

The Battle of Blair Mountain:
The Revolution Against Oppression that Shocked America Forever

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Senior Division

Historical Paper

Paper: 2,500

Process Paper: 500

Process Paper

Standing in College Park, Maryland, at the National History Day National Contest, I felt like I had reached the summit. Months of late nights, revisions, and pressure had led to this moment. And instead of feeling finished, I left wanting more. That drive pushed me back to my desk, determined not just to return to Nationals but to improve my project. That motivation led me to the Battle of Blair Mountain.

While exploring topics connected to this year's theme of Revolution, Reaction, and Reform, I discovered a story that felt largely forgotten. In 1921, over 10,000 coal miners in West Virginia took up arms against coal companies in the largest labor uprising since the Civil War. They marched for union recognition and basic rights, facing armed resistance and aerial bombardment—the first time civilians in the United States were attacked from the air. Despite its scale, the event is rarely discussed in standard history courses, making it even more important to research.

Research became the most demanding part of the project. I relied on the West Virginia Encyclopedia for foundational context on the Mine Wars and key events. Archival photograph collections from West Virginia University helped visualize miners, encampments, and mountainous terrain. Newspaper archives from the 1920s showed how differently the uprising was portrayed depending on political bias, requiring comparison. I also studied oral histories preserved in West Virginia University collections, which provided perspectives missing from official records. Congressional testimony and court documents clarified the legal and political response. One key secondary source was Robert Shogan's *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising*, which emphasized how government intervention often aligned with coal operators, explaining broader patterns of labor conflict.

Each source added complexity: mining community structure, the influence of coal companies and private security forces, and debates over workers' constitutional rights. Instead of one clear narrative, I found competing interpretations that forced me to evaluate bias and reliability.

Writing was equally challenging because of the amount of material available. Condensing everything into 2,500 words required difficult decisions about what to include. I removed sections, including background detail and parts of the battle description, to keep my argument focused. Feedback from previous judges reinforced that clarity matters more than completeness.

The revision process taught discipline and precision. I spent hours refining the structure, tightening evidence, and strengthening transitions. When others dismissed the project as “just a school assignment,” I thought about miners marching under American flags, insisting they were citizens demanding constitutional rights. Their story demanded my best effort.

My historical argument is that the Battle of Blair Mountain represents the cycle of Revolution, Reaction, and Reform. The miners' demand for union rights met violent reactions through corporate force, federal intervention, and mass arrests. Yet this exposed deep injustice in American labor systems. Within a decade, New Deal reforms strengthened protections for workers and legitimized unions. The miners lost the battle, but their struggle helped drive reforms that reshaped labor rights in the United States.

“We didn’t have nothing but our guns and our guts. But we had to stand. We just had to.”

- Ed Reynolds

Miner and Battle Participant of Blair Mountain

In the summer of 1921, the mountains of West Virginia echoed not with birdsong but with shots of gunfire. On August 24, 10,000 coal miners, rifles in hand, marched toward Logan County in what would become the largest armed uprising since the Civil War.¹ Yet they were not radicals seeking to overthrow the government. They were men who had run out of options.

For decades, coal companies had controlled nearly every aspect of miners’ lives through a system designed to trap them. They were paid in scrip, a company currency, rather than real wages, which forced families to buy even basic necessities at company stores—where coal companies could inflate prices and push them deeper into debt.² Increasingly, company-owned housing became leverage—even one complaint or missed shift could mean eviction within hours, enforced by the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, a ruthless private security force hired by coal companies to evict families, break strikes, and intimidate union organizers.³ Below ground, explosions and black lung killed miners regularly, and operators dismissed these deaths as acceptable costs of production.⁴ It was clear that the law offered no protection whatsoever. At that moment, the question surfaced: What recourse remains when the law serves only the powerful? For these miners, it was resistance.

The Battle of Blair Mountain stands as one of history’s biggest paradoxes: a revolution that failed yet ultimately succeeded. When the government responded to this movement by

¹ Cole, Merle T. “Martial Law in West Virginia and Major Davis as ‘Emperor of Tug River’.” *West Virginia History*, vol. 43, no. 2, 1982, pp. 118–144

² Lee, Howard Burton. *Bloodletting in Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia’s Four Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields*. West Virginia University, 1969.

³ Miller, Rodney A. *Battle of Blair Mountain*. West Virginia State College, n.d.
www.wvstatecollege.edu/blair-mountain

⁴ *Ibid*

sending federal troops and warplanes to crush workers instead of protecting them, the miners were forced to back down, signaling a crushing defeat.⁵ Yet the brutality of that suppression—bombing American workers and prosecuting them for demanding basic rights—exposed a system where corporate power dominated government authority, and where workers had little protection.⁶ Within a decade, President Frederick D. Roosevelt signed New Deal reforms that dismantled the corporate feudalism that provoked the march, guaranteeing workers' rights to organize and ending company towns.⁷ In doing so, Blair Mountain revealed a powerful truth: revolution provokes reaction, and even when suppressed, can ignite reforms that reshape the balance between power and rights for years to come.

