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Casey P. Cater. *Regenerating Dixie: Electric Energy and the Modern South.* History of the Urban Environment Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. Illustrations. 248 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8229-4564-2.

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Regenerating Dixie is a rich and well-researched study of the adoption of electrical power in the Southeast United States that will interest historians of technology, southern historians, and perhaps even environmental historians. It focuses specifically on the electrification of "Alabama, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Tennessee," with particular attention paid to Atlanta, Georgia, as an exemplar of the industrializing "New South" (p. 6). Casey P. Cater argues convincingly that the South has been all too often neglected in histories of electricity. He fills this gap in the scholarly record, demonstrating how the national battle regarding public and private ownership of electrical utilities played out in interesting and regionally specific ways. In the process, he also chronicles how different stakeholders helped to shape what electrification meant in the South through their clashes and compromises. This is no Whig history—Cater excels at recapturing the different possibilities for development and exploring how and why certain models and policies won out.

Cater's first chapter, "An Unseen Force in the New South," discusses the earliest electrical developments in the region. It discusses how world's fairs in Atlanta, Louisville, and Nashville strove to recast the South as modern and forward-looking. Despite the novelty of these exhibitions, Cater demonstrates how municipal governments worked to keep electrical power in southern cities, even when city councils were hesitant to invest their money in a different lighting source than gas. While readers may already be familiar with the "Battle of the Currents" between Thomas Edison and George Westinghouse that waged on the national stage, Cater describes the lesser-known "Second Battle of Atlanta" between Joel Hurt and Henry Atkinson, illustrating how regional utilities companies and power brokers became embroiled in their own local dramas that were no less important to the history of electricity.

The second chapter, "Electricity and the Mind of the New South," addresses the complexity of social and racial power dynamics, recognizing, for example, that amusement parks seemed to modernize the South by challenging some social mores, but that they still used state police to enforce Jim Crow and bar Black southerners from participating in this new form of entertainment. Cater argues that, "If most dreams for—and lived realities of—the New South's future applied primarily to whites, African Americans too saw in the electrified city prospects for a better life" (p. 38). This chapter misses the opportunity to cite evidence of Black perspectives that were so hopeful for those better prospects; the number of Black southerners

who used mass transit stand in for his argument on this point. Cater does, however, discuss Black activism that pushed back against segregationist policies on electric trolley lines by boycotting, withholding fare, and staging sit-ins on streetcars. He also details the role white supremacy played in electrical development, detailing, for example, a white riot that attached a car and murdered at least three Black men. White supremacists thought that privately owned utilities were capitalistic above racial separation; they pushed for public ownership in their attempts to keep electricity—and particularly electric traction—a form of white privilege. At this point, Cater turns from focalizing on the perspective of Black southerners to discuss how white-owned electrical companies adopted the language of white supremacy to push their own agenda to keep electricity in the hands of private business: "Electric utility regulation in Georgia was a shield against angry whites' calls for government ownership of the utility business" (p. 50).

Chapter 3, "A Mighty Outpost of Progress," discusses the role of hydropower in the South, the ways it was affected by drought, and the slow adoption of coal, which was often mined with unpaid convict laborers. This chapter analyzes how different stakeholders in the electrical industry engaged with the ideas of the Old South and the New South: "New South leaders argued that a new work ethic must replace romantic notions of the 'genteel loader' and the dawdling slave" (p. 62). They adapted racist narratives about the laziness of the past to justify the fact that they were putting rivers to work in new ways. After Tallulah Falls became a symbol of the New South in this way, preservationists sought to reimagine it as a part of their heritage, although it was a part of Cherokee territory until 1819. This chapter discusses how the use of waterpower became a pawn in the fight over southern identity.

The fourth chapter, "Power for the Masses and the Farm," discusses the use of slave imagery in advertisements for electrification—a subject that particularly interested me. It also discusses the earliest push toward rural electrification in the South and further debates about privately versus publicly owned power. This chapter is particularly adept at complicating regional debates. Cater argues, for example, that "the Hydro's failure in Georgia did not deter like-minded actors in other southern states" (p. 93). Cater also address white supremacy again in this chapter, discussing how privately owned utilities took up discussions of race and class to support privatization—drawing on a rhetorical technique that was previously used by anti-monopolists who favored public ownership.

Cater continues his discussion of rural electrification in his fifth chapter, "A New Power Era," in which he discusses the Tennessee Valley Authority and Rural Electrification Administration's different points of contact with the South. This chapter chronicles how hydropower became coded as publicly owned and how electricity shifted from being considered a luxury to a necessity. This chapter misses the opportunity to discuss how that shift in status affected Black southerners; Cater does continue to focus on race but mostly through the lens of racism as in the fear that Black meter-readers would visit farms and thus interact with white women (p. 117).

Chapter 6, "Public Dams, Private Powers," chronicles fears of power shortages and southern clashes with the US Department of Interior and critiques of the New Deal. It discusses Dwight D. Eisenhower's election and promise to take the federal government out of sectors that could be run by private industry and the effects that change in policy promised for the owners of southern power companies.

The seventh chapter, "The Heart of the New South," introduces an interesting concept that Cater calls "historical friction," or the process by which people stop noticing elements of infrastructure that they depend on. He says, "although hydroelectricity receded from view and importance

in the 1940s and 1950s, coal plants, coal mines, and coal trains did not replace dams and rivers in the public eye ... leaving a conceptual void" (p. 158). I wonder how Cater's intriguing concept of "historical friction" might engage with the science and technology studies scholarship that examines the invisibilization of infrastructure, most notably Paul N. Edwards's essay on the subject, which is included in Cater's references but not discussed in the text.[1] This chapter discusses one final clash with student environmental activists who resisted nuclear power. Cater mentions that these activists "aligned with civil rights organization such as the NAACP" but does not discuss what role Black activists played in the movement or how the activist organization, the Mississippi Catfish Alliance, might relate to the tradition of Black activism he discusses in chapter 2 (p. 178).

Cater's conclusion emphasizes the role that "ordinary people" played in energy history and addresses its engagement with environmental history. "The point," he says, "is not to idealize 'The People' as a pure and unified force fighting the good fight. Southerners frequently disagreed with and acted violently against one another. White southerners often characterized their antimonopoly crusades as a means, at least in part, to protect or recover a chimerical sense of racial supremacy and their movements and interests rarely included African Americans" (p. 187). Cater does succeed in these stated goals, though Black and other nonwhite perspectives and voices—perhaps from minority-owned newspapers—could have offered a counterpoint to the white supremacist perspectives that he chronicles and critiques. At the very least, a discussion of why those perspectives are marginalized in this text or in the archives would have more fully realized the goal of telling a true people's history. That said, this book does offer a rich discussion of the role electricity played in consolidating white supremacy, and, reciprocally, of the role that different white power brokers played in shaping the electrification of the South.

Note

[1]. Paul N. Edwards, "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems," in *Modernity and Technology*, ed. Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 185-225.

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