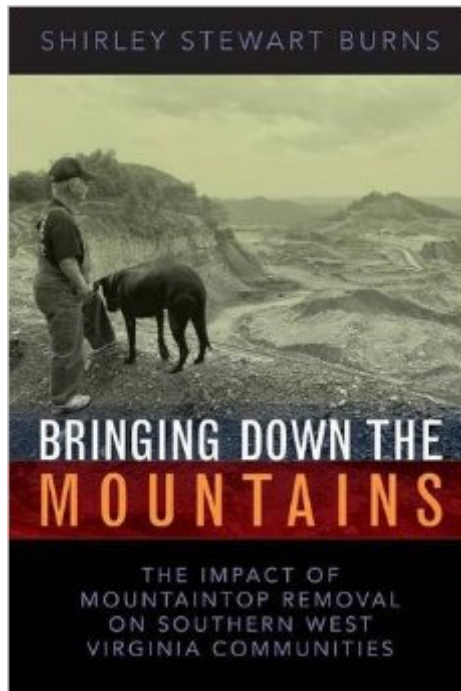


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# Bringing Down The Mountains: The Impact Of Mountaintop Removal On Southern West Virginia Communities



## Synopsis

Coal is West Virginia's bread and butter. For more than a century, West Virginia has answered the energy call of the nation and the world by mining and exporting its coal. In 2004, West Virginia's coal industry provided almost forty thousand jobs directly related to coal, and it contributed \$3.5 billion to the state's gross annual product. And in the same year, West Virginia led the nation in coal exports, shipping over 50 million tons of coal to twenty-three countries. Coal has made millionaires of some and paupers of many. For generations of honest, hard-working West Virginians, coal has put food on tables, built homes, and sent students to college. But coal has also maimed, debilitated, and killed. *Bringing Down the Mountains* provides insight into how mountaintop removal has affected the people and the land of southern West Virginia. It examines the mechanization of the mining industry and the power relationships between coal interests, politicians, and the average citizen. Shirley Stewart Burns holds a BS in news-editorial journalism, a master's degree in social work, and a PhD in history with an Appalachian focus, from West Virginia University. A native of Wyoming County in the southern West Virginia coalfields and the daughter of an underground coal miner, she has a passionate interest in the communities, environment, and histories of the southern West Virginia coalfields. She lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of the most important books WVU Press has published to date is *Bringing Down the*

Mountains, by Shirley Stewart Burns. This book documents the effects of mountaintop removal on human communities and is the best study to date. The author focuses in detail--with rigor of mind and fidelity of heart--on the human impact of mountaintop removal. MTR may as well be called "extractive desertification," both in ecological and sociological terms. This book is already having an impact and is serving to link more and more voices around the most compelling criticisms of MTR. The author is the daughter of a coal miner and knows first hand what devastation this practice wreaks: like me, her hometown is being encroached upon by one of these sites. Mountaintop removal is not coal mining and it does not participate in that cultural legacy. Those who work these sites are excavators, and their employment is short. If you care about Appalachia, the most diverse temperate forests in the world, a major source of water, or the impact of globalism, read this book.

I bought this book the day it hit the market and have read it twice. Dr. Burns lays out the case against mountaintop removal as only a native of southern West Virginia could. If everyone read this book the nation would finally understand the horror that is mountaintop removal, and take action to halt the practice. This is without doubt the authoritative academic work on this subject!

I personally know the author, Shirley Stewart Burns, and knew that the caliber of this story would be of the highest order. I was not surprised when I read it, and her emotional connection to the story and in particular the small mining communities of West Virginia shines through from start to finish. This is a story that should be read by all, as it highlights the power of the people and the ever increasing need for communities to rally behind a cause. I congratulate Dr Burns on a wonderful, thought provoking and personally touching account. Even from the southern hemisphere where I am living, stories like this are relevant, and a number of my environmental friends have shown an interest in reading it.

"Bringing Down the Mountains" is only the latest in a line of books about West Virginia mining disasters, industrial carnage, and coal wars, going back to H.B. Lee's wonderful "Bloodletting in Appalachia" and Hubert Skidmore's heartbreaking "Hawk's Nest." You could fill an entire library room with these books. As a West Virginia native, my heart breaks whenever I read them. Most, like Ms. Burns' stirring expose of present-day mountaintop strip mining, show the most ruthless side of capitalism and Big Industry. And yet West Virginians have lately ignored the lessons of their own history of corporate exploitation and "gone Republican." Part of the problem is that the schools don't teach real state history and tell students about Buffalo Creek, Monongah, Union Carbide's Hawk's

Nest tunnel, and the rest of the human tragedy and ecological degradation that seem so much a part of West Virginia, going back to the 1880s when the robber barons of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania essentially "colonized" the state and began mercilessly plundering its resources and grinding down the lives of its citizens. Like many Third World countries, West Virginia provides a bitter example of why large corporations, amoral by nature, should never be unregulated. It's a lesson, unfortunately, that too many West Virginians have either forgotten or never learned.

The fight has been raging in W. Virginia for decades over coal. Coal is the major employer in this area, and of course no one wants to lose their jobs. However, the politicians want citizens believe that their new method of mining - namely stripping away the mountains, is safe and the mountains can be rebuilt. Not so. What you get is a slob of mess, with the FOUNDATION of the mountain gone, along with the beautiful trees and habitats for animals. The pictures in this book are graphic, and anyone who loves nature will cry. What is being done to our mountains is a travesty of justice and needs to be STOPPED. This author is not afraid to explain, in detail, just how bad the problem is, and what the strip mining will do for generations. I highly recommend this book for ANYONE in the USA because it also tells a story of political corruption to fight to continue a practice that is proven fatal to the environment just to keep a few men rich.

I really liked this book. As far as really investigating MTR in West Virginia as not just a political/economic issue, but as a social issue with lots of dimensions, this is one of the top two or three books out right now. It is fluid and gracefully written as well, making it easy to get into. I would strongly suggest this book to anyone from WV (like myself), interested/concerned about MTR practices, interested in Appalachian culture, or taken up by American history.

I am a regulator in the mining industry. The book was a gift for my new boss. He really enjoyed it. I've read the book before--it gives a good background on mountaintop removal from an environmentalists perspective. Whether you're pro-coal or absolutely against using it--you should read this book to get a more-rounded understanding of the issues.

I had to get this book for class and I loved it, I kept it instead of selling it back. Its a great look into the past about coal mining in the States history. Its easy to read and full of emotion.

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