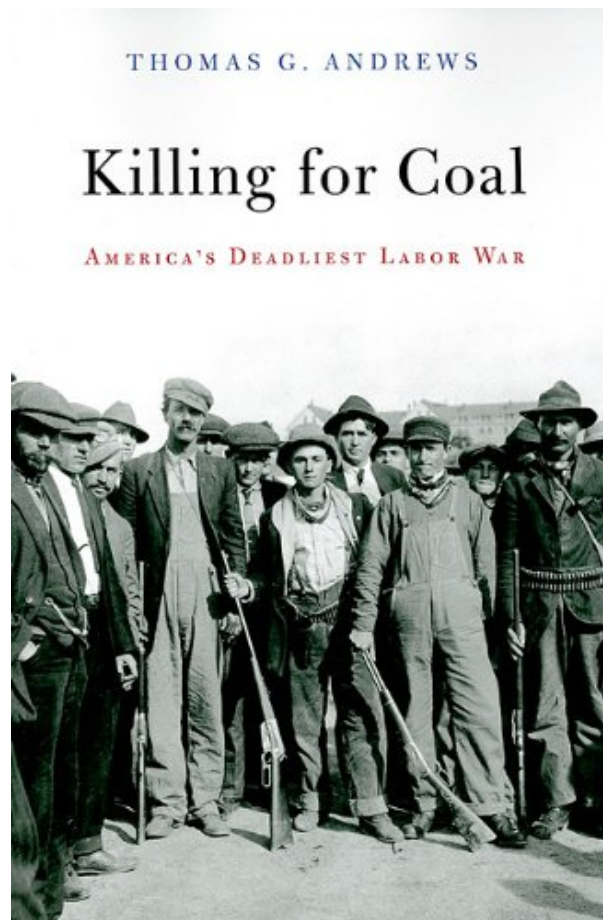


KILLING FOR COAL: AMERICA'S DEADLIEST LABOR WAR BY THOMAS G. ANDREWS



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On a spring morning in 1914, in the stark foothills of southern Colorado, members of the United Mine Workers of America clashed with guards employed by the Rockefeller family, and a state militia beholden to Colorado's industrial barons. When the dust settled, nineteen men, women, and children among the miners' families lay dead. The strikers had killed at least thirty men, destroyed six mines, and laid waste to two company towns.

Killing for Coal offers a bold and original perspective on the 1914 Ludlow Massacre and the "Great Coalfield War." In a sweeping story of transformation that begins in the coal beds and culminates with the deadliest strike in American history, Thomas Andrews illuminates the causes and consequences of the militancy that erupted in colliers' strikes over the course of nearly half a century. He reveals a complex world shaped by the connected forces of land, labor, corporate industrialization, and workers' resistance.

Brilliantly conceived and written, this book takes the organic world as its starting point. The resulting elucidation of the coalfield wars goes far beyond traditional labor history. Considering issues of social and environmental justice in the context of an economy dependent on fossil fuel, Andrews makes a powerful case for rethinking the relationships that unite and divide workers, consumers, capitalists, and the natural world.

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About the Author

Thomas G. Andrews is Associate Professor of History at the University of Colorado Boulder.

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3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

An ambitious, over-the-top history that I nonetheless found worthwhile

By R. M. Peterson

Most "massacre" sites in the Great Plains are from the campaigns to remove the Indians. One exception is the Ludlow Massacre site, just off I-25 between the Colorado cities of Trinidad and Pueblo, snug against the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. There, the "massacre" occurred during a labor war -- "America's Deadliest Labor War" -- between coal miners and coal mine operators (of which the largest was owned by the Rockefellers). Ludlow was a tent city erected by the United Mine Workers union to house miners and their families after they had been evicted from company towns for going out on strike. On April 20, 1914, Colorado National Guardsmen (most of whom had only recently been guards for the mining companies) surrounded the Ludlow tent city. There is no consensus about what started the shooting, but by day's end there were nineteen dead -- one militiaman and eighteen coal miners and family members, including two women and eleven children. That touched off a ten-day "war", in which miners went on a destructive rampage, killing and attacking mines and company towns. The fighting stopped when President Wilson sent in Federal troops. The strike itself ended when the UMW ran out of money. All told, from the beginning of the strike in September 1913 to its end in December 1914, the death toll was between seventy-five and one hundred.

