



POWER & LIGHT

PORTRAITS OF UNSUNG AMERICANS BY RUSSELL LEE

Special Exhibition at the National Archives Museum

March 16, 2024—July 6, 2025



Who Do We Remember?

This is the story of workers who helped build a nation. Of a moment when the government took stock of their health and safety and a photographer who saw their humanity. Russell Lee's coal study photographs honor a group of Americans, more diverse than we realized, who were mostly hidden from view.

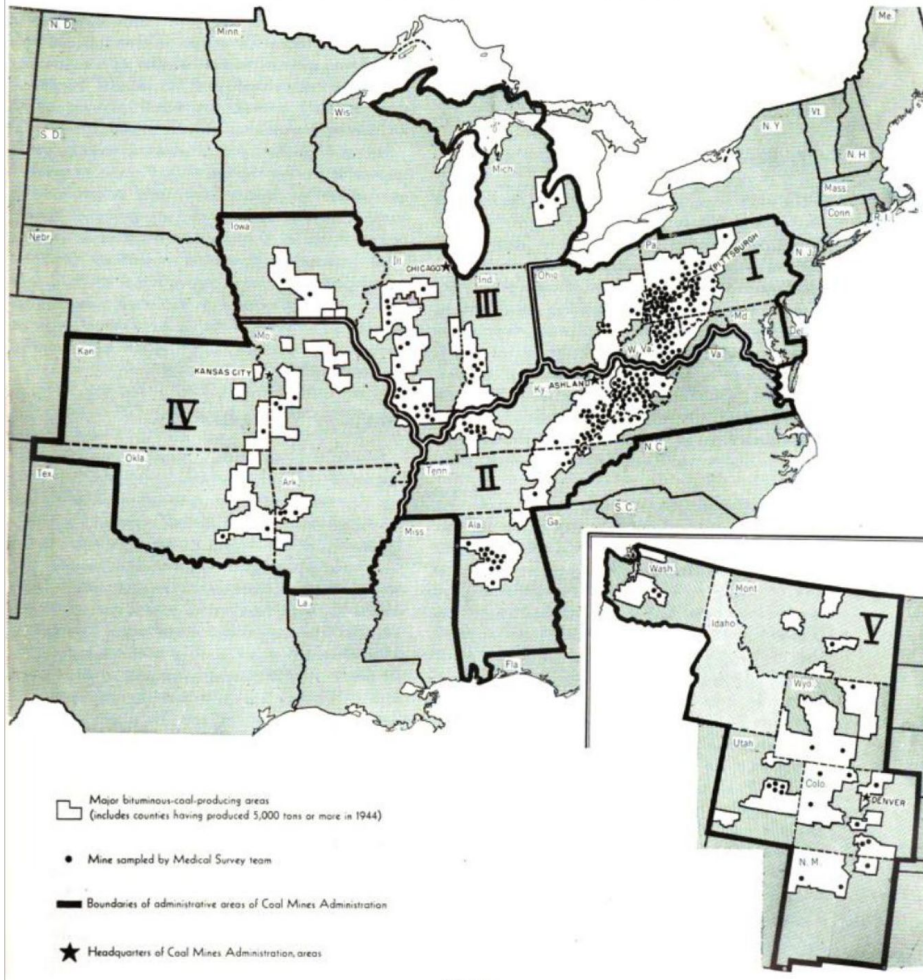
This exhibition is about who we choose to remember and how we challenge what we think we know.





The Coal Study

In 1946, President Truman ordered the seizure of bituminous coal mines to end a 40-day strike. As part of the settlement with the United Mine Workers Union, the administration agreed to survey the health and safety of the miners' working and living conditions.



The Coal Study

The study, led by the U.S. Navy Medical Corps, covered 90 mining communities in 22 states from Wyoming to West Virginia. Russell Lee was contracted to document the study with photographs.

This unprecedented effort and its powerful images were published in 1947 and resulted in many reforms.

The Photographer

The passion that ignited American photographer Russell Lee (1903–1986), best-known for his Depression-era Farm Security Administration images, was his belief in the power of photographs to inspire social change. This passion, married with his respect for his subjects, enabled Lee to create portraits that reveal the character, ingenuity, and individuality of his subjects.

