

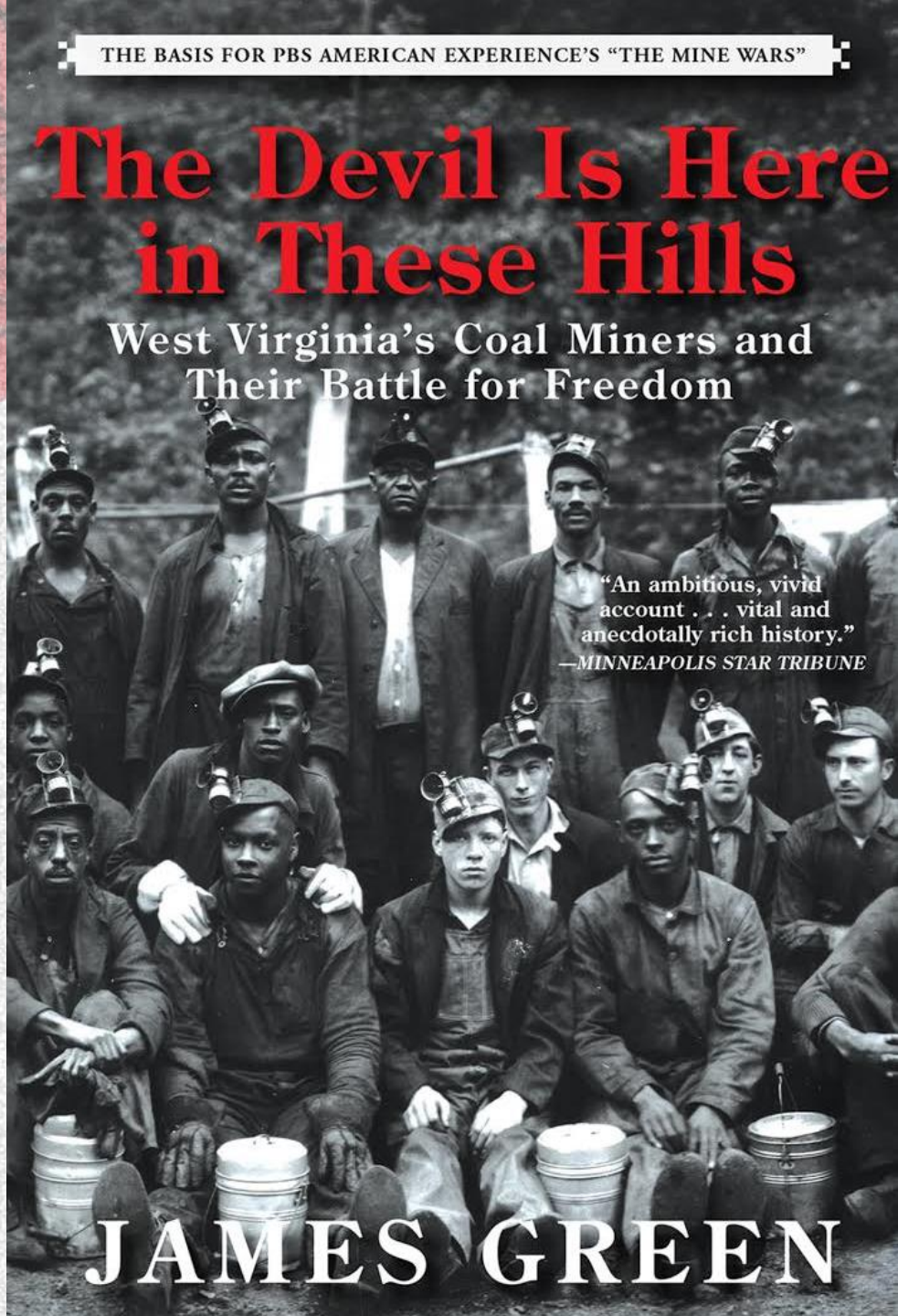
THE COAL WARS

Robin Happel

Lick Creek tent colony & red bandana from WV Mine Wars Museum collections

AGENDA

- Introduction
- Coals Wars History
- The Battle of Blair Mountain
- Legal Reforms





THE LABOR MOVEMENT ORIGINS OF A JUST TRANSITION

"A just transition means greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind."

