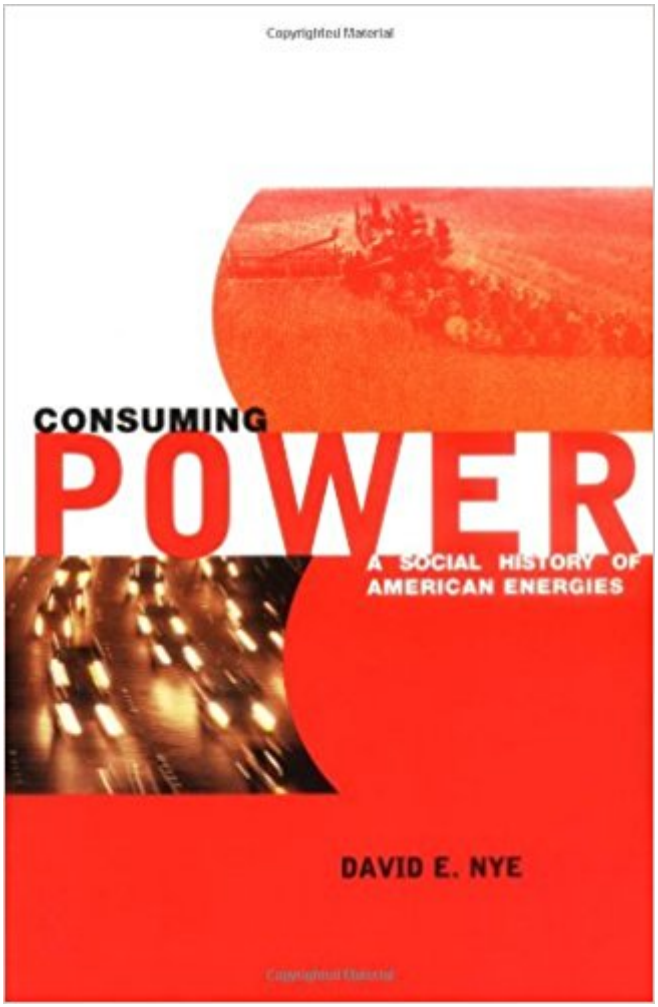
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Consuming Power: A Social History Of American Energies



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Synopsis

How did the United States become the world's largest consumer of energy? David Nye shows that this is less a question about the development of technology than it is a question about the development of culture. In Consuming Power, Nye uses energy as a touchstone to examine the lives of ordinary people engaged in normal activities. He looks at how these activities changed as new energy systems were constructed, from colonial times to recent years. He also shows how, as Americans incorporated new machines and processes into their lives, they became ensnared in power systems that were not easily changed: they made choices about the conduct of their lives, and those choices accumulated to produce a consuming culture. Nye examines a sequence of large systems that acquired and then lost technological momentum over the course of American history, including water power, steam power, electricity, the internal-combustion engine, atomic power, and computerization. He shows how each system became part of a larger set of social constructions through its links to the home, the factory, and the city. The result is a social history of America as seen through the lens of energy consumption.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Despite the double-entendre in its title, this work focuses less on the history of America's consumption of energy than on its sheer consumption, conspicuous and incorrigible. Nye (American studies, Odense Univ., Denmark; American Technological Sublime, LJ 11/1/94) attempts to

examine how the development of energy systems within America’s unique culture, within a complex set of social constructions, caused the United States to become the "greatest power-consuming nation in history." His rambling and tentative work moves awkwardly from the painfully mundane, such as the type of shoes people wore, to the painfully abstruse: "Possessing a new way to move through the world creates tacit dynamic and perceptual knowledge, thus expanding the potential for experience." Lacking serious discussion of BTUs and horsepower, it is largely a hodgepodge of technology, commerce, and labor, a better treatment of which can be found in any standard history text. Not recommended.?Robert C. Ballou, AtlantaCopyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This survey is compellingly written, making intelligent use of entertaining anecdotes, apt but unfamiliar quotations, and concrete details of everyday life -- all in the service of innovative general arguments. (Jeffrey L. Meikle, Director, American Studies Program, University of Texas at Austin; author of American Plastic: A Cultural History)

Rating the first book one has read on a subject is always a speculative venture one has nothing to compare it with. That said, Consuming Power is a very engaging read and covers a wide range of technical and social issues that gave rise to power systems in the US, contrasting our choices with the UK to make the case that, indeed, our systems WERE choices. The later chapters in the book are not without a bias regarding the current debate over human induced climate change, but the presentation is forthright; one can choose to agree with the author or not. This is a good read, and the copious footnotes provide ample information for additional acquisitions.

I thought this book was fascinating. I have been doing research on energy for a long time and this is one of the best books I have read. Nye examines the role that energy use has played in American society -- an important relationship that energy analysts have generally ignored. The book is very readable and well-researched, and always interesting.

Intereseting book had to have it for class. Shipped as expected.

This is a fabulous piece of social history -- deeply researched, insightful, and utterly lucid. It is among the best university-press books I can remember reading.

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