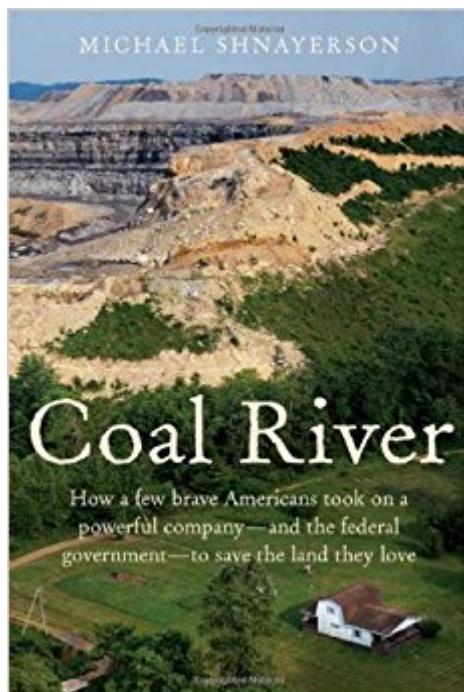


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# Coal River



## Synopsis

One of America's most dramatic environmental battles is unfolding in southern West Virginia. Coal companies are blasting the mountains, decapitating them for coal. The forested ridge tops and valley streams of Appalachia— one of the country's natural treasures—are being destroyed, along with towns and communities. An entire culture is disappearing, and to this day, most Americans have no idea it's happening. Michael Shnayerson first traveled to the coal fields four years ago, on assignment for *Vanity Fair*. There he met an inspiring young lawyer named Joe Lovett, who was fighting mountaintop removal in court with a series of brilliant and daring lawsuits. He also met Judy Bonds, whose grassroots group, the Coal River Mountain Watch, was speaking out in a region where talking truth to power was both brave and dangerous. The two had joined forces to take on Massey Energy, the largest and most aggressive of the coal companies, and its swaggering, notorious chairman, Don Blankenship. *Coal River* is Shnayerson's account of this dramatic struggle. From courtroom to boardroom, forest clearing to factory floor, Shnayerson gives us a novelistic and compelling portrait of the people who risked their reputations and livelihoods in the fight against King Coal.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I picked up this book because it takes place close to where I grew up (much of it in the same county), because I love the mountains and fear for them, because I grew up in an area dominated by the coal industry and I have an interest and a grudging admiration for it. But I liked the book most

of all for the story of a rookie lawyer and a few clients with little in the way of resources but a burning desire to fight for what's right. At times it reads a bit like "A Civil Action," or perhaps a John Grisham novel, though the real-life tactics of restraining orders and injunctions played out over the battleground of arcane environmental regulations is hardly the stuff of a legal thriller. On the other hand, the book has a great villain, and author Michael Shnayerson does a good job of trying to explain what motivates Massey Chairman Don Blankenship. This book was written before the deadly explosion at the Upper Big Branch Mine near where much of this book plays out, and his cataloging of Massey's sorry safety record seems prophetic. Odd too, is Massey's insistantly standing by its controversial and -- toward the end -- arguably inept, chairman. It was only after 29 miners died at Upper Big Branch after this book was published that Blankenship got the ax. For someone who grew up in West Virginia politics, it's a treat as well. I can remember when federal judges who now go by grander-sounding names were once Joe Bob or Chuck. I found myself wanting to tell the author a bit of backstory, but usually he came around to relating it. (Though the book mentions Richard Neely, it doesn't say he was once a state Supreme Court justice. Neither does it mention that Sen. Jay Rockefeller, now a friend of coal, once opposed strip mining. He lost big in that election.

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