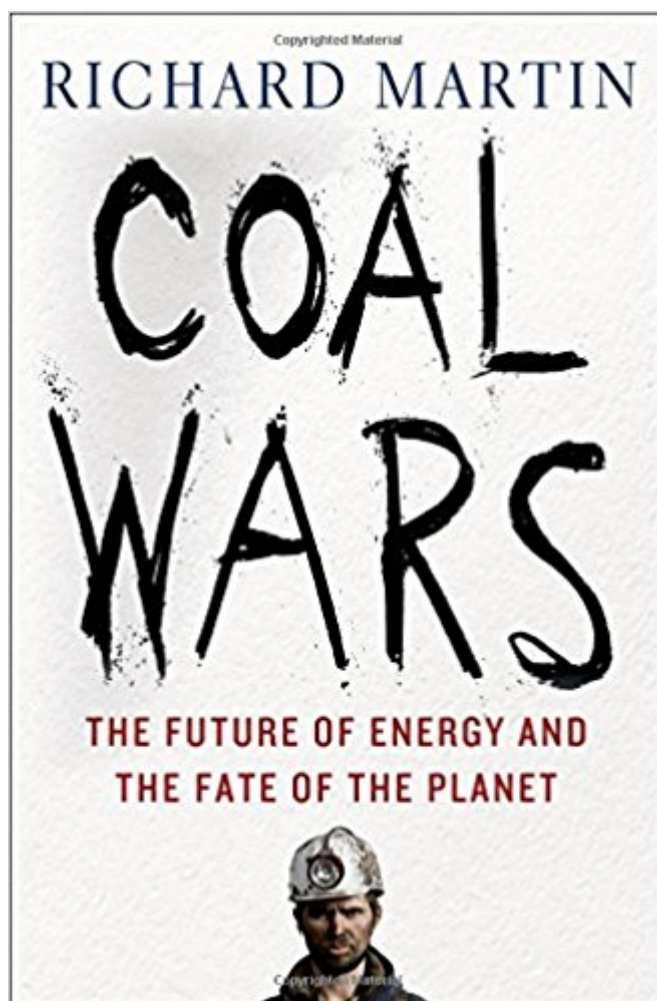


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# Coal Wars: The Future Of Energy And The Fate Of The Planet



## Synopsis

A searching examination of the worldwide effort to shut down big coal even as the industry struggles to remain the dominant source of energy

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“The race to shut down the coal industry is synonymous with the race to save the climate--and from Appalachia to inner Mongolia, brave activists are leading the fight. This comprehensive account makes it clear why their work is so crucial and so hard, pitting them against not just ingrained tradition but against some of the richest resource barons on earth.”

—Bill McKibben, author of *Earth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* “Martin has managed to locate dozens of compelling personal narratives that show the human face of a debate that is too often reduced by environmentalists as much as by the coal industry to numbers and yawn-inducing energy wonkery.”

—Tim McDonnell, *Mother Jones* “A clear-eyed and beautifully written narrative of the people, cities and companies whose lives and existence are wrapped up in the 4,000-year-old history of this iconic source of power. *Coal Wars* is a gripping account of the stakes at play as the world necessarily winds down its consumption of the fossil fuel. Given that the subject might be grim, it is a surprisingly enjoyable read and a unique contribution to the literature.”

—Steve LeVine, author of *The Powerhouse: Inside the Invention of a Battery to Save the World* and *Washington Correspondent for Quartz* “Martin

chronicles his visits to a handful of places where coal is an important part of not just daily life, but the region's history and economic circumstances. A levelheaded researcher and a caring individual as well as a graceful, commanding writer, Martin is unequivocal and persuasive: The best use of coal is in holiday stockings.

— Kirkus Reviews

“Fresh and provocative, *Coal Wars* brings the hammer down on the world's dirtiest fuel. Richard Martin's deeply reported journey into the dark heart of coal land exposes Big Coal's big lies and offers a new approach to kicking our coal addiction. Entertaining, forceful, and full of insight, *Coal Wars* is must reading for a warming planet.”