KILLING FOR COAL starts and concludes with the Ludlow Massacre. In between, the book is about coal and coal mining in Colorado and about the larger conflict between labor and capital. It aims to be an environmental history and an industrial history. It aims to explore the natural world and the social, technological, and economic forces that combined to bring about the Colorado Coal War that culminated in the Ludlow Massacre. It also aims to be a new and different sort of history, and as things turned out, it was awarded the Bancroft Prize in 2009.

In the end I am somewhat ambivalent about the book. I had wanted to read about the Ludlow Massacre, and I selected **KILLING FOR COAL** because I thought it would provide more background than the other options. I got plenty of background -- more than I hoped for -- and I wish that there had been more detailed discussion of the Ludlow Massacre and the ten days of guerilla warfare that followed it. Nonetheless, there is considerable merit in what Thomas Andrews was trying to do in writing a broader, more comprehensive history. At times, the scope of his vision and the reach of his ambition were nigh breathtaking. Plus, Andrews is a much more colorful and skilled writer than most historians. The problem is that he overdoes things on virtually all scores.

On occasion, he claims too much. (The book "illuminates how the close study of one small area of the world can improve our understanding of processes that now pose grave threats to the well-being of our nation and our planet.") In trying to cover everything, he sometimes dwells on the obvious. ("Miners sidled up to the bars of [mine camp saloons] thirsting not simply for refreshment, but also for release from the anxiety, loneliness, and anger that mine work tended to inflict on them.") There are occasional gratuitous nods to political correctitude. (Andrews uses the pronoun "he" for a "mogul" buying coal to heat his Denver mansion, because "virtually all moguls were men".) Often Andrews gets carried away with the color and flamboyance of his prose. ("Men, women, and children had traveled a long, winding road to reach this precipice; many years of struggle and suffering seemed to drive them toward the abyss before them.") There are sentences that are goofy ("They [historical photographs of Colorado] attest to the protean nature of energy and its incredible capacity for disguise."), and others that are grandiose ("[Mining] companies unwittingly transformed disputes rooted in subterranean workscapes into an all-out struggle in which the very meaning and fate of America seemed to hang in the balance.").

The book is based on seemingly prodigious research and reading. Andrews gets considerable mileage out of the transcripts of a lengthy "man-to-man talk" the Colorado governor called between three coal company executives and three leaders of the striking miners in November 1913, transcripts inexplicably ignored by other historians. The 290 pages of text are supported by 75 pages of endnotes. There are about thirty

historical photographs and four maps, all of which enhance the presentation.

Bottom line: **KILLING FOR COAL** is an ambitious, over-the-top history that nonetheless is worth reading if you are interested in (a) the history of coal mining and the coal industry in America, (b) the conflict between capital and labor as played out in the coal fields of Colorado, or even (c) the Ludlow Massacre.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A Fascinating Read...

By Matthew W. Quinn

KILLING FOR COAL is a fascinating look into a part of American history that's really not well-known. It starts out with a fascinating description of how the Colorado coal fields formed millions of years ago and continues on by describing how the mining of coal revolutionized the lives of the people living in the energy-poor and hostile West, although this came at an environmental price. It also does a great job describing the lives and culture of the miners and what led to the titular strike and violence.

However, the latter part of the book doesn't live up to the promise of the prologue. The prologue discusses how the unrest spread from the miners into other sectors of the working class and how it looked like the strikers might take over the state, but that isn't really covered in the section covering the battles between the strikers and the guardsmen after the Ludlow Massacre. The battles aren't covered in great detail either. Finally, although the prologue discusses the trials of the strike organizers afterward and how various factors (including anti-Communism and even a period of dominance by the Klan) "encouraged" the miners to forget how they'd outright defeated the state government, there is almost nothing about the aftermath. Considering how well-done the early parts of the book are, this is a major missed opportunity.

Still, it's a very informative book and definitely worth a read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

The first half of the book was very dry and ...

By Jerry Smart

The first half of the book was very dry and not very interesting. The title was a bit conceiving. I thought they would talk more about the miners. The last half of the book was interesting as the writer wrote about the actual miners and their struggles with the greedy companies.

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