



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Gordon R. Smith Kentucky Photoprints

NMAH.AC.0700

David Haberstich

2000

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Gordon R. Smith Kentucky Photoprints
Date:	1994
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0700
Creator:	Smith, Gordon R. (Photographer)
Extent:	0.1 Cubic feet (1 box, 7 items)
Language:	English .
Summary:	Photographs from a project entitled "Kentucky Coal Country," in which photographer Gordon Smith concentrates on economic and social factors in Kentucky. The photographs document poverty, erosion of the land through strip mining, and other harsh realities in Kentucky.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Gordon R. Smith, 1999, January 25.

Provenance

The photographer donated the photographs to the Archives Center after communication with the photographic archivist. They represent a synthesis of choices by artist and curator, and were printed especially for the Museum after selections were made from slides and proofs. They were donated to the Museum in late January 1999.

The photographer has the original negatives and retains copyright. Anyone interested in reproducing these photographs should contact him directly. The Archives Center can provide his address and telephone number.

Processing Information

Collection processed by David Haberstick, 2000.

Preferred Citation

Gordon R. Smith Kentucky Photoprints, 1994, Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Photographer holds copyrights. Reproduction permission from artist; contact information upon request.

Biographical / Historical

Gordon R. Smith is an American photojournalist whose photographs are in the collections of the Library of Congress, the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Center for Creative Photography (Tucson, Arizona), the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, and many other American and European collections. He has been included in many group exhibitions, and he has had solo exhibitions in galleries in the United States, Canada, Colombia, Denmark, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. He has received grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (Visual Arts Fellowship, 1994) and Eastman Kodak Company (Materials Grant, 1990).

His work has been published in the *Washington Post*, *New York Newsday*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Photographer's Forum*, *S F Camerawork*, *Photo Metro*, *The Photo Review*, *Camera Austria*, and other newspapers and magazines. He is based in Pennsylvania.

Scope and Contents

The seven photographs in this group are all from a project entitled "Kentucky Coal Country," in which Gordon Smith concentrates on economic and social factors in Kentucky. They powerfully and starkly document poverty, erosion of the land through strip mining, and other harsh realities in Kentucky. All negatives were made in 1994, but these prints were made by Smith in late 1998 and/or early 1999. All are silver gelatin, printed on 16" x 20" paper, and are unmounted. Included with the prints are copies of the artist's project description and a caption list with his comments for forty images in the series.

Smith's photographs depict the Appalachian region of Kentucky, whose residents remain among the poorest in the nation. "This region, whose underground fortunes are still being ruthlessly plundered, now faces a near lifeless economy patched together by low paying service jobs, food stamps and welfare cheques," he writes. "...[The] Appalachian Regional Commission has overseen the spending of huge quantities of taxpayer dollars in an effort to penetrate the economic, geographic and cultural isolation of this mountainous region... Two thirds of these funds have been absorbed by road construction efforts which appear to have been more beneficial to local contractors and the coal and lumber industries than the population at large. The lavish spending program has had little effect in transforming the area's coal-linked economic base... The state of Kentucky has been particularly hard hit." Smith's photographs indicate his concerns about the devastation of both the land and the people in the Appalachian region of Kentucky. The photographs in this selection vividly show the effects of strip mining, as well as people living in poverty. "Machines have stolen forever the jobs that kept this land alive," he comments. "...As communities perish and families are split apart, one of America's oldest and least understood cultures is in danger of being wiped away..."

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into two series.

Series 1: Documents,

Series 2: Photographs,

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Coal mines and mining -- 1990-2000 -- Kentucky
Strip mining -- Environmental aspects -- 1990-2000 -- Kentucky

Types of Materials:

Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 1980-2000

Places:

Appalachian Region
Kentucky -- 1990-2000

Container Listing

Series 1: Documents, undated

Box 1 Project Description by the artist: "Kentucky Coal Country," 2 pp.

Box 1 Caption List for forty images, "Kentucky Coal Country," 3 pp.

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Series 2: Photographs, 1998-1999

Box 1, Item 1	Roadside Advertisement, Rt. 1862, Thornton Notes: "There must have been some very persuasive salespersons about-tanning beds are available everywhere."
Box 1, Item 2	Tracy Rickett, Waiting on the Laundry, Cawood Notes: "Tracy has been trying to save up enough money to buy a clothes dryer. 'Sure will make things easier in the winter,' she says, 'One of these days, Lord willing, it'll come to pass.'"
Box 1, Item 3	Security Guard (Joe Bently), Kite Notes: "Joe guards machinery for New Horizon Coal. He doesn't like the job, but admits he was lucky to find it."
Box 1, Item 4	Dumptruck Dust, Perry County Notes: "Roaring back empty for more, this truck has just dumped its load of rock. As they blast and scrape away at a mountaintop removal site, huge trucks are loaded with the unusable rock refuse which is hauled to a spot where it can be flung down the mountainside into an adjacent valley."
Box 1, Item 5	Two Dumptrucks, Perry County Notes: "The size of the mining equipment is massive—the tires on these dumptrucks are nearly nine feet tall. Two men standing on the ground next to a pickup truck can be seen to the left of center in the photograph."
Box 1, Item 6	Kentucky Fried Mountains, Knott County Image(s): 6. Kentucky Fried Mountains, Knott County Notes: "This section is almost mined out. A few veins still adorn the battered face of this formerly pristine ridge."
Box 1, Item 7	Sunset, Mountaintop Removal Site, Knott County Notes: "Working in three eight-hour shifts, the mining process continues day and night."

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