— Bruce Barcott, *Outside* magazine contributing editor and author of *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* and *Weed the People*

“Richard Martin's timely and powerfully written book reveals with clarity the multiple dangers emitted by coal combustion as an energy source. His journey takes him to sites around the U.S. where a number of aging and obsolete installations are being shut down as natural gas plants flourish, and to China and Germany, where coal plants are on the rise despite a growing, science-based recognition that their toxic wastes harm life and their carbon-dioxide emissions imperil ecosystems, significantly acidifying the oceans and contributing mightily to the rapid increase in climate change.”

— Gwyneth Cravens, author of *Power to Save the World: The Truth About Nuclear Energy*

Richard Martin is an award-winning science writer whose work has appeared in *Wired*, *Time*, *Fortune*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Best Science Writing of 2004*. He is the author of *SuperFuel: Thorium, the Green Energy Source for the Future*. He is the editorial director of Pike Research, a leading clean energy firm. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

Richard Martin gives us perspectives large and small. He delves into the history of the coal industry, how it has fueled economies around the world for centuries, and how it has begun to slow as other sources of energy become economical and environmental awareness expands. In a refreshing example of classic reporting, he travels the world to deliver up-close stories of coal mining operations, and the towns and lives that have been dominated by the industry. He travels to Ohio, Kentucky, Wyoming, and several parts of China. He describes in poignant detail how these communities are changing. He also interviews industry executives, some of whom are surprisingly forward-thinking, and some of whom adhere to hoary industry themes. Martin's style is natural and assured, and the mixture of information and individual stories keeps the reader interested throughout.

Provides the facts about Major conflicts in front of the endeavours against climate change. Which seems to also provide the reasons for the US election results.

Wow. the things I did not know or remember.

Any book that can make a scientific topic not only understandable, but truly \*readable\* to me is a good book. When it happens to be about coal, the world's dependence upon it, and those big players who insist that the reduction of our dependency is impossible...then that book must be partially magic, for this topic is not my typical bedtime reading. Richard Martin has written such a book, traveling from Kentucky to China and places in between to get the story on how and why coal is still as strong as it is. He effectively makes the argument that coal is facing a crisis from which it won't recover, though it's death knoll won't be rung any time soon. It's almost compulsively readable, and absolutely fascinating. And for those of you who are absolutely convinced that man-made global warming is a hoax, then be warned - Martin makes absolutely no bones about the fact that his belief in it is real, that it is now, and that it will soon become irreversible if something is not done. So read at the risk of learning something that flies in the face of your own beliefs. Frankly, this book should be required reading for most. It makes a compelling argument, and most importantly, he posits that the workers must be taken care of for our coal dependence to have a chance of waning. He throws out a suggestion of something similar to the GI Bill, which, personally, I find almost brilliant. Better to retrain the workforce than have them jobless - these are hardworking people who deserve to be successful in another field. So. Read the book. Weep over the monster we have created, or cheer over the steps that seem so incrementally positive. Maybe even both, sometimes together. Then decide to stay involved and educated - if not for YOUR future, then for the ones that follow.

To state that the coal industry, from mining to coal powered power plants is dead would be a massive over statement of the truth, but to state that the continued use of coal is on its way towards extinction would not be an exaggeration. While there will never be a time when some coal is not in use for some purpose (particularly metallurgical coal), the amount of coal mined and utilized is currently on a serious downward spiral and the end of it as a common product in power generation may occur in our lifetimes. The author took a long look at the status of the coal industry around the world to see what is true and what is false about the use of coal as a power generation substance. The author also evaluated the state of coal mining around the world and where it might be headed.