International Labor Organization (ILO)

COAL COUNTRY A HUNDRED YEARS AGO



WEATHER

The Washington Times

THE NATIONAL DAILY

FINAL HOME EDITION

NUMBER 11,994. WASHINGTON, THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 1, 1921. THREE CENTS EVERYWHERE.

Full Disarmament Is Impossible---Harding

AIR FLEET ORDERED TO W. VA. BATTLEFIELD

Small Cotton Crop Forecast

Miners' War District In West Virginia

Mountainous Country Where Men Are Fighting Shown Here.

CONDITION IS LOWEST ON RECORD

Unfavorable Weather and Ravages of Insects General in South.

Tokens Are 5 For 35 Cents Today

DISARM PARLEY DELEGATES TO BE ALLOWED LIQUOR

U. S. Prohibition Officials Will Make No Attempt to Stop Expected Flow of Rum.

PRESIDENT SAYS WARS WON'T END

Burdens of Armament Will Be Diminished Only, He Tells War College Students.

OHIO
CABELL
PUTNAM
CHARLESTON
KANAWHA
WAYNE
LINCOLN
BOONE
MADISON
LOGAN
WYOMING

AVIATORS WILL DROP BOMBS ON MARCHERS

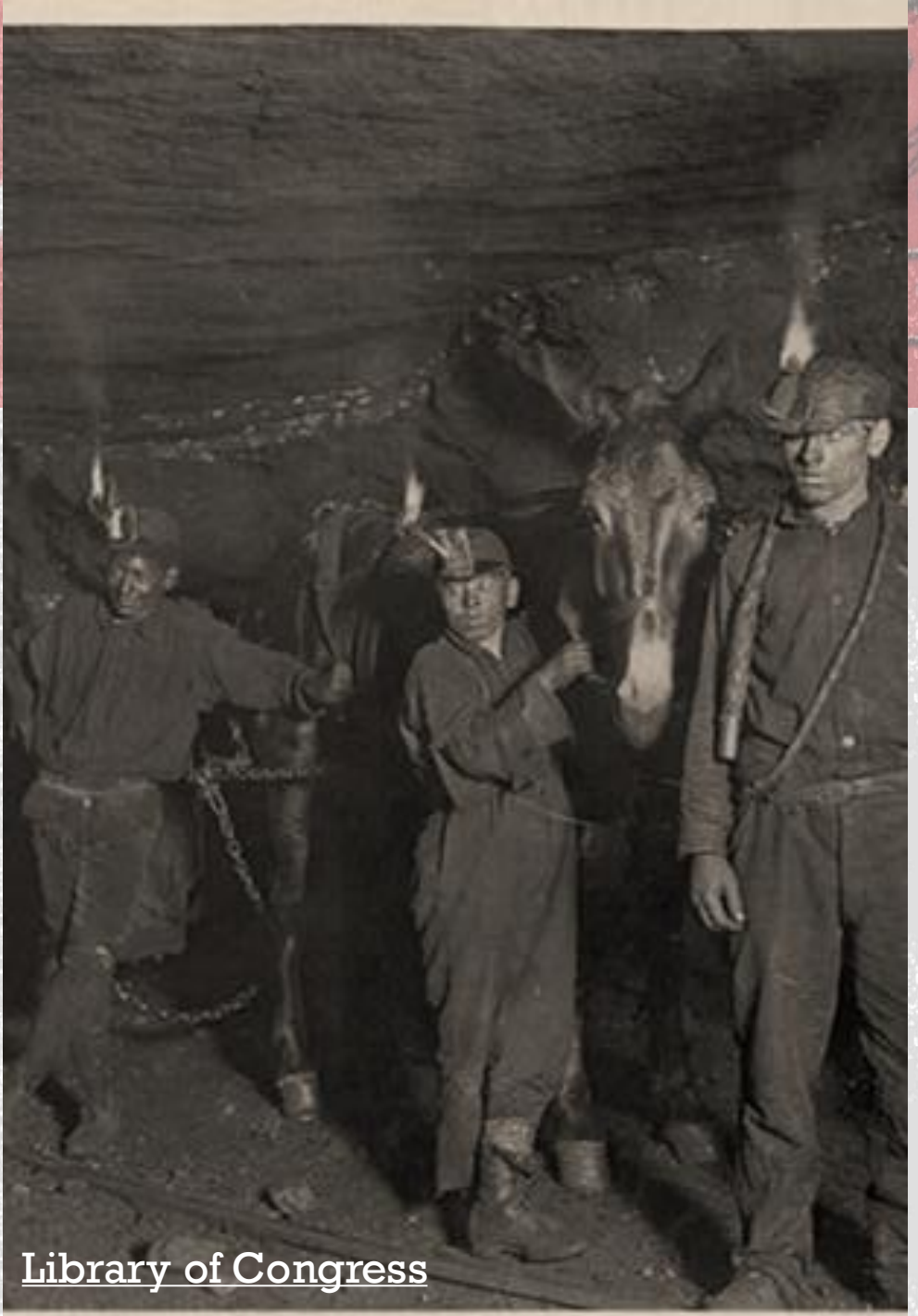
Fifty Miners Believed Killed in Attack on Machine Gun Nest Near Madison.