The “Coal Rush”

Before oil-fueled engines and electricity lit cities, coal powered the world. By the early 1900s, southern West Virginia sat atop one of America's richest coal reserves, an estimated 117 billion tons.⁸ Between 1880 and 1920, production exploded from 600,000 tons to over 89 million tons annually, enriching operators like Consolidation Coal Company and Bethlehem Steel, while families who extracted the coal saw little prosperity.⁹

⁵ “Recognizing Mine and Labor History.” NEH for All

⁶ Laurie, Clayton D. “The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy in Labor Dispute Interventions: The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars, 1920–1921.” *West Virginia History*, vol. 50, 1991, pp. 1–24

⁷ Miller, Rodney A. *Battle of Blair Mountain*. West Virginia State College, n.d. www.wvstatecollege.edu/blair-mountain

⁸ “Blair Mountain Battle Resumed.” *Huntington Advertiser*, 1 Sept. 1921

⁹ Shogan, Robert. *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising*. New York: Atlantic Press, 2004

Underground, death was constant. Between 1900 and 1920, over 5,000 West Virginia miners died in explosions and roof collapses—an average of more than 250 deaths per year.¹⁰ Thousands more suffered from black lung disease, their lungs slowly destroyed by coal dust.¹¹

And the hardship didn't end there. When a miner died or became too sick to work, his family faced immediate destitution. Eviction from company housing came within days, cutting off access to shelter and the company store.¹² In coal-dominated communities where operators controlled all housing and employment, widows had few options: some took in boarders, cooking and cleaning for single miners in exchange for cash; others sent their children into the mines to replace their father's income, perpetuating the cycle of danger.¹³ Many families were simply forced to leave the region entirely, joining the thousands who fled West Virginia's coalfields for Northern cities in search of survival.¹⁴

In 1890, rival miners' organizations merged to form the United Mine Workers of America to demand safer conditions, fair wages, and collective bargaining rights.¹⁵ By 1917, when Frank Keeney became president of UMW District 17, thousands of miners had joined, and signs of organized resistance were growing.¹⁶ Miners passed union pamphlets secretly, and neighbors sheltered evicted families.¹⁷ Though small, these acts threatened coal companies' profits,

¹⁰ Shogan, Robert. *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising*. New York: Atlantic Press, 2004

¹¹ Hall, Roger, and Mary Hufford. *Mining on Blair Mountain*. 1995. Library of Congress

¹² "The Battle of Blair Mountain." *American Experience: The Mine Wars*, PBS, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/theminewars/

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ Murray, Philip. *The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Workers: Opening Statement*. United Mine Workers of America, 1921.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ Hadsell, Richard M., and William E. Coffey. "From Law and Order to Class Warfare: Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Fields." *West Virginia History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1979, pp. 268–286

¹⁷ *Ibid*

weakening their control over workers and risking strikes.¹⁸ In response, operators used overwhelming force: Baldwin-Felts agents broke strikes, evicted families, and patrolled camps with rifles, even monitoring conversations to intimidate miners, justifying their actions as “protect[ing] our interests...to know what our men are doing, what they’re talking about.”¹⁹ As one company lawyer said: “It is like a servant lives at your house. If the servant leaves your employment, if you discharge him, you ask him to get out of the servants’ quarters. It is a question of master and servant.”²⁰ The question now was whether someone would emerge brave—or reckless—enough to challenge that power.

A Spark of Hope

The answer emerged not from a union organizer or outside agitator, but from an unlikely source within the system itself. Sid Hatfield had worked as a miner in the West Virginia coalfields before establishing himself as a small business owner in Matewan.²¹ In 1919, Mayor Cabell Testerman, a union sympathizer, appointed him police chief of the mining town after seeing Hatfield’s reputation as a respected member of the community. Coal operators assumed he would carry out evictions like other local lawmen, but Hatfield defied expectations.²²

When the United Mine Workers launched an organizing drive in early 1920, over 3,000 Mingo County miners joined.²³ Coal companies responded by firing union members and

¹⁸ Shogan, Robert. *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising*. New York: Atlantic Press, 2004

¹⁹ “Battle of Blair Mountain.” *West Virginia Encyclopedia*

²⁰ Lunt, Richard D. *Law and Order vs. the Miners: West Virginia, 1907–1933*. Appalachian Editions, 1979.

²¹ Shogan, Robert. *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America’s Largest Labor Uprising*. New York: Atlantic Press, 2004

²² Murray, Philip. *The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Workers: Opening Statement*. United Mine Workers of America, 1921.

²³ Lunt, Richard D. *Law and Order vs. the Miners: West Virginia, 1907–1933*. Appalachian Editions, 1979.

deploying Baldwin-Felts agents to evict them from company housing.²⁴ Yet Hatfield refused to cooperate. He allowed union meetings to continue and protected miners from company enforcers, triggering a broader reaction from the coal operators.²⁵

Hatfield's defiance inspired the region.²⁶ Organizers who once met in secret now held open rallies in the streets, and at the Stone Mountain Coal Company mines, every worker unionized and walked off the job, bringing production to a halt.²⁷ Alarmed by the loss of control, coal companies escalated their response: additional Baldwin-Felts agents were sent throughout Mingo County, while Sheriff Don Chafin in neighboring Logan County assembled a private army of deputies, paid directly by coal operators, to block union activity.²⁸ Detectives infiltrated meetings, compiled membership lists, and coordinated mass evictions.²⁹

Yet the suppression backfired. When Baldwin-Felts agents raided the Lick Creek tent colony (see Appendix A) in late June, destroying tents and arresting miners, the brutal action showed families firsthand the coal companies' willingness to punish those who organized.³⁰ By mid-1920, this outrage had pushed southern West Virginia to the brink of open warfare between miners demanding recognition and operators determined to crush them by any means necessary.³¹

Massacre at Matewan

²⁴ Hadsell, Richard M., and William E. Coffey. "From Law and Order to Class Warfare: Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Fields." *West Virginia History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1979, pp. 268–286

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ "The Battle of Blair Mountain." *American Experience: The Mine Wars*, PBS, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/theminewars/

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ "Fighting Is in Progress at Merrimac in Mingo; One Attacker Is Killed." *Huntington Advertiser*, 3 Sept. 1921

²⁹ "Battle of Blair Mountain." *West Virginia Encyclopedia*

³⁰ "45 Arrested Miners Say," *Charleston Gazette*, 12 July. 1921.

³¹ Hadsell, Richard M., and William E. Coffey. "From Law and Order to Class Warfare: Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Fields." *West Virginia History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1979, pp. 268–286

On May 19, 1920, thirteen Baldwin-Felts agents arrived in Matewan to evict families from company housing.³² Led by brothers Albert and Lee Felts, the agents went door-to-door, throwing furniture into the street and forcing women and children from their homes.³³ When word reached Hatfield, he confronted the agents on Matewan's main street, claiming their eviction warrants were invalid.³⁴ What happened next remains disputed, but witnesses agree that someone fired a shot, triggering a gunfight that left ten men dead within minutes: both Felts brothers, five other agents, Mayor Cabell Testerman, and two miners.³⁵

The "Matewan Massacre" made national headlines, triggering a broader reaction from coal operators and authorities.³⁶ Labor journalist Winthrop Lane wrote that the bloodshed had exposed "the brutal reality of America's coalfields."³⁷ However, coal operators demanded Hatfield's arrest for murder, with 22 other defendants facing charges for the deaths of Albert Felts and the other Baldwin-Felts agents.³⁸ The trial became a national spectacle, with conflicting testimonies over who fired first. After less than an hour of deliberation, the jury acquitted all defendants, concluding there was reasonable doubt about their guilt and accepting that Hatfield and the others may have acted in self-defense, especially given the miners' reputation in the community and the aggressive tactics of the Baldwin-Felts agents.³⁹ The Charleston Gazette celebrated: "Justice has been done. Sid Hatfield defended his town and its people, and a jury of

³² "Battle of Blair Mountain." West Virginia Encyclopedia

³³ Hadsell, Richard M., and William E. Coffey. "From Law and Order to Class Warfare: Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Fields." West Virginia History, vol. 40, no. 3, 1979, pp. 268–286

³⁴ "Battle of Blair Mountain." West Virginia Encyclopedia

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Murray, Philip. The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Workers: Opening Statement. United Mine Workers of America, 1921.

³⁷ Corbin, David Alan, editor. The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology. Appalachian Editions, 1990

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ The Butte Daily Bulletin. 7 July 1920, p. 3. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/sn83045085/1920-07-07/ed-1/

his peers had vindicated him.”⁴⁰ Because of this, union membership surged from fewer than 5,000 in early 1920 to over 50,000 by mid-1921.⁴¹ For the first time, miners believed they could win.

But Hatfield’s fame also made him a target. Baldwin-Felts agents attempted multiple assassinations, all unsuccessful.⁴² And one day, their patience had paid off.⁴³

The Breaking Point

On August 1, 1921, Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers went to the McDowell County courthouse in Welch to face murder and other charges tied to union conflicts, including the Matewan Massacre.⁴⁴ As they climbed the steps, Baldwin-Felts detectives opened fire.⁴⁵ Hatfield was killed on the steps, and Chambers was wounded.⁴⁶ The gunmen claimed self-defense, and despite testimony that both had been shot in the back, no one was convicted.⁴⁷ This brought the miners a clear-cut realization: they were not safe.⁴⁸

News of the assassination spread quickly, sparking revolutionary mobilization among miners. They gathered at union halls in Lens Creek, Marmet, and Madison, armed with rifles, shotguns, and pistols, tying red bandanas around their necks for identification—earning the name

⁴⁰ “45 Arrested Miners Say,” *Charleston Gazette*, 12 July. 1921.

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² Murray, Philip. *The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Workers: Opening Statement*. United Mine Workers of America, 1921.

⁴³ *Greenbrier Independent*. 27 Aug. 1920. Library of Congress

⁴⁴ Hadsell, Richard M., and William E. Coffey. “From Law and Order to Class Warfare: Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Fields.” *West Virginia History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1979, pp. 268–286

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Fisher, Lucy Lee. “John J. Cornwell, Governor of West Virginia, 1917–1921.” *West Virginia History*, vol. 24, nos. 3–4, 1963, pp. 258–288, 370–389

⁴⁸ *Operators Association of the Williamson Field. Statement Made by the Operators’ Association of the Williamson Field*. Washington, DC, 1921.

“rednecks.”⁴⁹ “It is time to lay down the bible and take up the rifle,” miner and Baptist reverend John Wilburn declared.⁵⁰ By late August, over 10,000 armed miners had assembled.⁵¹ Led by union organizer Bill Blizzard, they marched under American flags, insisting they were not revolutionaries but citizens demanding rights already guaranteed to them.⁵²

Their destination was Mingo County (see Appendix B), where union miners had been imprisoned under martial law—but to get there, they had to pass through Logan County, controlled by Sheriff Don Chafin, who blocked union organizers, jailed activists, and patrolled company property on behalf of coal operators.⁵³ Miners made their anger clear, reportedly singing, ‘we’ll hang Don Chafin from a sour apple [tree],’ an ominous warning to the man enforcing company rule.⁵⁴ The miners had three stated aims: free the imprisoned Mingo miners, end the martial law strangling union organizing in the region, and seek justice for Hatfield’s murder after the courts had failed to deliver it.⁵⁵ Washington took notice, prompting a reaction from the federal government.⁵⁶ President Harding issued two proclamations ordering the miners to disperse, characterizing the march as an insurrection, and authorized the deployment of Army troops, even raising the possibility of using military aircraft against the marchers.⁵⁷ The UMWA leadership, pressured by both the rank and file and the federal threat, urged miners to stand down with promises of a congressional investigation.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Aliff, Joe, and Mary Hufford. Origin of the Term “Redneck.” 1995. Library of Congress

⁵⁰ Andrews, Evan. “The Battle of Blair Mountain | HISTORY.” *HISTORY*, 28 May 2025

⁵¹ The Butte Daily Bulletin. 7 July 1920, p. 3. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/sn83045085/1920-07-07/ed-1/

⁵² Corbin, David Alan, editor. *The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology*. Appalachian Editions, 1990.

⁵³ Greenbrier Independent. 27 Aug. 1920. Library of Congress

⁵⁴ Andrews, Evan. “The Battle of Blair Mountain | HISTORY.” *HISTORY*, 28 May 2025

⁵⁵ Miller, Rodney A. Battle of Blair Mountain. West Virginia State College, n.d. www.wvstatecollege.edu/blair-mountain

⁵⁶ Buttino, Lou. *The Battle of Blair Mountain*. s.l., n.p., n.d.

⁵⁷ Corbin, David Alan, editor. *The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology*. Appalachian Editions, 1990.

⁵⁸ Ibid

But the pause lasted only days. Reports of arrests and violence by Chafin's forces showed the promises were empty. In response, Bill Blizzard, the union organizer leading the effort, rallied the miners who had stayed assembled in the coalfield towns back onto the roads toward Logan County.⁵⁹ What began as a demand for legal protection had become an armed revolt.

A Battle for the Centuries

On August 25, 1921, armed miners crossed into Logan County. Sheriff Don Chafin had prepared defensive positions along Blair Mountain's ridges, deploying nearly 3,000 men—deputy sheriffs, Baldwin-Felts detectives, and volunteers armed and paid by coal companies.⁶⁰ What followed became the largest armed insurrection in the United States since the Civil War.⁶¹

The battle lasted five days across a 15-mile front.⁶² Miners advanced through mountainous terrain, exchanging fire with Chafin's forces entrenched along the ridgelines.⁶³ "Machine guns cracked up there so you would think the whole place was coming down on you," miner Ira Wilson later recalled.⁶⁴ Estimates suggest 50 to 100 men died, though exact numbers remain unknown as coal companies buried bodies quickly and wounded miners fled to avoid arrest.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ "The West Virginia Mine Wars." West Virginia Archives & History

⁶⁰ Operators Association of the Williamson Field. Statement Made by the Operators' Association of the Williamson Field. Washington, DC, 1921

⁶¹ Corbin, David Alan, editor. *The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology*. Appalachian Editions, 1990.

⁶² United States, Department of War. Report on Federal Troop Deployment During the West Virginia Disturbances. Washington, DC, 1921.

⁶³ "General Fighting Along All Boone-Logan Front Is Expected to Follow." *Huntington Advertiser*, 1 Sept. 1921.

⁶⁴ Andrews, Evan. "The Battle of Blair Mountain | HISTORY." *HISTORY*, 28 May 2025

⁶⁵ "Troops Arrive in West Virginia; Miners Begin to Disperse." *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 1921.

Coal operators escalated the conflict in unprecedented ways. Private planes piloted by World War I veterans hired by the companies dropped homemade bombs and gas on miners' positions, marking the first time American civilians were bombed from the air on U.S. soil.⁶⁶ President Warren G. Harding, pressured by coal operators and West Virginia Governor Ephraim Morgan, declared the situation an insurrection, prompting a federal reaction.⁶⁷ On August 29, federal troops arrived with machine guns and artillery.⁶⁸ Faced with the U.S. Army, Bill Blizzard urged miners to surrender, warning that fighting federal troops would mean treason charges.⁶⁹ By September 4, miners laid down their weapons and returned home, defeated.⁷⁰

The immediate aftermath was brutal. Federal and state authorities arrested over 900 miners.⁷¹ Bill Blizzard and dozens of others faced treason and murder charges, with prosecutors claiming they had led an armed insurrection and were responsible for deaths during the Battle of Blair Mountain.⁷² The revolution had been crushed.

The Seeds of Reform

Yet defeat on Blair Mountain planted seeds that would reshape American labor. National newspapers documented coal company violence in unprecedented detail—photographs of

⁶⁶ Operators Association of the Williamson Field. Statement Made by the Operators' Association of the Williamson Field. Washington, DC, 1921

⁶⁷ The Laramie Republican. 31 Aug. 1921. Library of Congress

⁶⁸ United States, Department of War. Report on Federal Troop Deployment During the West Virginia Disturbances. Washington, DC, 1921.

⁶⁹ "Blizzard Held as Conspirator in Mine March." Charleston Gazette, 9 Nov. 1921

⁷⁰ "Troops Arrive in West Virginia; Miners Begin to Disperse." New York Times, 3 Sept. 1921. www.nytimes.com/1921/09/03/archives/troops-arrive-in-west-virginia-miners-begin-to-disperse.html

⁷¹ United States District Court, Southern District of West Virginia. United States v. Bill Blizzard et al. 1922. www.archives.gov/us-v-blizzard-1922

⁷² "Troops Arrive in West Virginia; Miners Begin to Disperse." New York Times, 3 Sept. 1921. www.nytimes.com/1921/09/03/archives/troops-arrive-in-west-virginia-miners-begin-to-disperse.html

workers bombed from planes and accounts of corporate tyranny reached millions who had never considered the conditions under which their coal was mined.⁷³ Public opinion began to shift.

The battle exposed contradictions that American democracy could not ignore. How could a nation that fought for democracy abroad tolerate corporate feudalism at home? How could American citizens be bombed for demanding basic rights? These questions haunted the 1920s and exploded during the Great Depression, when economic collapse discredited the corporate capitalism Blair Mountain had come to symbolize.⁷⁴

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal swept away the legal framework that had allowed coal companies to dominate workers, implementing sweeping labor reforms.⁷⁵ The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (Wagner Act) guaranteed workers' right to organize and prohibited the corporate repression that had sparked events like Blair Mountain.⁷⁶ The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 established minimum wage and hour protections, while the Federal Mine Safety Act enforced safety regulations that operators had long ignored.⁷⁷ Company towns gradually disappeared, replaced by independent communities where workers could live without corporate control.⁷⁸

The United Mine Workers, nearly destroyed in 1921, rebounded to become one of America's most powerful unions.⁷⁹ By 1933, organizers returned to Logan County under federal protection, and Sheriff Chafin—whose power had depended on coal company domination and

⁷³ "The Battle of Blair Mountain." American Experience: The Mine Wars, PBS, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/theminewars/

⁷⁴ Shogan, Robert. *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising*. New York: Atlantic Press, 2004

⁷⁵ "The Legacy of Blair Mountain: The Persevering Fight for Workers' Rights a Century Later." WCHS-TV

⁷⁶ "Blair 100." West Virginia Mine Wars Museum

⁷⁷ "Battle of Blair Mountain – Still Being Waged." The Cultural Landscape Foundation

⁷⁸ "The Legacy of Blair Mountain: The Persevering Fight for Workers' Rights a Century Later." WCHS-TV

⁷⁹ "America's Largest Labor Uprising: The Battle of Blair Mountain." History.com, A&E Television Networks

the suppression of unions—was voted out in 1932 as New Deal reforms dismantled corporate control and gave workers the freedom to organize and participate in local politics.⁸⁰ As labor historian Robert Shogan observed, “Blair Mountain taught the nation that the question is not whether the government will intervene in labor disputes, but on whose side.”⁸¹

Conclusion

Blair Mountain was more than an armed uprising—it was a reckoning. It revealed a moment when desperation met overwhelming force, and the demand for basic rights was answered with bombs and treason charges. The government and coal operators believed they had won: federal troops crushed the miners, hundreds were indicted, and union membership collapsed. On paper, the revolution was finished.

Yet the battle exposed the true face of unchecked corporate power. It forced the nation to confront the conditions workers endured, sparking reforms that finally enshrined protections for labor, and the coalfields were gradually unionized. In the end, Blair Mountain embodied one of history’s most enduring cycles: revolution sparks reaction, and reaction forces reform, even if decades too late. The miners never received the justice they demanded, but their struggle permanently reshaped labor in America, proving that those who lose battles can still win wars.

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ “West Virginia Mine War Ends; Leaders Arrested.” Washington Post, 4 Sept. 1921.

Appendix A

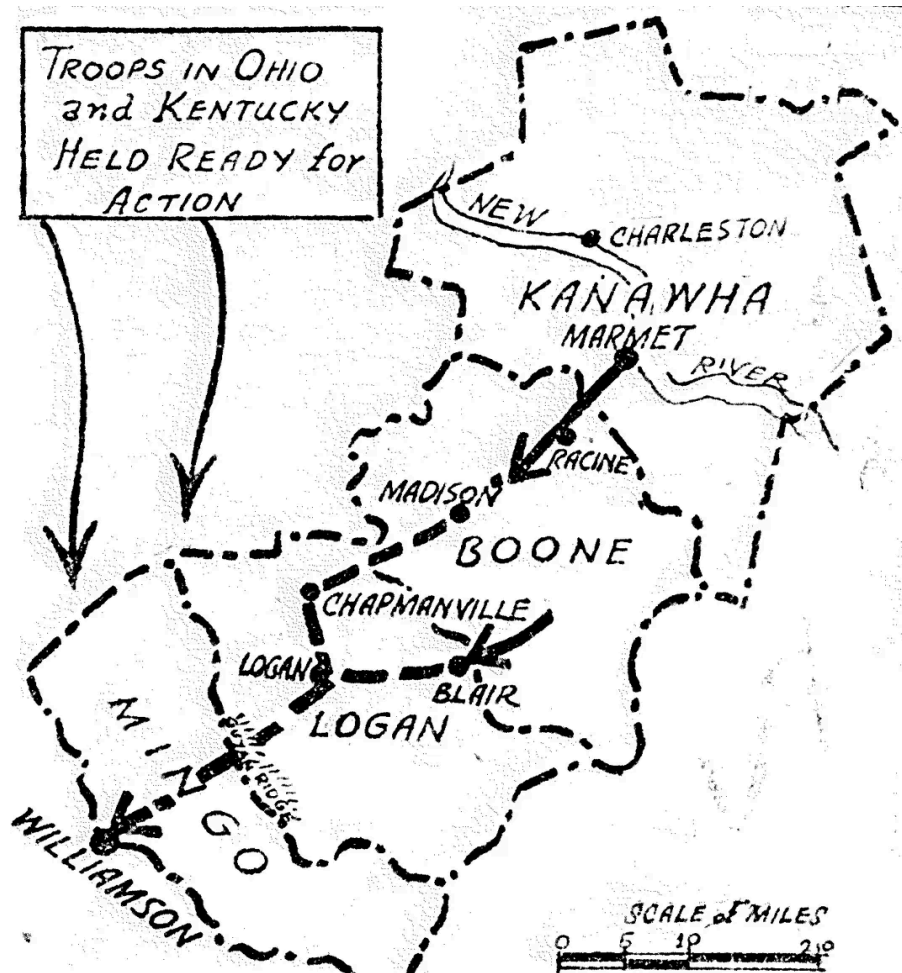


Evicted miners' families in Mingo County, WV.

Mine, WV. "West Virginia Mine Wars Museum." *West Virginia Mine Wars Museum*, 16 Aug.

2024, wvminewars.org/news/battleofblair.

Appendix B



Marchers' path to Mingo County

Hood, Abby Lee. "What Made the Battle of Blair Mountain the Largest Labor Uprising in American

History." *Smithsonian Magazine*, 25 Aug. 2021,

www.smithsonianmag.com/history/battle-blair-mountain-largest-labor-uprising-american-history-180978

Annotated Bibliography

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Aliff, Joe, and Mary Hufford. Origin of the Term “Redneck.” 1995. Library of Congress,
www.loc.gov/item/cmns002092/

This oral history helped me understand how cultural identity among miners developed during the march on Blair Mountain, especially through symbols like red bandanas. It provided insight into how miners’ self-identification influenced later interpretations of the term “redneck,” showing that it originally came from lived labor practices rather than outside labeling. It also helped me see how memory and oral tradition shape how historical events are understood over time.

“Blair Mountain Battle Resumed.” Huntington Advertiser, 1 Sept. 1921.

omekas.lib.wvu.edu/home/s/The-Battle-of-Blair-Mountain-Through-The-Press-and-Media/page/Federal-Troops-and-Aviation-Called-to-Quell-Uprising.

This article helped me understand how quickly the Battle of Blair Mountain escalated once fighting began across the region. It gave detailed reporting on shifting control of mountain positions, showing how fragmented and widespread the conflict was. It also revealed how contemporary journalism tracked unfolding violence in real time rather than as a finished historical narrative.

“Blizzard Held as Conspirator in Mine March.” Charleston Gazette, 9 Nov. 1921.

www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/518

This source helped me understand how the conflict was reinterpreted after it ended, especially through the symbolic framing of events. It showed how journalists reshaped the story by attributing meaning and causes in hindsight rather than reporting immediate

facts. It also helped me see how public memory of the march was constructed through post-conflict narratives.

“Fighting Is in Progress at Merrimac in Mingo; One Attacker Is Killed.” Huntington Advertiser, 3 Sept. 1921. www.wvu-historicalarchives.org/merrimac-fighting.

This article helped me understand that the battle was not a single confrontation but a series of localized clashes across mining communities. It provided geographic detail that showed how widespread the fighting became across Mingo County. It also helped me see the decentralized nature of the conflict as miners and law enforcement engaged in multiple locations.

“45 Arrested Miners Say,” Charleston Gazette, 12 July. 1921.

www.charlestongazettearchives.org/45-arrested-miners.

This article helped me understand the early stages of conflict between miners and authorities before the full march developed. It showed how quickly law enforcement responded to union organizing efforts, even before violence escalated. It also helped me see how early arrests contributed to growing tensions in the coalfields.

“General Fighting Along All Boone–Logan Front Is Expected to Follow.” Huntington Advertiser, 1 Sept. 1921. www.wvu-historicalarchives.org/boone-logan-fighting.

This source helped me understand how newspapers anticipated the scale of the conflict before it fully unfolded. It reflected expectations of widespread violence, which influenced how both the public and officials prepared for escalation. It also helped me see how media speculation shaped perceptions of instability in the region.

Greenbrier Independent. 27 Aug. 1920. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/sn84037217/1920-08-27/ed-1/.

This newspaper helped me understand that labor tensions in West Virginia existed long before the 1921 march. It provided context showing ongoing disputes between miners and coal operators that built toward open conflict. It also helped me see the uprising as part of a longer pattern of labor unrest rather than a single event.

Hall, Roger, and Mary Hufford. Mining on Blair Mountain. 1995. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/cmns001790/.

