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REGENERATING DIXIE:  
ELECTRIC ENERGY AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN SOUTH

by

CASEY P. CATER

Under the Direction of Michelle Brattain, PhD and Joe Perry, PhD

ABSTRACT

The emergence and spread of electricity profoundly shaped the “long New South.” This dissertation traces the electrification of the US South from the 1880s to the 1970s. Focusing primarily on the Atlanta-based Georgia Power Company, it emphasizes that electricity’s rise was not simply the result of technological innovation. It was a multifaceted process that deeply influenced, and was influenced by, environmental alterations, political machinations, business practices, and social and cultural matters. Although it hewed to national and global patterns in many respects, southern electrification charted a distinctive and instructive path. Its story speaks to the ways the

South's experiences with electrification shaped larger American models of energy transitions and economic development, but also the ways it wrought dramatic changes in the fabric of everyday life.

INDEX WORDS: Electricity, Hydroelectricity, US South, Georgia, Atlanta, Rural Electrification, New South, Georgia Power Company, Alabama Power Company, Southern Company, Morgan Falls, Tallulah Falls, Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, Clarks Hill, Coal, Plant Robert W. Scherer, Nuclear Power, Plant Alvin W. Vogtle, Energy transitions, Energy history, Environmental history, Business history

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ELECTRIC ENERGY AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN SOUTH

by

CASEY P. CATER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2016

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REGENERATING DIXIE:  
ELECTRIC ENERGY AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN SOUTH

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Georgia State University

August 2016

## **DEDICATION**

For Ewa, Krzysiu, and Zosia

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As several historians have pointed out, a study of electrification is in many ways an investigation of things that have been obscured. The links between daily life and dams, coal mines, coal trains, power lines, substations, distribution systems, financial vehicles, corporate dealings, congressional hearings, and so on, and so on are mostly hidden from view. But they are indispensable to the lives (most) people are able to lead in the modern United States.

My attempt to uncover these connections in the US South has taken lots of time and effort, and I would never have been able to complete this project if weren't for the people nearest and dearest to me—the people who are most often the collective unseen force underwriting this type of work. So I want to flip the usual acknowledgment script and thank them first. Ewa has supported and sustained me, in more ways than I can count, every single step of the way. She encouraged me to go to graduate school, refused to let me quit, prodded me to finish, played zone defense against the kids when I was away for research and conferences, and did so much more. Words are truly inadequate to express my gratitude and love for her. Mentioning the children, Krzysztof and Zofia: they did very little to help see this study to completion. In fact, their unceasing tomfoolery, endless energy, and amazingly boundless curiosity kept me (mostly pleasantly) distracted far too often. But still, I'm grateful and indebted to them anyway. I did all of this for them, and it's to them and Ewa that I dedicate my work. *Kocham was bardzo.*

My parents, Mike and Cheryl, have been wellsprings of support too. They have fed us, taken care of the kids, and offered me plenty of encouragement and praise. What is more, their lifelong example of charity, generosity, and perseverance constantly inspires me to be a better, more open human being. Thanks, Mom and Dad! My brothers Brent, Josh, Steven, and my sister, Michelle, deserve lots of thanks as well. Though I have never felt anything but love and support



from them, their not infrequent good-natured jabs at my chosen path—to say nothing of the occasional basketball game, round of golf, birthday party, or brewery visit—have helped me stay grounded. At the risk of going completely off the rails, I also want to thank my in-laws, Ryszard and Maria Urbowicz, for making me feel welcome in Poland (not an easy thing for a foreigner to pull off, for sure) and even allowing me some time to work during our family vacations there.

Now on to the usual suspects. While my family acted the emotional infrastructure that allowed finish my dissertation, no one has been more critical to this project's completion than Joe Perry. It was Joe who suggested that southern electrification might be an interesting subject and it was Joe who urged me to switch from my original topic to a study of electric power development in the South. Joe read every version of everything I wrote and his critical eye, along with his unceasing insistence that I add more cultural history, forced me to hone my thoughts, to improve my prose, and, simply, to do better work. Beyond being a great advisor, Joe has been a steady friend as well as an outstanding sommelier and DJ. Michelle Brattain, too, offered me wonderful advice, feedback (especially concerning labor history), and encouragement, and always came through when I needed her help. Although he graciously agreed to join my dissertation committee quite late in the game, Chuck Steffen, my original teaching mentor, has played a pivotal role in helping me paint a clearer picture of capitalist development and life in the modern South.

I have also benefitted greatly from the kindnesses of many other faculty members in the Department of History at Georgia State University. Isa Blumi—now of the University of Stockholm—is a human dynamo, easily the most prolific scholar I have ever known. (He says he's a prolific scorer too, but I have yet to find a way to coax him on to the basketball court.) Isa has long been an unofficial mentor and generously devoted untold amounts of time reading and

commenting on my work. He has also been an unfailing source of encouragement. “You’re a true scholar,” he once told me. I’m still trying to live up to that line—and will be for a long time.

Glenn Eskew and the late Cliff Kuhn guided me through my master’s level studies and taught me southern history. If I understand anything about the curious and tortured past (to say nothing of the present) of my native land, it’s due to them. I also want to thank Rob Baker, Alex Cummings, Ian Fletcher, Denis Gainty, Larry Grubbs, Hugh Hudson, Richard Laub, John McMillian, Jared Poley, Steve Rapp, J.T. Way, and Larry Youngs for the advice, friendship, and laughs shared in seminars or just in stop-and-chat encounters. I reserve a special shout-out for Christine Skwiot for being there for me so many times.