Photo link



LIFE IN A COMPANY TOWN

Coal companies controlled almost every facet of everyday life, and kept miners in debt by paying in scrip



Library of Congress

LABOR LAW AND LABOR RIGHTS

- Labor protections today did not exist in the 1920s
- Dangerous working conditions were a significant driver of labor organizing
- "Yellow dog" contracts forbid miners from unionizing

MINERS EVICTED
FROM COMPANY TOWNS
LIVED IN TENT CAMPS



LAW & ORDER IN WEST VIRGINIA

- Coal companies frequently employed private mercenaries or mine guards
- The August 1st, 1921 murder of popular local sheriff Sid Hatfield & deputy sheriff Ed Chambers by mine guards led directly to the Battle of Blair Mountain



Photo link



THE TRIAL OF SID HATFIELD

- "Smilin' Sid" supported unions
- May 19, 1920 – Matewan Massacre
- January 28, 1921 – murder trail of Sid Hatfield and co-defendants begins
- March 22, 1921 – jury acquits on murder charges; Hatfield's lawyer motioned for a change of venue on other charges, requiring a court appearance
- August 1, 1921 – killing of Sid Hatfield & Ed Chambers on the steps of McDowell County Courthouse by Baldwin-Felts detectives

THE BATTLE OF BLAIR MOUNTAIN

- The largest labor uprising in American history
- The largest armed uprising since the Civil War
- Many other labor strikes across Appalachia occurred around the same time period
- Library of Congress



THE INTELLIGENCER
Has the Largest Circulation of Any Morning Newspaper in the State of West Virginia.

The Wheeling Intelligencer.

WEATHER FORECAST FOR TODAY
Generally Fair Tuesday and Wednesday; Cooler Tuesday Afternoon or Night

VOLUME LXX., NO. 5 — WHEELING, W. VA., TUESDAY, AUGUST 30, 1921 — THREE CENTS

DEADLY BATTLE IS FEARED

Adjutant General and U. M. W. Official Report Grave Situation On Logan Border

U. S. TROOPS MAY BE ORDERED TO STATE

TREATY JOKER!

Are the Anti-Leaguers Outwitted in Negotiation of the U. S.-German Pact?

By DAVID LAWRENCE.

