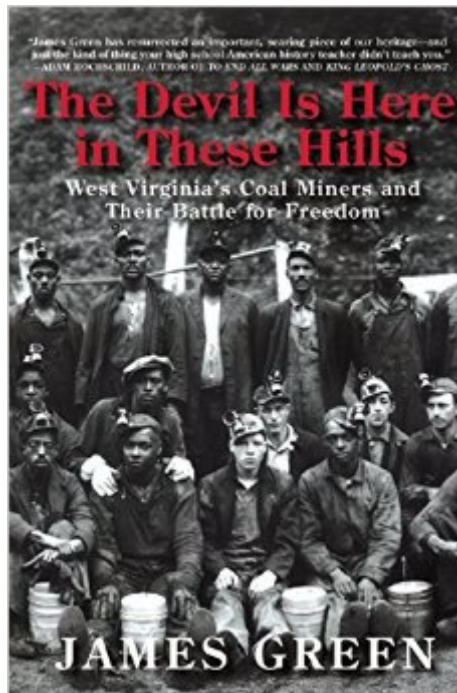


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# The Devil Is Here In These Hills: West Virginia's Coal Miners And Their Battle For Freedom



## Synopsis

From before the dawn of the 20th century until the arrival of the New Deal, one of the most protracted and deadly labor struggles in American history was waged in West Virginia. On one side were powerful corporations whose millions bought armed guards and political influence. On the other side were 50,000 mine workers, the nation's largest labor union, and the legendary "Miners' Angel," Mother Jones. The fight for unionization and civil rights sparked a political crisis verging on civil war that stretched from the creeks and hollows to the courts and the US Senate. In *The Devil is Here in These Hills*, celebrated labor historian James Green tells the story of West Virginia and coal like never before. The value of West Virginia's coalfields had been known for decades, and after rail arrived in the 1870s, industrialists pushed fast into the wilderness, digging mines and building company towns where they wielded nearly complete control over everyday life. The state's high-quality coal drove American expansion and industrialization, but for tens of thousands of laborers, including boys as young as ten, mining life showed the bitter irony of the state motto, "Mountaineers are Always Free." Attempts to unionize were met with stiff resistance. Fundamental rights were bent, then broken, and the violence evolved from bloody skirmishes to open armed conflict, as an army of miners marched to an explosive showdown. Extensively researched and told in vibrant detail, *The Devil is Here in These Hills* is the definitive book on an essential chapter in the history of American freedom.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I grew up in the coal mining area of NE Pennsylvania, so I knew about the history of mine workers versus mine owners, including the violence and hardships. But I was not prepared for the levels reached by the West Virginia miners, especially in the early 20th century.=== The Good Stuff ===\* James Green writes very well. The book was easy to read, avoided the long paragraphs and obscure vocabulary of "academic" works, and captured the struggles of the miners both at a personal and organizational level.\* I never realized the levels of violence reached in West Virginia-certainly bordering on civil war with opposing armies striking out at each other. The author captures the bravery of the union miners and their supporters, the lack of support for their cause from non-union miners, the hardships their families faced, and the brutal tactics used by both sides.\* Green takes us through the entire story, from the rise of mining communities in the mid 19th century through the rise and fall of mining in the 20th century. He shows how the miner's struggles became interwoven with other class struggles in the area-including legendary feuds such as the Hatfield/McCoy battles.\* My ultimate judgement of a history book is whether it helped me understand something that had always puzzled me, and this book met that test. As an example, I had often wondered about the propensity of mine workers to strike in times of national crises such as WWI and WWII. Sure, there was an obvious higher demand from coal which made the operators more likely to cave in to their demands. But I had never appreciated that the wars dried up the supplies of new immigrant labor, a resource mine owners often used to beat the miners back into submission.

"The mine war was a product of clashing economic interests and conflicting ideas of freedom, but it was also the product of men with aggressive personalities." James Green, Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts and author of an earlier book about the labor movement (DEATH IN THE HAYMARKET: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America), has assembled a gritty cast of characters in this fact-rich recounting of the West Virginia mine war. The cast of "aggressive" men included Frank Keeney, a local boy who first went down in the mines to work at age 10. Keeney quickly learned the ropes: miners were beyond tough, working without complaint and mocking those who were scared or balky (including the new boys). In crowded clumps they played with explosives in the dark underground, were regularly cheated out of their pay by various ruses dreamed up by unscrupulous rich mine operators, and were well aware of the daily possibility of death or maiming. (One West Virginia governor baldly stated, "It is but the natural course of mining events that men should be injured and killed by accidents.") Keeney grew up to be an operative for the United Mine Workers Union, once

declaring, "I haven't left the class I was born into yet and I hope I never will." • He came into his own as an organizer during the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912, the first skirmish in the mine wars, in which both sides were armed and the miners were fighting for their livelihood as well as their lives. On the other side was Sheriff Don Chafin of Logan County, son of a sheriff, who despised what he saw as the insidious incursion of socialism inherent in unionism.

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