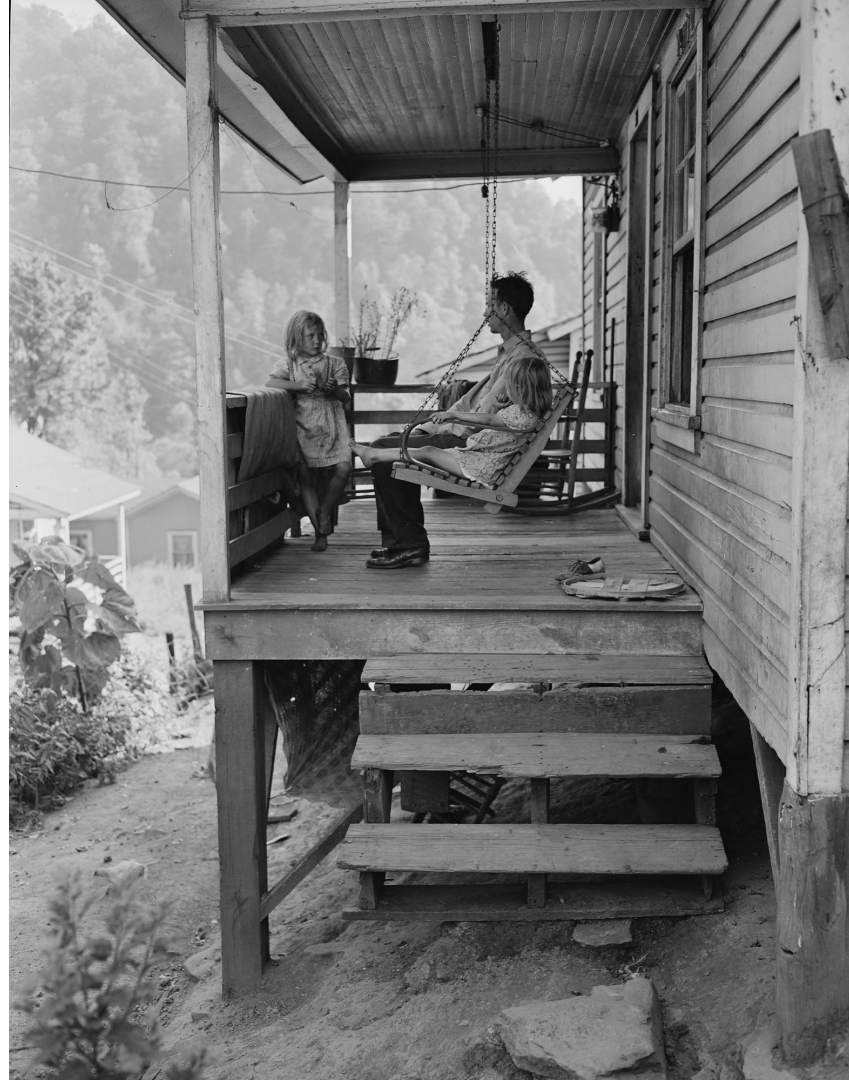


The Photographs

Only the National Archives holds the full series of coal study photographs—over 4,000 in all—including original negatives, contact prints, and handwritten notes. Despite recent scholarly attention to Russell Lee, this group of images remains largely unstudied and rarely exhibited.

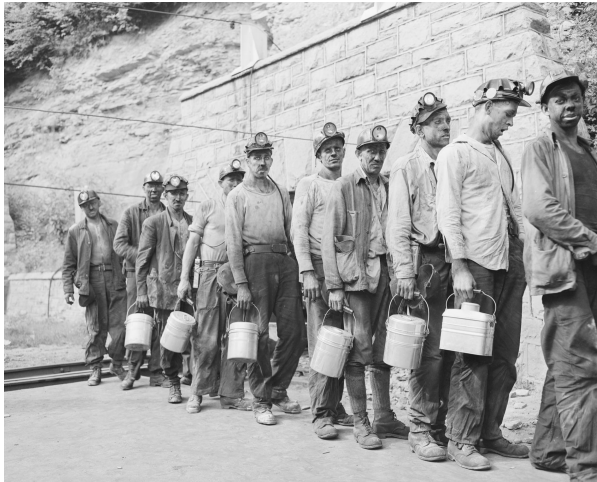
Until now.

Lee's photographs invite visitors to appreciate the miners' contributions, relate to their joys and struggles, and consider our responsibility to the wellbeing of all our citizens.



Daily Life

Lee cataloged the living and working conditions in each of the mining communities covered by the study. He often worked extensively with one family, documenting the activities of the miner, his wife, and children from morning till night. Because of his systematic approach, the coal study images are a rich source of historic information. Studied as a group, they reveal inequities within the industry and the gulf between the circumstances of the miners and those of other working class Americans.



Family

Russell Lee's personal fascinations drove him beyond the mandate of the study. Family was one of his primary interests. His good nature, easy way with people, and humility enabled him to capture unguarded and intimate moments.



Diversity

Contrary to stereotype, miners were a diverse group. Beginning in the 19th century, the promise of steady work drove immigrants and Black Americans to mining communities across the country. Russell Lee's photographs reflect this diversity. His subjects include miners of Japanese, Mexican, Greek, and African descent.



Community

Bible study, beauty contests, summer camp, baseball games—wherever miners came together, Russell Lee was there with his camera. From church to school to the company store, community formed and enriched the lives of the miners.



Resourcefulness

Lee's regard for the miners' **resourcefulness** is evident in many of his images and their detailed captions. He noted "the homemade baby buggy made of a powder box." He documented the installation of "running water at no cost to the company," and the 97-year old without no pension "who makes bread pans from sheet steel salvaged from the mine dump."

Lee created a historical record of the creative and individual ways the miners shaped their lives with whatever was at hand.



Note: Baby buggy made of a powder box.



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The National Archives Foundation is seeking financial and programmatic partnerships to ensure this project reaches the broadest audience possible in Washington, D.C. and nationally.

Expense	Budget
Washington, D.C. Exhibit	\$375,000
Virtual/Web Development & Communications	\$60,000
Education Programs & Partner Outreach	\$50,000
Exhibit Opening, Marketing, Media Development	\$85,000
NAF Project Management	\$55,000
TOTAL	\$625,000

SPONSORSHIPS

Benefits	Major Sponsor (\$100,000)	Supporting Sponsor (\$50,000)
Recognition displayed on exhibition entrance banners and sponsor acknowledgement panel, exhibit materials, throughout the National Archives building, and on the National Archives Foundation website.	Logo	Name
Recognition at and invitations to attend the National Exhibition Opening Event in Washington D.C. in March 2024.	X	X
Recognition at and invitations to all other events associated with the exhibition, including education outreach events and public programs.	X	X
NAF-led tours of the National Archives Museum exhibits, including <i>Power & Light</i> for corporate executives and guests throughout the run of the exhibition.	X	X
Recognition in regional and national advertising associated with the D.C. exhibit through print, radio, social media, and news websites.	X	-
Membership in the Foundation's Corporate Council	Silver Level	-

*Customized sponsorship packages available.
Number of invitations and other benefits dependent upon level of sponsorship.*



PARTNERSHIPS

BROAD AUDIENCE

More than 1.7 million visitors are expected to visit the exhibition in D.C. – from Members of Congress to classrooms of 8th graders – and millions more will engage with the project through in-person and virtual programming, dedicated websites, educational resources, and media initiatives.

ACTIVATION OPPORTUNITIES

Coordinated social media campaigns will engage individuals of all ages with the exhibition content during its run.

NON-PARTISAN

The Archives is dedicated to preserving and sharing the story of our nation through its own records without political bent.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES & NATIONAL ARCHIVES FOUNDATION

The National Archives' mission is to preserve, protect, and make accessible the records of our shared history.

The National Archives Foundation's mission is to generate financial and creative support for National Archives while making the records and the nation's history more accessible to the public.



1+ BILLION

Views of Archives records via Wikipedia



15+ BILLION

Records managed by the National Archives



70+ MILLION

Individuals engage with the Archives website and digital assets each year



44 SITES

Regional facilities and Presidential Libraries in 16 states around the country



1.3 MILLION

Individuals visit the iconic building in D.C. each year



NATIONAL ARCHIVES
FOUNDATION

A black and white photograph showing several children peering through a window made of horizontal wooden planks. The children are looking out with various expressions of curiosity and concern. The background behind them is dark, making their faces stand out. The window frame is made of vertical wooden planks, some showing knots and grain.

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