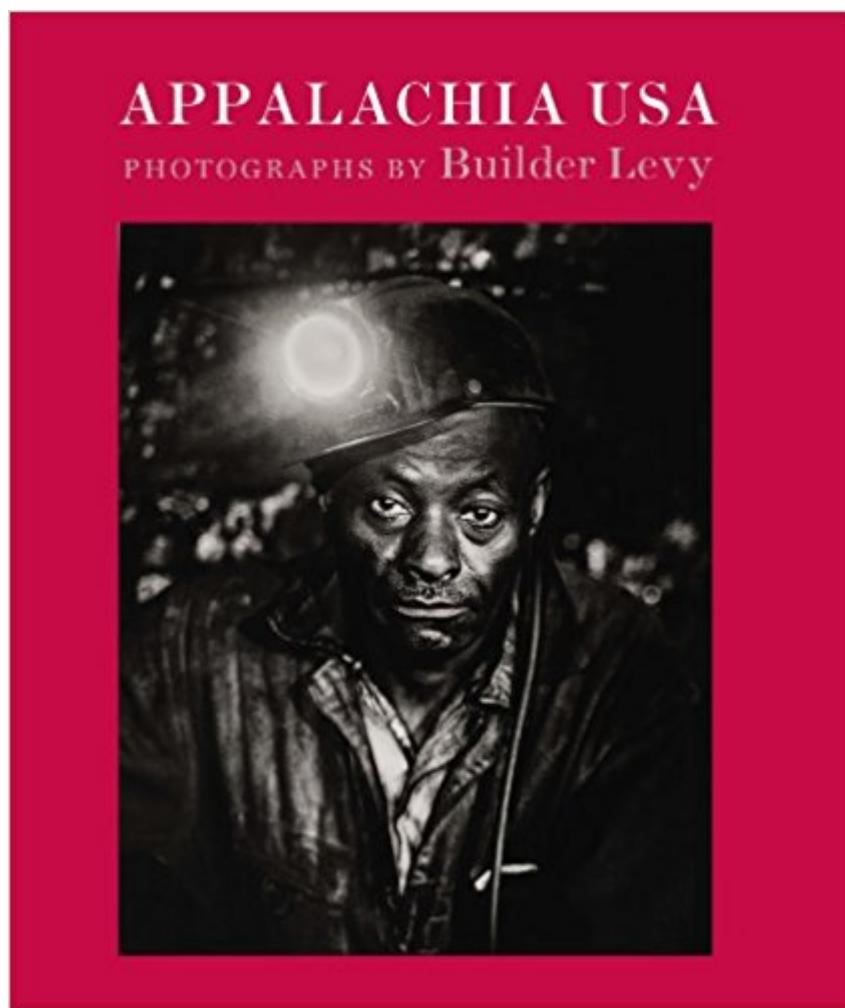


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# Appalachia USA: Photographs, 1968-2009



## Synopsis

This book is an intense artistic exploration of a significant yet little understood and often overlooked region of the United States. Despite the promise of alternative energy, coal still fuels most of our power plants and steel mills. The story of its extraction, and of the people who live, work, and endure in West Virginia, Southwestern Virginia, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania, has been a source of fascination bordering on obsession for the photographer Builder Levy. For four decades, he has been witness to a dangerous industry where workers operate heavy machinery in close quarters underground, extracting ever-increasing tonnage of coal. Over the last two decades, at surface mines, Levy has seen powerful explosives tear apart mountain summits, followed by giant draglines that scoop out the exposed veins of coal in massive, destructive, quantities. He has also witnessed strikes and picket lines, desperation and rage, hope and dignity, and the inevitable natural and man-made disasters that are part of the territory. Builder Levy is part of a grand humanist continuum that includes Lewis Hine, Paul Strand, Walker Evans, to name a few. Intertwining the traditions of fine art, social documentary, and street photography, Appalachia USA is an aesthetically and socially significant book that celebrates the human spirit; it is this spirit that shines through the coal dust in the faces of miners, in mothers struggling to protect their children, and in ravaged but resilient communities. Levy's photographs and accompanying captions capture the tension, the dignity, and the enduring humanity of this troubled corner of America. Includes 69 spot-varnished tritone photographs on large 9 9/16 by 12 inch pages.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Builder Levy's work has appeared in more than two hundred exhibitions, including over fifty one person shows. His photographs are in more than fifty public collections around the world. He has been awarded fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Puffin Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Monographs of his work include *Images of Appalachian Coalfields* (1989) and *Builder Levy Photographer* (2005), and his photographs are featured in more than twenty books. He lives in New York City with his wife, Alice Deutsch.

