

ABSTRACT

Working Across Lines:

Resisting Extreme Energy Extraction in Idaho and California

by

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In mid-2017, oil and gas extraction is expanding, particularly in the United States, even as average global temperatures reach all-time highs, and countries embark on the Paris Agreement, the global treaty to mitigate climate change. Much of this extraction is facilitated by extreme extraction techniques (such as fracking and tar sands development) that have negative health effects, contaminate water, and exacerbate climate change. How do everyday people respond to this contradiction?

This study examines how activists organized resistance to fracking and tar sands development—extreme energy extraction—in the U.S. states of Idaho and California between 2013 and 2016. The research relies on ethnographic participant observation with activist groups in both California and Idaho and 106 in-depth interviews with anti-extraction and climate justice activists. In this resistance, activists work across lines of political ideologies, social identities, and organizational forms.

Through investigation of group dynamics, strategies, tactics, and campaign outcomes within diverse geographic and political contexts, this study traces how activists practice *working across lines*. My data illustrate that *working across lines* is a method for creating inclusive and diverse organizations and social movements. *Working across lines* embraces

different practices in different locations, according to the social characteristics and cultures of particular communities. It relies on building relationships and finding common ground.

In southwest Idaho, residents of a rural, predominantly white region work across political lines to build nonpartisan opposition to Idaho's nascent natural gas industry. In the oil extraction county of Santa Barbara, California, college students explore how to make activism accessible to participants across lines based on configurations of identities and political commitments. Campaigns against the transportation of tar sands machinery via trucks and trailers known as megaloads in central and northern Idaho from 2011 to 2014, and the 2014 campaign against fracking in Santa Barbara County, California illustrate how success or failure in working across racial and ethnic lines shape social movement outcomes in legal, electoral, and movement-building realms. Finally, my interviews with activists who organize through staffed and funded organizations ("grasstops"), and with activists who are volunteers and rely on horizontal leadership structures ("grassroots"), reveal that working across organizational lines is also critical to cultivating a strong climate justice movement.

In sum, the dissertation demonstrates how activists in Idaho and California are developing creative ways to resist extreme energy extraction, deepening understanding of social responses to climate change and how social movements can build inclusive collective identities. I find that common values of justice, community wellbeing, integrity, and accountability, and an array of practices that people have developed to enact those values enable them to work across lines of difference—to build unlikely alliances, coalitions, and broad-based movements that are vital to realizing social justice within a changing climate.

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