BIG GATHERING OF ARMED MEN: MAY CLASH WITH LOGAN OFFICERS

FRIENDS OF CAPTURED DEPUTIES RESENTFUL

Boone County Official Declares Situation Is Beyond Control of Authorities.

LARGE ACCESSIONS OF ARMED MEN TO BANDS

Threats Being Made to Launch Attack Upon the Logan County Deputies.

HEAD OF MINGO OPERATORS REPLIES TO LEWIS; CHARGES ACTS OF TREASON BY MARCHERS; DETECTIVES NOT EMPLOYED

Forty Machine Gunners Reported Surrounded On the Logan Border

MARMET MEN AGAIN MARCH TO THE FRONT

LOGAN COUNTY LINE THEIR OBJECTIVE

Include Hundreds of Men Who Were Turned Back Last Week.

DEPUTY OSBORNE NOT SLAIN BY MARCHING MINERS AS RUMORED

NO ACTION YET ON THE MORGAN REQUEST FOR U. S. TROOPS

GOVERNOR'S TELEGRAM HAS BEEN RECEIVED

War Department Will Await Advices From Its Representatives.

FIVE FOR EVERY JOB; 600 MEN GO TO WORK

Buffalo Man Suicides In Spectacular Manner, Going Over Cataract

LEWIS WOULD EXTEND AID TO END WARFARE

Head of U. M. W. Demands Disbandment of Armed Mine Guards.

GOV. MORGAN TELEGRAPHS TO PRESIDENT FOR SOLDIERS

DESCRIBES STATE OF INSURRECTION

Declares Forces of Deputies Will Be Unable to Repel Attack.

