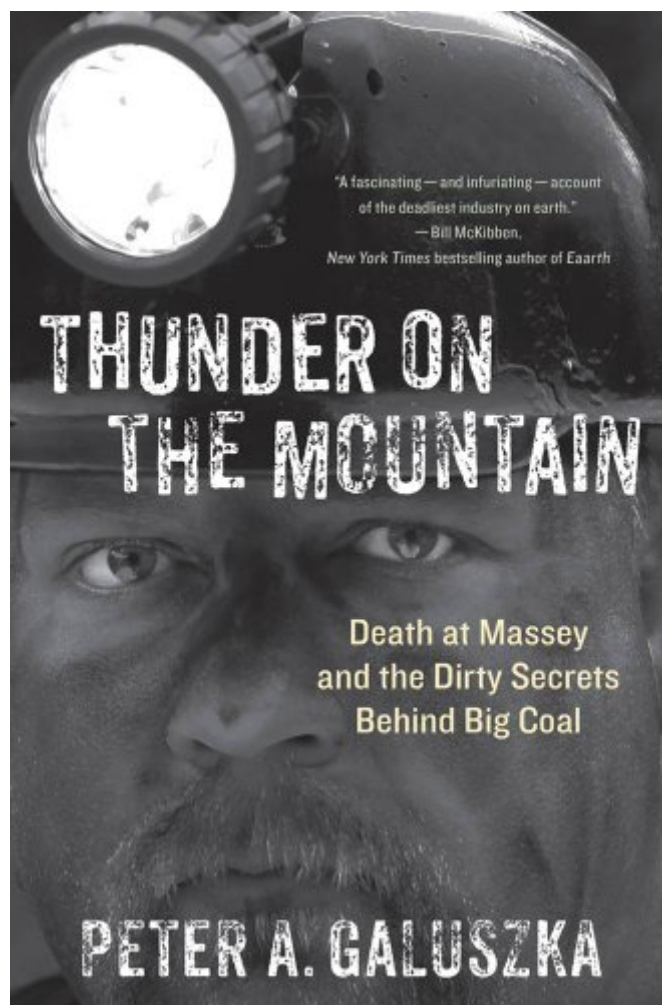


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# Thunder On The Mountain: Death At Massey And The Dirty Secrets Behind Big Coal



## Synopsis

"Scathing exposé of the coal industry."--The New York Times Book Review  
On April 5, 2010, an explosion ripped through Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Mine, killing twenty-nine coal miners. This tragedy was the deadliest mine disaster in the United States in forty years—a disaster that never should have happened. These deaths were rooted in the cynical corporate culture of Massey and its notorious former CEO Don Blankenship, and were part of an endless cycle of poverty, exploitation, and environmental abuse that has dominated the Appalachian coalfields since coal was first discovered there. And the cycle continues unabated as coal companies bury the most insidious dangers deep underground, all in search of higher profits, and hide the true costs from regulators, unions, and investors alike. But the disaster at Upper Big Branch goes beyond the coalfields of West Virginia. It casts a global shadow, calling into bitter question why coal miners in the United States are sacrificed to erect cities on the other side of the world, why the coal wars have been allowed to rage, polarizing the country, and how the world's voracious appetite for energy is satisfied at such horrendous cost. With *Thunder on the Mountain*, Peter A. Galuszka pieces together the true story of greed and negligence behind the tragedy at the Upper Big Branch Mine, and in doing so he has created a devastating portrait of an entire industry that exposes the coal-black motivations that led to the death of twenty-nine miners and fuel the ongoing war for the world's energy future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Galuszka leverages his vast experience as a journalist focusing on energy and his firsthand knowledge of the region to create this bleak prognosis for how the coal industry will adapt to safety and environmental challenges. He uses the now infamous CEO of Massey Energy (a darling of momentum investors prior to the collapse in all coal stocks and subsequent buyout) as a proxy for the executives and a tragic 2010 event as the main context for his critical look at the power of the coal lobby. While one could dismiss the diatribe as that of a tree-hugger - the detailed look at the history of coal industry particularly in West Virginia and a chilling portrait of Blankenship (Massey CEO) provides ample justification for the author's dire commentary. The history of WV - as told from the mineral rights viewpoint - is a very informative read. One also understands how class warfare was essentially created to control the 'hill people' and the new settlers. That injustice has to compete with the narration on the complete disregard for safety and punitive treatment of those who dare question the tactics or operations of the industry - right from well-meaning managers to regulatory agencies to how even judges are completely bought out. It portrays a vivid image of systemic corruption that surprisingly is not getting as much attention as it should. The impact of mountaintop mining and the orchestrated pushbacks on regulation and the episode involving pushing a holdout miner to bankruptcy clearly portray the extent of the power of the coal lobby and the depth of corruption.

"How the enormous contrasts of Central Appalachia--great riches against abject poverty--came about is rooted in brutal exploitation so intense that it is an anomaly in the history of the United States. Few other parts of the country have endured more than a century and a half of such stark contrasts." -- p. 58

While the vast majority of the American people profess to be concerned about environmental matters the simple fact of the matter is that the preponderance of evidence would indicate that we are much more concerned about lifestyle choices. In his 2006 book "Big Coal: The Dirty Secret Behind America's Energy Future" author Jeff Goodell opined that "'Big Coal's' goal is to keep us comfortable not curious." As we approach 2013 the American people remain blissfully unaware of just how much coal it takes to provide the energy each of us consumes so cavalierly on

a daily basis. Furthermore, most of us have no idea of the hidden costs of burning so much coal. The people of Appalachia have been paying the price for decades. On April 5, 2010 29 coal miners were killed at the Upper Big Branch Mine in Montcoal, WV. It was a disaster that did not have to happen. Author Peter A. Galuszka has chronicled the events surrounding this tragic incident in his new book "Thunder on the Mountain: Death at Massey and the Dirty Secrets Behind Big Coal". This is an all too familiar story of greed, willful neglect and corporate arrogance that is sure to make your blood boil. But there is a lot more to the story than the unfortunate events of April 5, 2010. In "Thunder on the Mountain" Peter A. Galuszka tells the sordid story of Massey Energy, the owner of the Upper Big Branch Mine and its notorious CEO Don Blankenship.

The timing of the publication in November of the paperback edition of Peter A. Galuszka's "Thunder on the Mountain: Death at Massey and the Dirty Secrets Behind Big Coal" (West Virginia University Press, 300 pages, photos, notes, index, foreword by Denise Giardina, \$19.99) couldn't have been better. Galuszka's examination of the explosion at Massey Energy's Upper Big Branch Mine in Raleigh County, WV on April 5, 2010, was published in hardback by St. Martin's Press in 2012. A few days after the paperback edition of this must-read book hit the shelves on Thursday, Nov. 13, 2014 Donald L. Blankenship, 64, Massey's CEO at the time of the accident, was indicted by a federal grand jury in Charleston, WV on charges that he orchestrated the routine violation of key federal mine safety rules at Upper Big Branch Mine, when 29 miners lost their lives. The Charleston Gazette story stated that: "The four-count indictment, filed in U.S. District Court, also alleges that Blankenship led a conspiracy to cover up mine safety violations and hinder federal enforcement efforts by providing advance warning of government inspections." Upper Big Branch (UBB) was the worst coal mining accident in 40 years and triggered events that led to Blankenship's departure from Massey with a golden parachute settlement totaling \$86 million and the company's acquisition in 2011 by Bristol, VA-based Alpha Natural Resources.

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