

## Twilight in Hazard: An Appalachian Reckoning | Alan Maimon

### Discussion Guide

1. How do you feel about the introductory quote from Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*? Do you agree with it? Do you feel differently about it now that you've read this book?
2. Maimon says, "Other than it being poor and poorly depicted in movies ... I knew little about Appalachia. But its reputation intrigued me." Did you have any preconceived notions about the Appalachian region, or coal-mining regions/persistent poverty regions like it, before picking up this book? How do you think your lived experience has influenced those notions? How were those notions either changed or confirmed throughout *Twilight in Hazard*?
3. "Few areas in the US have been as subject to stereotype as Appalachia," Maimon writes, before detailing his peers' jokes about his relocation. Can you think of any other heavily stereotyped areas, and from where do you believe those stereotypes stem? How have you personally perpetuated these stereotypes?
4. Reflect on a time you've been a "foreigner in [your] own country." What did you learn about Americanism? What did you learn about yourself?
5. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and President Bill Clinton visited Hazard 32 years apart for the same reason: to encourage private investment in the region to defeat poverty. Reflecting on Maimon's discoveries, and on the administrations of both leaders, think of some reasons why the effort failed.
6. On page 22, Maimon observes, "There are plenty of wealthy people [in Eastern Kentucky] ... Some have hearts and positive intentions, but something, maybe it is the fierce pride I mentioned earlier, keeps them from really seeing the causes of the struggles all around them." What do you believe is the answer Maimon is missing? Do you agree that it is pride?
7. On page 24, Maimon reflects on the difference between cultural appropriation and cultural abnegation, and says it's a subject worth exploring. What, in your own words, is the difference? Can you reflect on a personal experience with cultural abnegation?
8. Maimon claims that, while Purdue Pharma is not solely to blame for the opioid epidemic of the late 90s/early 2000s, the company "should have known what would happen if communities in Eastern Kentucky and around the country became overrun with the drug." Do you agree with Maimon's statement? How has your personal experience with Big Pharma shaped your opinion?

9. On page 63, Maimon discusses Eastern Kentuckian hostility toward reporters who investigate misconduct in the coal industry. Have you seen anything of this sort happen in the media? Can you think of a similar way you've seen journalists criticized in your area and beyond?
10. "At the same time that we exalted coal miners for their industriousness in working to help quench the nation's growing thirst for electricity, we pitied them for lacking safer, more conventional places to earn a paycheck," Maimon writes on page 62. What other industries have you seen depicted in a similar light, either in the media or in your personal life?
11. The Friends of Coal movement evolved into a culture war, claims Maimon on page 75, forcing Kentuckians to marry their opinions about coal to their opinions about their background and home. Have you ever been in a similar situation in which you were forced to curtail individual negative feelings about something you loved?
12. The black lung-afflicted former miners Maimon spoke to remembered their work fondly despite its consequences, stating, "It's the dirtiest job you'll do in your life, but I'd work tomorrow if I could." Do you think this is disillusionment, passion, or both?
13. "Only after leaving Eastern Kentucky and taking a step back did I realize the region's central paradox," Maimon writes on page 85. "[C]oal was fading away as an energy source of the future but managing to remain as culturally and politically relevant as ever." Why do you suppose this is?
14. On page 95, Maimon observes that "white, rural poor do not face the added hurdle of overcoming institutional racism." Using both lived examples and examples from Maimon's observations, discuss additional differences between rural and urban poverty.
15. In the chapter "Life Beyond the Mines," Maimon discusses differences between non-Kentuckians' beliefs of what Kentucky's tourist attractions are, versus what locals believe tourists should be coming to see. Discuss some "hidden gems" in your area, or areas you have visited, that are passed over by the tourism industry. Do you see this as a positive or a negative?
16. According to the US Census, every county in Eastern Kentucky lost population between 2010 and 2018. How do you suppose the coronavirus pandemic has since affected Eastern Kentucky's population, and rural populations in general, since 2020?
17. "It's Clay County," said county clerk Jennings White after an attempted shooting. "Things just happen here." Do you think this is an occurrence unique to Eastern Kentucky? Compare the violent and deadly election lead-ups detailed in the chapter "Killing Season" to any other political races you have observed, either locally or nationally.

18. "In struggling Eastern Kentucky ... violence has always been used to achieve and hold onto power," Maimon writes on page 135. Is violence as a form of power-grabbing unique to the Harlan County region? Compare political power struggles in that area to any other you have observed in reality or fiction.
19. In reference to Maimon's observations of Harlan County's religious fervor and its waves of popularity, to what extent do you believe in the power of religion as a guiding force? Is it difficult for you to separate religion from the politics of religion?
20. "The very idea of the "common good" has been destroyed by ideological tribalism," Maimon writes on page 199. "We do not just disagree with our ideological adversaries on policy and direction. We believe the other side is loathsome and deranged and determined to destroy the foundations of family and democracy." To what extent do you believe in Maimon's statement, and how has your lived experience shaped this opinion?
21. "We understood he wasn't like us. He doesn't talk like us. He doesn't act like us. He can be seen as a parody. But he had a swagger that was appealing," says Bill Bissett about Trump on page 200. To what extent do you believe representation—seeing oneself represented in a political candidate—can influence voting?
22. "Innovation is a great thing. Ill-conceived change that smacks of desperation is not," writes Maimon about the decay of local print news. What other industries have you personally seen affected by the rise of the Internet?
23. "Owsley County is hoping a sense of adventure and a low cost of living will attract work-from-home urban transplants who only need fast Internet to do their jobs," writes Maimon on page 221. Based on what you have witnessed, either in person or in media, has this been the case yet for rural America?
24. After reading Maimon's observations of, and opinions about, Eastern Kentucky, what do you think Harlan County and areas like it need in order to experience the economic boom they have been holding out for?