To say that the future of coal mining and use is bleak would be an understatement. The author begins the journey by looking at the Tennessee Valley Authority and its history of coal use. The TVA started using coal because it was in need of additional power to supply the territory in its original charter. Without the ability to add hydro electric capacity, coal was the best option at the time. And they added a serious portfolio of coal fired power plants, which are now slowly being decommissioned. The old plants are expensive, dirty, in need of massive upgrades and it is much cheaper to retire them, erect new gas fired power generation and move on. And that is what they are doing. Following the TVA, the author traveled to coal mines in the Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia areas to see what the state of coal production is. The answer you will receive certainly depends on who you speak with. If it is the executive of a large coal producer (Peabody, Arch, etc.) the industry is fine and only needs to rid the country of Obama's "War on Coal" for the industry to rebound. But in talking with the miners and people in and near the mines, there is a sense of despair. They realize coal is done in, particularly in the Appalachian region, due to difficulties in removing the coal and the costs associated with it. While there is a glimmer of hope, in reality they are hanging onto a false sense that coal can make a major comeback, even in the face of major decommissioning of coal plants around the country. The story reminded me a lot of the Northeast Pennsylvania region, where my wife and I lived for several years in the 1990s. There was a sense there that coal mining would come back there, but it was a false reality. People continued to live in this very depressed region believing that coal would return, but it never did. The cost was too great for the anthracite to be produced and used, other than in small amounts for local industries. Similar situations played out when the author went to Colorado and Wyoming. Workers still cling to the hope that coal will come back, but many of the workers are really praying that it holds on long enough for them to retire and get full benefits. They realize that coal use is going downward rapidly and they just want to survive long enough to escape. It is the same attitude my wife and I saw in Pennsylvania. The miners won't move, but the jobs are leaving, and what will be left behind is a lot of unemployment and desperation. Finally, the author travels to China, which has been described as a still thriving coal industry. To some extent, that is true. There is still massive amounts of coal use in China, but as a percent of power produced and utilized, the number has become stagnant. China is the throwback of an early environmental movement, and the government is aware that if it is to become and remain a major economic player, then coal and the associated pollution must be dealt with. They are closing down smaller mines and doing extensive research into how to utilize coal as substitute fuel in cleaner ways. China is working rapidly towards weaning itself from coal and moving to cleaner renewable energy, and given the political financial climate in China, if they have

the determination, it will get done. Although coal use is dwindling, and rather quickly, the question remains whether its use will be limited quickly enough to lower greenhouse gas emissions. The answer is that no one really knows the answer to that question. It certainly is possible, but only time will tell. Certainly "Big Coal" is not going quietly into that good night! This book looks deeply into the future of coal and explains what we do and don't know about coal's future on the planet. It is well written, very well researched and is about as neutral to the subject as possible. It was an excellent read and one I recommend that anyone read if they have an interest in the future. The book had a quotation that I found quite telling and very, very prescient. It is from a Boulder, Colorado resident who is caught in the fight over whether to move to full renewable energy and states: "Look, there's no question we're using nineteenth-century technology, developed in the twentieth-century regulatory environment, to supply our power in the twenty-first century." And that is about the best summation of the book that I can think of.

As a proud coal miner's daughter, granddaughter, niece, cousin, and friend, I fully expected to butt heads with Mr. Martin, and readily admit to my own prejudice. Plowing through the first few chapters, is an understatement. The writing is very dry. If I didn't have a personal interest in the book, I surely would not have finished it. The author presents facts from both sides of the industry, which I appreciated. He does delve into the lives of the miners, what the job is really like, and the toll that it takes on them, physically and mentally. He presents data about drug use of the miners that I have not found to be true in the people that I know. But perhaps that is because I am not from the top three states he names? I did find the comparison of USA coal industry to those in China and other parts of Asia, and Europe to be very interesting. I liked the ideas of what government can do for the workers if the industry continues to decline, as well as what the coal companies themselves are attempting to do to stay viable in the marketplace.

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