I love this book. I saw the photos exhibited some time ago and have followed this masterful photographer since. The book is perfect, came quickly and I would highly recommend.

Builder Levy captures the heart and soul of the Appalachian culture in his books "Appalachia USA." Each photo tells a story of what life is like - the sadness, hard labor, togetherness, resiliency of the people and the impact of "King Coal." I am from the coalfields so I stare deep into the eyes of the people in the photos and think about the coal camp life - this is my heritage. I am thankful Builder Levy took the time and effort to capture this little known culture. These photos will serve as a remainder of how life used-to-be or still is as time marches on. This book will serve as a gauge. I look at the photos first and read the captions later. The photos tell the story - the washtub hanging on the back of the house with the garden tools leaning up against the house tell me the story of the people inside. This book is close to my heart. It is a beautiful, caring journey into my mountain culture. I love this book.

Book is beautiful, but the corner was a bit smashed in shipping. I am getting to meet the author this weekend and looking forward to getting my copy signed.

Perfect condition

I am disappointed. Many of the photographs in this new book were previously published in Levy's 1989 *Images of Appalachian Coalfields*. Levy does beautiful work...but I didn't need - in essence - another copy...especially at this price!

Not what I was expecting. Was hoping for a more historical look at coal mining.

Life for the rural poor in Appalachia and the many heartbreak problems they must grapple with, have been discussed in academic books and journals in the context of theories, analysis, and statistics. But through his poignant photographic images of the landscape and the people in that part of the country, Builder Levy, in his book Appalachia USA, gives life to those numbers and theories. As a social documentary photographer and humanitarian, he uses visual images as language to tell a story about people and place, not only about those he photographs, but more generally, to offer a narrative about life for many others living in that same place and time. Aesthetically, his images are works of art, and a viewer cannot help but be emotionally affected, a response numbers alone cannot elicit. It is obvious that people in his photographs are more than subjects for Levy. Rather he *knows* them in a very humanistic and empathic way, and clearly, he holds both an intellectual and sensitive awareness of the history of the people in the region, especially the history of mining. The richness of Levy's images reveals that he is engaged emotionally and professionally with those he photographs, but yet it appears that some individuals are not aware of his presence as a photographer. This is obvious in the photos of coal miners at work. Gaining access to the interior of the mines is testament to the trust people inevitably must have developed in Levy as someone who was there to tell their stories. One of my favorite Levy photos is Mae Phillips and her granddaughter, Jeanie. When I saw that photo, I reflected on a beautiful 1902 John Sargent Singer painting of Mrs. Knowles and her two sons. Mrs. Knowles is very elegant, and her dress and demeanor as well as that of her sons, tells us they are very wealthy; they feel very confident about the present and the future. When I gazed upon Levy's image of Mae and her granddaughter, I thought of Singer's painting, and in my mind juxtaposed it alongside Levy's photo as a visual representation of class differences. Unlike Mrs. Knowles, Mae and Jeanie are not adorned with exquisite fashions nor are they feeling that all is well in the moment, nor that it will be in the future. But Levy lets us know that despite class differences, they are just as beautiful; no embellishments; the simple dress; Jeanie's bare feet; the backdrop of a cornfield; and Jeanie's hand resting on her grandmother's wrist as Mae's arms envelop Jeanie. Levy's images contain no references to the disparaging stereotypes of Appalachians held in our culture, and this is communicated by he has captured as a sense of pride and dignity in the grandmother. I have read both non-fiction and fiction books about Appalachia. Through Levy's powerful photographs, the numbers in academic books and the characters in the novels we read become real people, and we enter their lives, and hopefully, like Levy, feel more empathy for people in the region. I teach courses about social inequality, and I am anticipating that sharing and discussing Levy's images with my students will result in more empathic

individuals.

IÃ¢Â™m a picture guy. The first time I pick up a book like Builder LevyÃ¢Â™s *Appalachia USA* I look at all the pictures. I donÃ¢Â™t like anything to inform me about what an image might mean before I look at it. I want the image to become part of me. Next it is the foreword and any other notes about the book itself, like that on the inside of the Ã¢Âœcover flap.Ã¢Â•With all that information at hand now, itÃ¢Â™s time to read the captions. In LevyÃ¢Â™s newest book reading the captions is a book in and of themselves. It is a very unique experience when the captions carry as much weight as the images, especially when those images are displayed in brilliant black and white, spot varnished tri-tones, which aids greatly in reflecting the quality and intensity of the original prints themselves. There is nothing wasted in *Appalachia USA*.

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