One of the most rewarding things about graduate school is making friends. Far and away my closest friends from my years at Georgia State are Hal Hansen, Jon Schmitt, and Clif Stratton—three of the smartest guys I know (but that’s my problem). Hal is as dependable as they come. He has read nearly every word of this dissertation and has offered many valuable insights on how to improve it. More than that, Hal and his wife Jan have long been very close friends who are always willing to post up at 71 for witty banter, smoked wings, frosty beverages, and time-tested music. Along with Joe Perry and Hal Hansen, Jon is probably more familiar with my work than anyone else and tirelessly agreed—sometimes with very little notice—to pore over everything I wrote. If the study that follows has anything valuable to say, it’s because Jon, in no small measure, has helped make it so. Clif has been an unfailing friend for over ten years, one with whom I can always share a fine beer, make quips (that I don’t have to explain) about *Seinfeld*, and bellyache about the Braves. Clif’s work as a teacher and a scholar inspire me. He’s set the standard for GSU history PhDs.

To my other pals from GSU: Joe Bagley, Greg Brooking, Mindy Clegg, Michelle Lacoss, Lauren Moran, Sam Negus, Sara Patenaude, Dylan Ruediger, Alyson Tadjer, Lauren Thompson, and Juan Pablo Valenzuela (or is it Venezuela?): I can't say how valuable it has been to get to know and learn so much from each of them. Ryan Prechter is a friend I can always count on. Only he knows what this means, but a significant portion of my research would literally have been impossible if he had not been willing to help me out.

Friends outside the GSU family have offered me more than just friendship—although that would have been enough. They have generously welcomed me—an energy and environmental history orphan—into the energy and environmental history family. Katherine Stevens, now an ATLIen and a fine southern environmental historian, agreed to put me up, sight unseen, when we were both WHEATSies at MIT. We've been close pals ever since. Michaela Thompson is the best ASEH buddy a guy could ask for. I basically shamelessly cold called Bart Elmore and Chris Jones. They have both been extraordinarily kind. They've read and commented on chapters, proposals, and letters, and have helped me in many other ways too. Will Bryan and Bert Way have taken time to talk with me and have offered to look over my work, and they've both contributed to southern environmental history in ways to which I can only hope to aspire. My hydropower consorts, Jon Hill, Marc Landry, and Fred Meiton, are all outstanding scholars who, each in his own way, have helped make my thoughts on hydroelectricity (and even coal-fired electricity) much clearer and better.

Lastly, humble and heartfelt thanks are due to the institutions that have kindly furnished me with the financial assistance that made much of my research and writing possible. A research grant through the History Project (a joint venture of Harvard University, Cambridge University, and the Institute for New Economic Thinking) as well as a Joel Williamson Southern Studies

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In an April 2011 speech at the US Chamber of Commerce's "CEO Leadership Luncheon," the Atlanta-based Southern Company's chief executive Thomas Fanning lamented that under President Barack Obama, the federal government had "virtually declared a war on coal." Proposed strictures on coal-based power plant emissions, especially those of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Fanning reported, "will limit our ability long term to use coal." For the electric utilities under the Southern Company's financial umbrella (the Georgia Power, Alabama Power, Mississippi Power, and Gulf Power Companies) the government's bellicosity posed a serious problem. Coal, according to Fanning, was "America's most abundant energy resource" and still served as the basis for almost half of the nation's electrical generation, more than half for the Southern Company group, and some two-thirds for Southern Company's largest operating utility, the Georgia Power Company. The EPA's new regulations, which, Fanning feared, "must be met in an unreasonably short time frame," would likely increase energy costs by 20 percent and would eliminate some 70,000 megawatts of much-needed power for American homes and businesses by 2015. The fallout from such developments, though, would rock the foundations of more than just the electric industry. The interference of the federal bureaucracy in the electric industry's affairs would inflict massive damage on the US economy as well as on everyday American life. The EPA's new guidelines, according to the Southern Company's CEO, would immediately jeopardize "35,000 jobs" in the utility industry, "but you also have coal mining, railroads and equipment vendors that will be impacted. Those jobs will go away too. And think about the tax base that would be lost to those communities." If



America's business leaders failed to take adequate account of their foe, the "health of jobs and the economy" would take a quick and decided turn for the worse.<sup>1</sup>

Fanning's discussion of prevailing, if not heavy-handed, energy policy under the Obama administration spoke to several critical questions facing the South in the twenty-first century: business-government tensions, exploitation of natural resources, environmental issues, economic growth, jobs, and the importance of electric power to daily life. And with some justification Fanning cast his industry as central to both the southern and US economies in the early twenty-first century. With a market capitalization of nearly \$45 billion and generating capacity of nearly 46,000 megawatts, Southern Company is the third largest electric energy corporation in the United States; the largest (Duke Energy) and second largest (NRG Energy) American power companies also call the South home.<sup>2</sup> The concerns Fanning raised, however, were not germane only to conditions in 2011. Whether Fanning realized it or not, his comments existed in a long and deep stream of history. