

GLOBAL FORUM ON URBAN & REGIONAL RESILIENCE

Fall 2017 Seminar Series

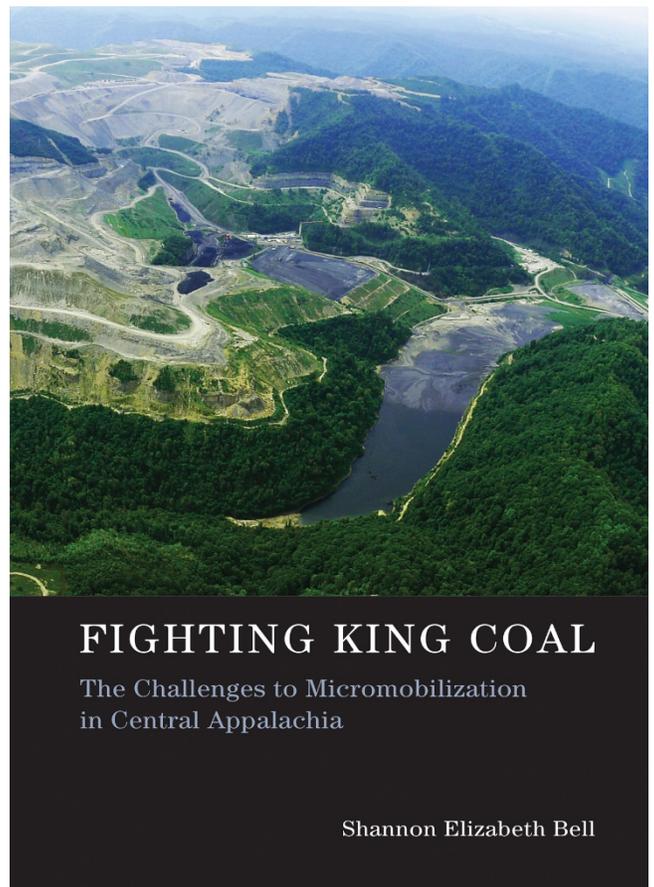
Thursday, December 7th | 3:30 PM

***** RECEPTION TO FOLLOW*****

Cultural Manipulation, Friends of Coal, and the Socially Constructed Barriers to Resilience in Central Appalachia

Dr. Shannon E. Bell
Associate Professor of Sociology, Virginia Tech

In Central Appalachia, where more than 1 million acres of land and over 500 mountains have been destroyed by mountaintop removal coal mining, residents suffer higher rates of birth defects, cancer, cardiovascular conditions, respiratory illnesses, and mortality than non-coal-mining areas. Alongside the rising public health and environmental costs associated with coal extraction has been a decline in the economic contributions made by the industry. For instance, in West Virginia – the top coal-producing state in Central Appalachia – the coal industry costs taxpayers more than it provides, and direct and indirect coal employment have been on the decline for decades, now only accounting for about 7 percent of jobs in the state. Despite these trends, the coal industry still maintains a political stranglehold on the region. How? Drawing on Chapter 5 of her recent book, *Fighting King Coal: The Challenges to Micromobilization in Central Appalachia*, Bell argues that part of the answer lies in the industry's cultural manipulation efforts to maintain and amplify the perception that coal production is not only integral to the economy of the region, but to the *identity* of its citizenry. Bell illustrates this process by analyzing the public relations efforts of the faux grassroots (or “astroturf”) organization Friends of Coal, which has constructed pro-coal ideology that has successfully penetrated the lifeworld, creating the perception of widespread coal-industry support through appropriating cultural icons that exploit the hegemonic masculinity of the region and through painting the social and physical landscape with Friends of Coal sponsorships and propaganda. These findings have implications for how industries around the country, and the world, work to maintain their power through ideological manipulation.



FIGHTING KING COAL

**The Challenges to Micromobilization
in Central Appalachia**

Shannon Elizabeth Bell

***LOCATION: Global Forum Conference Room, Suite 312,
Kent Square – 250 S. Main St***

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