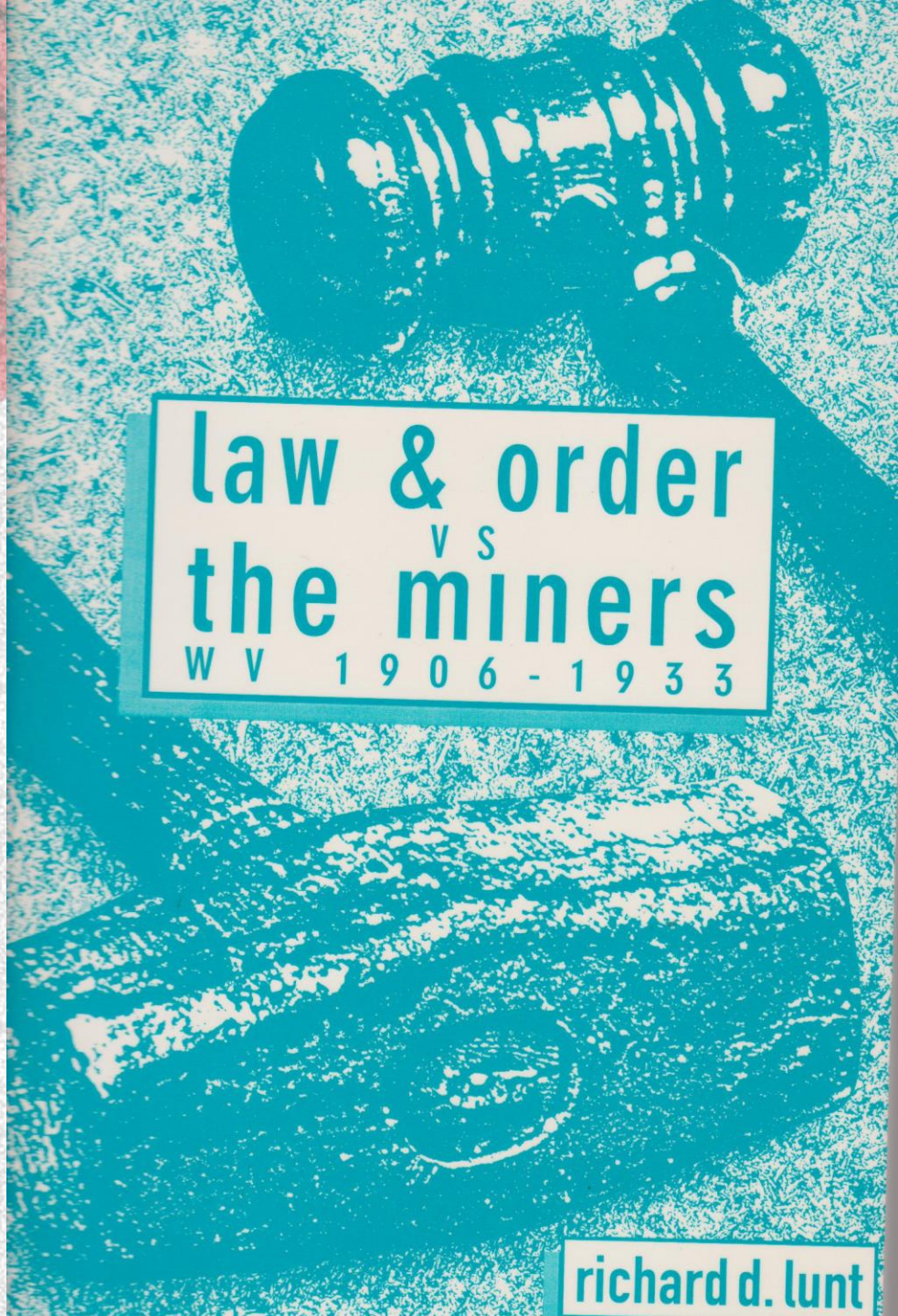


CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE COAL FIELDS

- Coal companies in the 1920s relied on racial divisions to discourage miners from unionizing
- During the Coal Wars, miners briefly desegregated parts of the South decades before the Civil Rights era
- Photo of the Lick Creek Tent Colony from the Library of Congress

TREASON TRIALS

- Many miners took a vow of secrecy to protect labor leaders from prosecution
- Jury nullification was also a factor in local West Virginia courts
- Battle of Blair Mountain Treason Trial Records





