool used in design thinking sessions to generate positive, collaborative relationships as well as a list of ideas. After screenings of the film, facilitators are often asked: “What are we supposed to do now?”

To develop possible next steps to extend education about economic justice, have people identify one idea that they might act upon in their community. Then have them work in pairs and do the following:

The first partner pitches their action idea, and the second partner must respond with an idea about what they might do to support the pitched idea by saying “Yes, and _____ ...”

Then the first partner responds to that idea by saying “Yes, and _____ ...”

Let partners work through this round for one to two minutes before repeating the process with the second partner pitching their idea.

For example, Partner One might begin with the idea: “We can write a letter to our representative about supporting a living wage for everyone in our community.”

Then Partner Two might respond: “Yes, and we can open it up and have people in our schools, neighborhoods and families write letters too.”

Then Partner One might respond: “Yes, and we can organize a rally in our community to bring attention to the issue.”

Then Partner Two might respond: “Yes, and we can get the media there to cover the event and let the community know that this is an important issue.”

SESSION FOUR: Corporate Responsibility

- Discussion: People versus profit (Safety, Commons, Wealth, Health)
- Discussion Prompts
- Exercise: What if you are the CEO?

Discussion Prompts:

If the people don't have other options for employment, what may the dangers be? What if the workplace is unsafe, can you complain? What if you lose your job?

Now you have to drive two hours, each way, to another mine to work, that's if you're not black-listed.

Do you believe workers should have the right to complain if they feel their workplace is unsafe?

Why would the management of a coal company risk running an unsafe mine and put their workers in danger?

How can a company create a safe working environment and also make a profit?

Do you believe a safe working environment should be a priority over making profit?

Why would a CEO, like Don Blankenship of Massey Energy, make decisions that put employees under his watch in danger?

Do you believe the CEO or other management officials should be held responsible for the actions of the companies they lead? If a worker is injured or killed on the job, is that the responsibility of the company? What about the people who organize and manage that company?

You learned in the film that Blankenship was eventually convicted in court for violating mine safety regulations. Do you believe Blankenship should be held responsible for the deaths of the 29 coal miners that worked at the Upper Big Branch mine? Was one year a fair sentence? What do you think his sentence should have been? What would be fair? How much is a life worth?

Exercise: Class Stratification

Instructions: Participants must be seated in traditional classroom rows. Start by giving each student a scrap piece of paper and ask them to write their name on it and then wad it up. Place a waste paper basket in the front of the room.

The game is simple — you all represent the population of a community in Appalachia. And everyone has a chance to get an education and get a good job, right?

To get the best job and make the most money, all you have to do is hit the basket while sitting in your seat.

Students in the back of the room may immediately state that this is unfair. There are three rows of students in front of them and they have a much better shot at the best education and best jobs.

Everyone takes their shot, and — as expected — students in the front are more likely to hit the basket. The closer you are to the basket, the better your odds at making it. This is what privilege looks like.

Did you notice how the only ones who complained about fairness were in the back of the room? By contrast, people in the front of the room were less likely to be aware of the privilege they were born into. All they can see is 10 feet between them and their goal.”

Your job — as students who are receiving an education — is to be aware of your privilege. And use this particular privilege called “education” to do your best to achieve great things, all the while advocating for those in the rows behind you.

Now we are going to assign you jobs based on how close you got to the basket.

Determine - based on who hit the basket first - who is CEO, then managers, coal miners and finally minimum wage workers.

Assigned roles (students help define their responsibilities):

CEO	Vice President	Mine Managers
Coal miners	Minimum Wage Workers	

Deliver prompts and have them make decisions based on how they handle the situations. Possible prompts include:

- 1) Drop in coal prices. (Responsibility: CEO)
Options: layoff 10% of miners or close one mine.
Impacts: Unemployment increases. Poverty increases. Some coal miners become minimum wage workers.

