Caring for Creation
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in Religion and Resistance in Appalachia: Faith and the Fight Against Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining

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This chapter examines theocentric (or god-centered) perspectives against mountaintop removal, including evangelical Christian visions of Creation Care and Stewardship ethics. The Creation Care movement is most often associated with evangelical Christians in the United States. Supporters of this movement generally argue that over-exploitation of natural resources and increased pollution are violations of a biblical mandate for humanity to be good stewards of the natural world. From this perspective, mountaintop removal is problematic not only because of the harm it does to human communities, but also because it is seen as a violation of the mandate of stewardship. The chapter examines several individuals and organizations, including Christians for the Mountains, that offer this perspective in their work against mountaintop removal.

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This volume examines the complex roles of religious values and perceptions of place in the efforts of twenty-first-century anti-mountaintop removal activists in Appalachia. Applying theoretical insights from religious studies, Appalachian studies, and critical regionalism, the work charts how views of Appalachian place were transformed and revised through activism and how different religious threads were involved in that process, weaving together patterns of meaning and significance to help motivate activist efforts and reshape
visions of Appalachia. The specific religious threads examined include Catholic and mainline Protestant visions of eco-justice (or religiously inspired arguments in support of social and environmental justice), evangelical Christian views of Creation Care (a term encompassing multiple visions of theocentric stewardship ethics), and forms of nature-venerating spirituality (including spiritual and religious proponents of biocentric ethics and “dark green religion”). These religious perspectives encountered friction with other perspectives, structures, and practices, generating new perspectives on the issue formed from physical interactions between diverse stakeholders as well as new visions for Appalachia in a post-mountaintop removal future. The work points to ways that scholars might continue to analyze the interconnections between local religious values and perceptions of place, influencing further studies in the interdisciplinary field of religion and nature, place studies, and social movements.