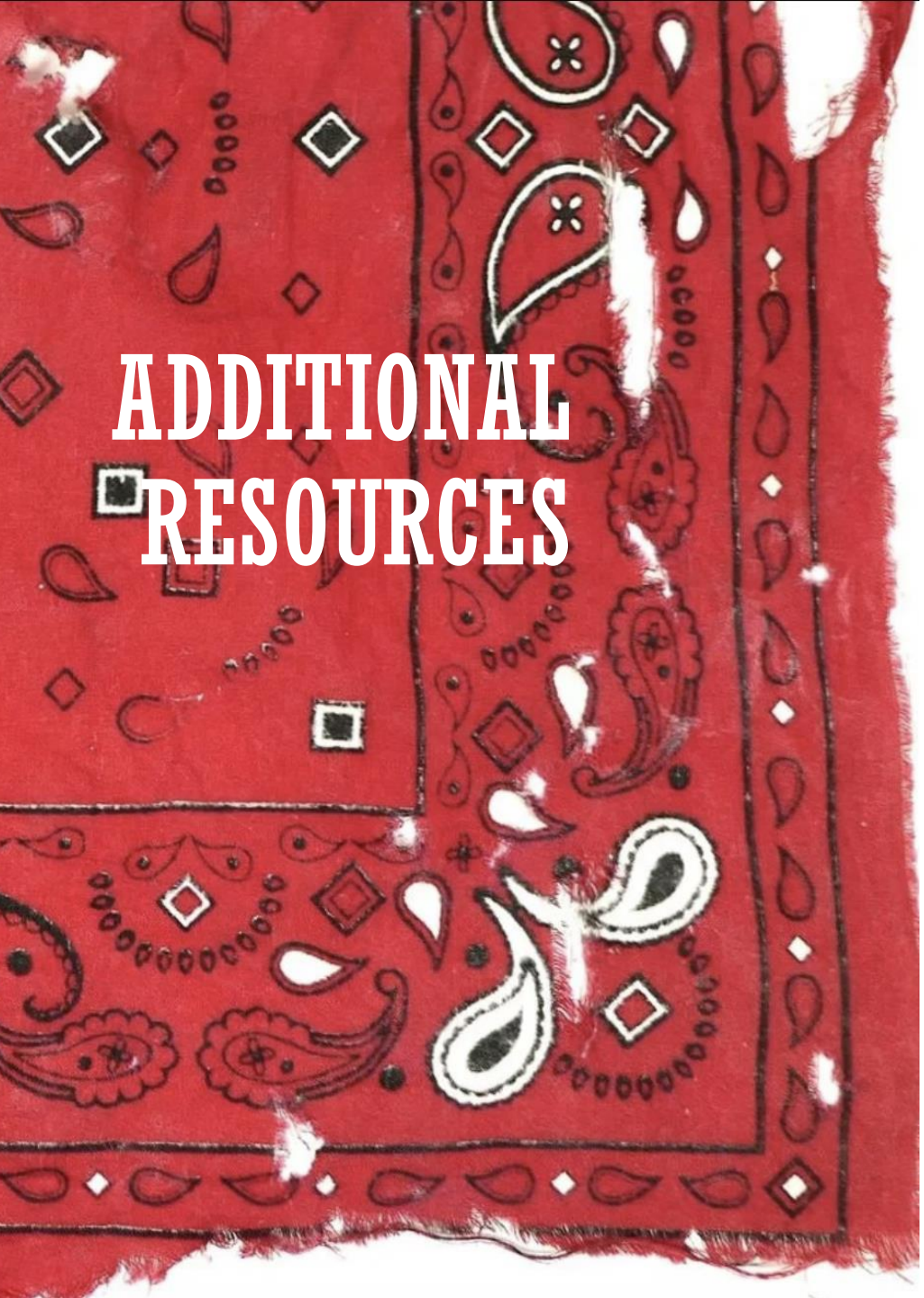
LATER LEGAL REFORMS

- 1932 – Norris-LaGuardia Act banned "yellow dog" contracts (*Adair v. U.S.*, 208 U.S. 161 (1908) and *Coppage v. Kansas*, 236 U.S. 1 (1915) previously upheld their legality)
- 1933 – National Industrial Recovery Act protected collective bargaining
- 1935 – National Labor Relations Act
- 1969 – Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act
- 1972 – Black Lung Benefits Act



LEGACY

The Battle of Blair Mountain was largely erased from popular history, but in recent years there has been an effort to preserve its memory



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- https://scholarship.richmond.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/lawreview/article/3419/&path_info=McGinley_Master_Copy.pdf
- https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/forgotten-matewan-massacre-was-epicenter-20th-century-mine-wars-180963026/
- https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/mcdowell-county-courthouse.htm
- https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/battle-blair-mountain-largest-labor-uprising-american-history-180978520/
- https://lawcha.org/2023/11/10/media-and-memory-the-battle-of-blair-mountain/
- https://blairmountainreenactment.wordpress.com/tag/bull-moose-special/
- https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/jefferson-county-courthouse-treason-trials.htm

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- https://wvminewars.org/news/battleofmatewantrial
- https://www.nytimes.com/1921/03/22/archives/jury-acquits-16-of-coal-strike-murder-finds-sid-hatfield-and-others.html
- https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/jones/autobiography/autobiography.html
- https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-blair-mountain
- https://wvencyclopedia.org/entries/260
- https://energyhistory.yale.edu/coal-mining-and-labor-conflict/
- https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/theminewars/
- https://wvminewars.org/news/lickcreek

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- https://wvminewars.org/news/2023/8/25/remembering-blair-mountain
- https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/mother-jones.htm
- https://retrospectjournal.com/2021/11/08/the-battle-of-blair-mountain-the-forgotten-us-insurrection/
- https://omekas.lib.wvu.edu/home/s/media-coverage-of-the-battle-of-blair-mountain/page/west-virginia-newspapers