This oral history helped me understand how the Battle of Blair Mountain affected long-term community identity in the region. It provided perspectives on how residents remembered the conflict decades later, especially its emotional and cultural impact. It also helped me connect the historical event to its lasting legacy in Appalachian memory.

Murray, Philip. The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Workers: Opening Statement. United Mine Workers of America, 1921.

www.umwa.org/resources/murray-case-wv-coal-workers.

This statement helped me understand the miners' perspective on labor conditions and their justification for organizing. It provided insight into grievances involving wages, safety, and employer control over daily life. It also helped me see how union leadership framed the conflict as a defense of constitutional and labor rights.

Operators Association of the Williamson Field. Statement Made by the Operators' Association of the Williamson Field. Washington, DC, 1921.

www.coaloperatorsarchives.org/williamson-statement.

This document helped me understand how coal operators justified their opposition to union organizing. It showed how they emphasized property rights, economic stability,

and legal authority to defend their actions. It also helped me understand the ideological divide between corporate power and labor demands.

The Butte Daily Bulletin. 7 July 1920, p. 3. Library of Congress,
www.loc.gov/item/sn83045085/1920-07-07/ed-1/.

This article helped me understand that labor conflict in the coal industry was not isolated to West Virginia. It provided a broader context showing similar disputes occurring across the United States during the same period. It also helped me place the Battle of Blair Mountain within a national pattern of labor unrest.

The Laramie Republican. 31 Aug. 1921. Library of Congress,
www.loc.gov/item/sn92066979/1921-08-31/ed-1/

This newspaper helped me understand how regions outside Appalachia interpreted the events in West Virginia. It showed how distance shaped reporting, often emphasizing general disorder rather than specific local causes. It also helped me compare regional perspectives on labor conflict.

“Troops Arrive in West Virginia; Miners Begin to Disperse.” New York Times, 3 Sept. 1921.

This article helped me understand how the national media framed federal intervention in the conflict. It emphasized restoration of order, showing a government-centered interpretation of events. It also helped me compare national narratives with local reporting from West Virginia newspapers.

United States, Department of War. Report on Federal Troop Deployment During the West Virginia Disturbances. Washington, DC, 1921.

www.archives.gov/federal-troop-deployment-wv1921.

This report helped me understand how the federal government justified intervention in the miners' conflict. It framed the situation as a threat to national stability rather than a local labor dispute. It also helped me analyze how legal language was used to legitimize military involvement.

United States District Court, Southern District of West Virginia. *United States v. Bill Blizzard et al.* 1922. www.archives.gov/us-v-blizzard-1922.

These court records helped me understand how the government prosecuted miners after the battle ended. They showed how the conflict extended into the legal system through accusations of insurrection. They also helped me see how the aftermath shaped interpretations of the miners' actions.

"West Virginia Mine War Ends; Leaders Arrested." *Washington Post*, 4 Sept. 1921.

www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1921/09/04/wv-mine-war-ends.

This article helped me understand how national newspapers portrayed the end of the conflict. It emphasized arrests and restoration of order, focusing on authority rather than miners' motivations. It also helped me see how closure was framed in national media.

Secondary Sources

"America's Largest Labor Uprising: The Battle of Blair Mountain." History.com, A&E

Television Networks,

www.history.com/articles/americas-largest-labor-uprising-the-battle-of-blair-mountain

This source helped me understand a clear national overview of the Battle of Blair Mountain and its major events. It provided a simplified explanation of causes, timeline, and outcomes that helped verify key facts. It also helped me place my research within a broader mainstream historical interpretation.

Andrews, Evan. "The Battle of Blair Mountain | HISTORY." *HISTORY*, 28 May 2025, www.history.com/articles/americas-largest-labor-uprising-the-battle-of-blair-mountain.

This article provides a clear overview of the Battle of Blair Mountain, including the Matewan Massacre, the miners' march, and the ensuing conflict with coal company forces. It highlights the miners' experiences, motivations, and resilience, offering quotes and firsthand perspectives that show their courage and response to oppressive conditions. The source helped me understand the causes, key events, and immediate consequences of the uprising.

"Battle of Blair Mountain." West Virginia Encyclopedia, www.wvencyclopedia.org/entries/502.

This entry helped me understand the regional historical context of the Mine Wars and key individuals involved. It provided background knowledge that clarified terminology and local political conditions. It also helped me ensure accuracy in my interpretation of the conflict.

"Battle of Blair Mountain – Still Being Waged." The Cultural Landscape Foundation, www.tclf.org/battle-blair-mountain-still-being-waged.

This source helped me understand how the battlefield is still contested in preservation debates today. It showed how historical memory continues to influence land use and public recognition. It also helped me see the long-term significance of the event beyond 1921.

“Blair 100.” West Virginia Mine Wars Museum, wvminewars.org/blair100.

This source helped me understand how the centennial of the battle was commemorated by historians and communities. It provided insight into how the event is remembered and interpreted in modern contexts. It also helped me connect historical analysis to public memory.

Buttino, Lou. *The Battle of Blair Mountain*. s.l., n.p., n.d.

www.appalachianhistory.org/blair-mountain-buttino.

This book helped me understand the sequence of events and major developments during the battle. It provided a narrative structure that clarified how different groups moved and interacted during the conflict. It also helped me connect individual experiences to the larger historical event.

