



THROUGH FAILURE COMES REWARD

By: Elizabeth Coble



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Professor Rees

When thinking of the American West and the role that it played, certain themes seem to stand out more than others. The good fighting against the evil in the name of doing what is right, is still a popular one to this day. The West was not just a place, and to think of it as only the frontier would not do it justice. The West was an idea. A thought that was not molded or planned, taught or given. It was the awareness of opportunity. The history of America is a long and winding one: filled with action, adventure, and heartbreak. But with every untold story, the foundation for America was built. Step by step, brick by brick, the people of the West grew stronger, more knowledgeable. The pursuit for something more drove them onward.

This drive can be seen through the history of the American mine workers and their towns. These mining towns spanned throughout the United States. But the Colorado Fuel and Iron's Company towns in the West, were where all the rules were broken, and new ones were formed. It was where workmen looked at one another as human beings; not judging them by the color of their skin or the sound of their voice. It was a place where humanity pushed aside their differences and found common ground; banding together to help better the lives for all individuals. It was where ideas were thought of, and then put into place. Ones, of which, that had never been thought of or tried at such an extent before. Where, when failure did occur, it was noticed by the nation. It was through the miners' tragedies, displeasures, and frustrations at CF&I that the West, as well as the United States was able to grow. Through failure comes reward. The Rockefeller Plan, along with the Sociology Department created within the plan, allowed for workers to receive representation, better healthcare, towns filled with commodities, and was a major stepping stone for safer working conditions. The plan likewise paved the way for independent unions and had become the foundation for employment policies that are still in place today.

As the frontier had shifted West, the need as well as the want, for a better life increased within the immigrants from the surrounding territories. As told by Andrews, “Migrants had embarked, after all, in search of opportunity, money, and freedom.”¹ Mining was a huge part of this want. As time passed Colorado became one of the hot spots for all diversities. “Labor was relatively scarce in Colorado through the 1870s, particularly during upswings in the West's boom-and-bust economy.”² But after the 1870s, it had become known for having high paying jobs that were open to anyone that was eager and willing to take them. Experience, race, ethnicity, none of these characteristics mattered. Mining in Colorado was one of the few enterprises that operated this way.³ Andrews had found that, “Already by 1890, the confluence of these movements in Southern Colorado was producing a mine workforce of remarkable diversity.”⁴ But as most of the miners found out, it was not the easiest when it came to supply and demand. These men, along with their families, ended up working for corporations that had the means to find, dig, transport, and manufacture the reserves found. But who also had different views than the workers out in the field. As discovered in the book, *Killing for Coal* by Thomas G. Andrews, “Balancing the interests of humankind and nature, capitalists and workers, would prove much more difficult...”⁵ But the companies’ goal in the end was similar to most industries. Profit was the end objective, no matter what the cost. This was the first step toward the challenge of authority that would shape the West and affect America.

The jobs created by the mines, mills, and smelters were sometimes sporadic throughout the year, but were one of the steadiest jobs to have. This quickly shifted in the 1880s with the addition of mechanization in the West. This addition increased productivity and decreased the

¹ Killing for Coal Pg. 121

² Killing for Coal Pg. 91

³ Killing for Coal Pg. 105

⁴ Killing for Coal Pg. 103

⁵ Killing for Coal Pg. 49

mining costs, allowing for the companies' profits to increase. But in the process of bettering the productivity of the companies' profits, it in turn decreased the miners' crafts and eroded their autonomy, resembling more of factor work. As well as costing many miners their jobs.⁶ This caused frustration and irritation among the workers in both the mines and the smelters of CF&I. The interest of independent unions increased. "The shift from migration to mass mobilization as a strategy for betterment, the translation of underground tensions into surface conflicts, the coalescence of local disputes into regional and national strikes, the union of fragmented identities and narrowly defined interests in collective movements championing the rights of coalfield migrants as workers, citizens, and human beings--these and other trends seemed at the tipping point."⁷ This was only the beginning of what was to come, for the widow of opportunity was on the horizon.

As time went by and the CF&I communities' history matured, so did the memories of those who lived amongst these communities. As the stories were told, the workers throughout the workforce began to notice something more important than currency. They were dying. "In the years before the 1913-1914 strike, the company had been rocked by a series of fatal mine explosions--19 dead at Tercio in 1904, 19 killed at Cuatro in 1906, 24 dead at Primero in 1907, and 75 killed also at Primero in 1910. Even in 1911, a year with no massive mine explosions on CF&I property, 22 company miners died from fatal accidents."⁸ Even though the amount of injuries and deaths within the company, spanning throughout the years, was outrageous. Nothing was ever done to improve the working conditions in the mines, mills, and smelters; until the Rockefeller Plan. It was through this ignorance that the magnitude and amount of strikes throughout the towns escalated.

⁶ Killing for Coal Pg. 76

⁷ Killing for Coal Pg. 157-158

⁸ Representation and Rebellion Pg. 118

With every strike conducted by the mining towns, the more knowledge the miners gained. The workers knew that their labor made this world go around. They also understood that if they could stop the flow of production, they might be able to change how things were done.⁹ “United and coordinated action, in short, could win [workers] formidable power.”¹⁰ They realized they were stronger together and that this form of unity was what the corporations were afraid of. “Once miners began to feel their oats, strikes “with all their attendant evils” would inevitably “come to afflict” the industry, an eventuality that would deny workmen their wages, capitalists their profits, and consumers their fuel.” This statement was proven over and over. The strikes had become a never-ending cycle, concluding in only sadness and frustration; never fixing the problem at hand. With every strike, the amount of violence from both sides increased. The most known and violent strike in the history of the mining enterprise, was during 1913 to 1914. “In the aftermath of the largest and deadliest strike in US history, no one could know the changes that lay ahead for all parties involved.”¹¹ The individuals in charge of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company had some decisions to make. With their workforce raging and the invasion of independent unions looming, this decision would need to be drastic and pleasing to everyone involved, even to those looking from the outside in. “The best way to contain union activism, executives and managers decided, was to transform the coalfield landscape.”¹² This, in turn, implemented the Colorado Industrial Plan.

Co-created by John D. Rockefeller Junior. Montoya explains how the plan was “[b]etter known as the Rockefeller Plan, this employment improvement plan reconfigured the managerial structure of CF&I and marked what historians ... have identified as a dynamic shift in

⁹ Killing for Coal Pg. 85-86

¹⁰ Killing for Coal Pg. 86

¹¹ Making An American WORKFORCE Pg. 81

¹² Killing for Coal Pg. 197

labor-management relations in the United States, and eventually throughout the whole world.”¹³

The idea behind this plan would create communication throughout the different levels of the company, which would create the opportunity for trust throughout the corporation. Under the plan, workers gained rights that had never been given before not just in the West, but in the world. It was through the plan that Rockefeller gave the workers the option to decide if management was their friend or their enemy.¹⁴ He gave the workers the option to change the way operations were done in their work environment through grievances, giving them a voice for their own rights. “Soon, workers would come "to feel as though it were their own Road and not some stranger soulless corporation." Once they recognized the company as "their own business and that they were adding to their store and growing more prosperous along with the Road," the laborers ... would realize that "all their interests would be the same as their employers' ": all "waste" and "all careless mismanagement" would evaporate and [they] would become "quite a little family."¹⁵ And all of this he set in stone, by writing it down for all to see. But Rockefeller didn't stop at only reconfiguring the work environments of the workers within his company. He believed that the workers needed to be reconstructed as well.¹⁶

This is led to the creation of the Sociology Department.

¹³ Making An American WORKFORCE Pg. 84

¹⁴ Representation and Rebellion Pg. 128

¹⁵ Killing for Coal Pg. 47-48

¹⁶ Making An American WORKFORCE Pg. 85