



Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed: Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice

Shannon Elizabeth Bell

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Motivated by a deeply rooted sense of place and community, Appalachian women have long fought against the damaging effects of industrialization. In this collection of interviews, sociologist Shannon Elizabeth Bell presents the voices of twelve Central Appalachian women, environmental justice activists fighting against mountaintop removal mining and its devastating effects on public health, regional ecology, and community well-being.

Each woman narrates her own personal story of injustice and tells how that experience led her to activism. The interviews--a number of them illustrated by personal photographs--describe obstacles, lawsuits, and tragedies. But they also tell of new communities and personal transformations catalyzed through activism. Bell supplements each narrative with careful notes that aid the reader while amplifying the power and flow of the activists' stories. Bell's analysis outlines the interconnectedness of Appalachian women's activism and their roles as wives and mothers. Ultimately, Bell argues that these women draw upon a broader "protector identity" that both encompasses and extends the identity of motherhood that has often been associated with grassroots women's activism. As protectors, these women challenge dominant Appalachian gender expectations and guard not only their families, but also their homeplaces, their communities, their heritage, and the endangered mountains that surround them.

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