

Effects of Coal Mining on the Environment and Economics

Watch the Coal in Kentucky Documentary by the University of Kentucky and answer the questions below:

1. What are the pros and cons of mining for their local communities and globally both economically and environmentally?
2. There are concerns presented about coal's effect on the environment and health and economic benefits for workers and society that seem to conflict. Do arguments made attempt to diminish or silence concerns? Do the concerns need to be in opposition?
3. Consider information presented as fact. Is it a logical argument or fallacy?
For example, examine this statement: "When you realize that 50% of all of electricity in the US comes from coal, it would be almost impossible to replace that with renewable energy" (43:15-25). This statement focuses on valid concerns about the dramatic shift in industry, that would greatly impact coal workers and their families. However, while this statement presents evidence of what is being used and how much, it does not serve as evidence that other forms of energy could not be as or more successful and widespread.
What other statements that appear to be presented as facts stand out to you? What are the underlying and valid concerns? Is the argument logical? If not, how could the concern be addressed logically without silencing other concerns or possible solutions?

4. Refer to our archive and examine the letters. What concerns about economics, personally and socially, are present. How does it relate to present day concerns?
5. Examining the letters, what may not be explicitly the subject matter but still present? Are their environmental concerns? Are their health concerns?
6. Look for potential power dynamics. What personal interests or capability might the Governor have in the concerns presented to him? Are their concerns presented about coal companies? Who is affected but may not be able to represent themselves?
7. The letters that document poverty does not seem to illustrate that wealth from mining trickled down to the laborers. How does this lend to questions about power dynamics within economics? Are similar power dynamics are presented in the documentary regarding to things now?
8. One letter's mentioning a lack of food presents concerns about health, (can you spot which one?). Are there other implications of health concerns?