- 2) Methane gas leak detected in a coal mine. (Responsibility: Mine Manager)
Options: Evacuate the mine until leak is contained or have miners move to safer part of the mine.
Impacts: Loss of production = loss of money. CEO backlash. Stockholders angry. CEO salary cut.
- 3) Purchase new, advanced safety gear. (Responsibility: CEO)
Options: Could save lives. Costs
- 4) Wear respirator in the mine. (Responsibility: Coal Miners)
Options: Yes, but cumbersome when working 12 hours in a mine. Or choose to not wear the respirator and risk of Black Lung.
Impacts: Possible Black Lung. Medical costs. Early death.
Fact: Black Lung rates have increased to 1970s rates and 22 of the 29 miners killed at UBB had varying stages of Black Lung.
- 5) Company just leased 5000 acres of a nearby mountain to mine using mountaintop removal methods. (Responsibility: CEO, VP and Mine Managers)
Options: Yes or no.
Impacts: Highly mechanized but you can hire small team of miners. Intense environmental impact (topsoil, trees, ecosystem). Environmental organizations will target the company. Community below the mountain will have potential negative impacts - homes damaged from blasting, polluted wells, increased flooding. Anger could rise within the community. Where will you get the miners?
- 6) MTR nearby (Minimum Wage Workers)
Impacts: The coal company decided to mine near you - adjacent to your property. You lose your water supply, property is suffers damage, unable to sell property, live daily with blasting sounds and air pollution. They offer you no compensation.
Options: Accept this or fight. But what challenges might one face?

“If the coal industry is so good for us, why are we so poor?”

– Bill Price, Sierra Club Community Organizer

SESSION FIVE: Beyond Coal

- **Exercise: Learning from Our Mistakes**
- **A Cautionary Tale: Fracking**
- **Discussion: What have we learned?**

Exercise: Learning from Our Mistakes

In design thinking, failure is an opportunity to learn by working through iterative cycles that often result in significantly better ideas. Understanding failure as a tool that can encourage honest growth in learning difficult lessons by removing any cloak of perfection.

Instructions: For this activity, have participants stand in a circle facing one another. Then have them verbally list any injustices caused by greed and/or corporate irresponsibility that come to mind. These situations may be the result of a company, like Massey Energy, cutting corners on safety leading to the deaths of workers, the BP Gulf oil spill, or the continued polluting of the Housatonic River by General Electric in the Berkshires by dumping PCBs right into the river.

What can we learn from these mistakes? Have these “accidents” occurred before? Why do they keep happening? And how can we improve future business ventures and projects?

When groups lose momentum in generating their lists, ask them to analyze what has been shared using these questions:

What common features did they notice about the policies and actions that were listed by their group?

Were any of the policies or actions failures because they lacked historical memory?

Did discussing the bad policies and actions lead to any insights about how to solve problems of racism and privilege?

Was anyone inspired to be more creative in developing solutions to corporate irresponsibility or economic injustices?

A Cautionary Tale: Fracking



Facts about Fracking

Discussion Prompts:

What is “fracking”?

Why is this method of extracting natural gas controversial?

What were some of the points made in favor of fracking?

What were some of the points made against the use of fracking?

Debate costs and benefits of fracking. Possible pros and cons:

Pros: Burns cleaner

Domestically available ... and there’s a lot of it

Doesn’t spill like oil

Cons: Releases methane

Chemicals - unknown to public (“industry secret”)

Pollutes groundwater

Linked to earthquakes

Still a fossil fuel

If you were running an energy company, or a politician let’s say heading up the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, what do you do? Should we be fracking? Why or why not?

Based on what we’ve learned from our mistakes with coal in Appalachia, how can you go into a community and extract natural gas in a way that does not disenfranchise the people or harm the environment?

Is it even possible?

Is this even the right question?

What lessons can we/have we learned from the past and how do they apply to the question of fracking?

Should we be moving beyond coal, oil and gas? How?

