

For Immediate Release

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**SASHA WATERS'S RAZING APPALACHIA
TO PREMIERE ON ITVS'S NEW SERIES *INDEPENDENT LENS* ON PBS**

**Documentary Explores Controversial Issue of Mountaintop Removal Mining in
West Virginia through the Eyes of Citizens**

**RAZING APPALACHIA Will Air Nationally on *Independent Lens*
On Tuesday, May 20, 2003 at 10 P.M.**

"Coal has been West Virginia's blessing and curse for the better part of a century."
— Michael Lipton, *The New York Times*

*"The coal companies of the past were greedy. The coal companies today are not only greedy,
they're ruthless."* — Freda Williams, Whitesville, WV

*"They're a bunch of extremists that won't settle for nothing less than the abolition of coal mining,
and they don't care who they hurt to get there. Who they're hurting here is coal miners and their
families."* — Terry Vance, Arch Coal Local 29–35

(San Francisco, CA)—Sasha Waters's powerful environmental documentary **RAZING APPALACHIA** explores the controversial issue of mountaintop removal mining by following a grassroots fight to stop the process in West Virginia. Set in the town of Blair, in Pigeonroost Hollow in the misty folds of the Appalachian Mountains, the film follows the journey of several families as they struggle to protect their land. Pigeonroost, with its narrow creek and crawdads, its wild ginseng and raccoons, looks as it might have a century ago—a woody haven tucked away from the marches of time and technology. But for how long? And at what price? **RAZING**

(over)



APPALACHIA will air nationally on PBS on Tuesday, May 20, 2003 at 10 P.M. (check local listings).

The fortunes and history of the people of West Virginia are virtually inseparable from coal mining. As long as anyone can remember, men have fought the mountains with pickax and shovel to dig out the shiny black rock that powers the ever-expanding energy demands of the United States. But those early miners never knew that one day 20-story tall machines called draglines would bite into the earth and move a hundred tons of rock at a time. Mountaintops (called “overlays” by the coal mining industry) are literally sliced off and thrown down into valleys and streams below in an effort to get at the coal buried deep inside.

In May 1998, Arch Coal, Inc. announced it would expand its Dal-Tex strip mine just above the small town of Blair. Rock and soil debris from a mountaintop mine stretching five square miles would bury Pigeonroost Hollow and creek. But lifetime residents said too many in their community had already been bought out or chased away by the gigantic mine. In the face of thunderous blasting and lung-choking dust caused by mountaintop mining, forty families—where there were once three hundred—stayed in Blair. **RAZING APPALACHIA** is the story of the remarkable fight between those families and the coal company, the state’s political leaders and the 400 union miners whose jobs were on the line.

The film also digs into the history of coal in West Virginia, the only state that lies entirely in Appalachia. Archival photographs and films, and testimony from miners and families whose lands are being irreparably altered by strip mining, reveal the harsh history of a place where backbreaking work, poverty and isolation have taken their toll. An all-but-forgotten historic event, the Battle of Blair Mountain, is documented—the only time in history that the United States government dropped bombs on its own people, during the fight to unionize the coal mines in 1921.

Following the completion of filming, this case is still being fought in the courts. In 2002, the Bush Administration came out in favor of mountaintop removal mining. Chief Judge Charles H. Haden II of the Southern District of West Virginia and families from across the state continue to oppose it.

(more)

FACT SHEET

- West Virginia has 4% of the coal in the world. The U.S. has 21.1% of the world total.
- In 2000, almost 170 million tons of coal were mined in West Virginia, with 60 million tons coming from strip mines.
- In 1950, West Virginia employed 143,000 miners. By 1997, that number was down to 22,000.
- 75% of West Virginia's streams and rivers are polluted by mining and other industries.
- 300,000 acres of hardwood forest in West Virginia have been destroyed by mountaintop removal mining.
- More than half of the electricity in the U.S. today is generated by coal-fired power plants.
- Demand for electricity in the U.S. has increased by 136% since 1970.
- The U.S. is responsible for 22.3% of the world's coal-related carbon emissions.
- A 500-megawatt coal plant produces 10,000 tons of sulfur dioxide per year. Sulfur dioxide is the main cause of acid rain.
- St. Louis-based Arch Coal is the nation's second-largest coal producer and accounts for about 6% of U.S. energy.
- In 2001, Arch Coal reported revenues of nearly \$1.5 billion.
- In the 1999–2000 election cycle, the coal mining industry contributed more than \$3.8 million to federal parties and candidates. Almost all of the recipients were Republicans.

For more information, go to www.pbs.org/independentlens/razingappalachia

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RAZING APPALACHIA Credits

Producer/Director/Editor	Sasha Waters
Camera	Ted Bourne
	Cheryl Hess
	Kathryn Ramey
	Ken Wyatt
Sound Editor/Mixer	Robert Hurst

(over)

Featured in RAZING APPALACHIA (in order of appearance):

Jim Weekley, Blair, WV resident
Rick Abraham, independent coal contractor
Joe Lovett, Appalachian Center for the Economy and the Environment
David G. Todd, Arch Coal, Inc.
Larry Gibson, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Freda Williams, WV Organizing Project
Patricia Bragg, WV Organizing Project
Ken Hechler, WV Secretary of State, 1984–2000
Larry Emerson, Arch Coal, Inc.
John Harden, United Mine Workers Assoc. (UMWA) Local 2286
Pat McGinley, WV University Law Professor
W. Michael McCabe, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Donna Green, WV Organizing Project
Sylvia Weekley, Blair, WV resident
Terry Vance, UMWA Local 2935
Michael Miano, WV Dept. of Environmental Protection, 1998–1999
Paul Burgess, Blair, WV resident
Cecil Roberts, UMWA President

Awards

First Prize, The Institute for Rural Poverty, Farmington, Maine
Special Jury Prize in Documentary, Cinevue International Film Festival

About the Filmmaker

Sasha Waters (Producer/Director/Editor) is Assistant Professor in Film & Video Production in the Department of Cinema and Comparative Literature at the University of Iowa. Waters has written and produced for film and television, including associate producing historical documentaries for the acclaimed PBS series *American Experience*. She has also independently produced audio documentaries for National Public Radio. Her first feature documentary, *Whipped*, a feminist portrait of women in the sex industry in New York, screened at festivals across the U.S. and abroad. Her films and videos have been supported by the Jerome Foundation, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund and the Donnet Fund. Waters was a Fellow in residence at the MacDowell Colony in 1999 and 2002. She earned her MFA in Film and Media Arts at Temple University in Philadelphia.

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is a groundbreaking weekly primetime PBS series that airs on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. and presents American and international documentaries and a limited number of dramas. Each week *Independent Lens* bursts onto the screen and presents a unique individual, community or moment in history to bring viewers gripping stories that inspire, engage, provoke and delight.

(more)

From pioneering women surfers to brilliant composers to brave resistance fighters, *Independent Lens* introduces people whose stories are unforgettable. *Independent Lens* is for curious viewers of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds; all that's required is a TV and an inquiring mind. The Executive Producer of *Independent Lens* is Sally Jo Fifer, ITVS Executive Director. *Independent Lens* is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), with additional funding provided by PBS.

About ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web, and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by the vision of media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. Contact ITVS at itvs@itvs.org or visit www.itvs.org.



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