Cole, Merle T. “Martial Law in West Virginia and Major Davis as ‘Emperor of Tug River’.”

West Virginia History, vol. 43, no. 2, 1982, pp. 118–144.

www.wvhistoryjournal.org/martial-law-davis.

This article helped me understand how martial law was used during the mine wars to control labor unrest. It explained how military authority was applied in civilian disputes. It also helped me understand the tension between law enforcement and workers.

Corbin, David Alan, editor. *The West Virginia Mine Wars: An Anthology*. Appalachian Editions, 1990. www.appalachianpress.org/wv-mine-wars-anthology.

This anthology helped me understand multiple scholarly interpretations of the mine wars. It provided different perspectives that showed how historians debate the causes and consequences of the conflict. It also helped me compare interpretations across sources.

Directors, Lawcha Board Of. "Media and Memory the Battle of Blair Mountain | LAWCHA."

LAWCHA, 5 Dec. 2023,

lawcha.org/2023/11/10/media-and-memory-the-battle-of-blair-mountain.

This article helped me understand the miners' experiences during the Blair Mountain uprising and how local and national media shaped public perception. It provided multiple perspectives on the causes and consequences of the conflict, including the role of race, ethnicity, and union organizing. It also helped me compare historical interpretations of labor struggles and the ways the events were remembered—or erased—over time.

Fisher, Lucy Lee. "John J. Cornwell, Governor of West Virginia, 1917–1921." *West Virginia History*, vol. 24, nos. 3–4, 1963, pp. 258–288, 370–389.

www.wvhistoryjournal.org/cornwell-governor.

This article helped me understand the role of state leadership in escalating or responding to the conflict. It showed how political decisions influenced both union activity and federal involvement. It also helped me understand the governor's influence on the crisis.

Hadsell, Richard M., and William E. Coffey. "From Law and Order to Class Warfare:

Baldwin-Felts Detectives in the Southern West Virginia Coal Fields." *West Virginia History*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1979, pp. 268–286.

www.wvhistoryjournal.org/baldwin-felts-detectives.

This article helped me understand how Baldwin-Felts detectives escalated labor conflict in West Virginia. It explained how private enforcement blurred the line between law enforcement and corporate interests. It also helped me understand how violence became embedded in labor disputes.

Miller, Rodney A. Battle of Blair Mountain. West Virginia State College, n.d.

www.wvstatecollege.edu/blair-mountain.

This book helped me understand the geography and troop movements of the battle. It provided visual and strategic detail that clarified how fighting unfolded across terrain. It also helped me understand the scale of the conflict.

Laurie, Clayton D. "The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy in Labor Dispute Interventions: The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars, 1920–1921." *West Virginia History*, vol. 50, 1991, pp. 1–24.

www.wvhistoryjournal.org/us-army-labor-intervention.

This article helped me understand federal labor intervention after World War I. It explained how national policy influenced decisions to deploy troops. It also helped me understand the broader political climate of the era.

Lee, Howard Burton. *Bloodletting in Appalachia: The Story of West Virginia's Four Mine Wars and Other Thrilling Incidents of Its Coal Fields*. West Virginia University, 1969.

www.wvupress.org/bloodletting-appalachia.

This book helped me understand that the mine wars were part of a longer pattern of repeated labor conflict in Appalachia. It showed continuity in violence and labor organizing across decades. It also helped me place Blair Mountain within a larger historical cycle.

Lunt, Richard D. *Law and Order vs. the Miners: West Virginia, 1907–1933*. Appalachian Editions, 1979. www.appalachianpress.org/law-order-vs-miners.

This book helped me understand how “law and order” language was used to justify suppressing miners. It showed how legal framing often supported corporate interests. It also helped me understand how authority was constructed rhetorically.

“Recognizing Mine and Labor History.” NEH for All,

www.nehforall.org/projects/recognizing-mine-and-labor-history.

This source helped me understand how labor history is preserved and funded through public programs. It showed how historical memory is actively maintained by institutions. It also helped me understand how preservation affects historical interpretation.

Shogan, Robert. *The Battle of Blair Mountain: The Story of America's Largest Labor Uprising*.

New York: Atlantic Press, 2004. www.atlanticpressbooks.org/blair-mountain-shogan

This book helped me understand the national significance of the battle within American labor history. It emphasized how government intervention often supported coal operators over miners. It also helped me connect the conflict to broader patterns of labor and political power.

“The Battle of Blair Mountain.” *American Experience: The Mine Wars*, PBS,

www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/theminewars/.

This source helped me understand how historians present the mine wars to general audiences. It provided a simplified interpretation of events and causes. It also helped me see how documentaries shape public understanding.

“The Legacy of Blair Mountain: The Persevering Fight for Workers’ Rights a Century Later.”

WCHS-TV,

wchstv.com/news/local/the-legacy-of-blair-mountain-the-persevering-fight-for-workers-rights-a-century-later.

This article helped me understand how the battle is connected to modern labor rights discussions. It showed how journalists link historical events to present-day issues. It also helped me understand the ongoing relevance of the conflict.

“The West Virginia Mine Wars.” West Virginia Archives & History,
archive.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh50-1.html.

This archive helped me understand how official historical institutions organize and present mine war documents. It provided curated materials that support my factual research. It also helped me verify interpretations across multiple sources.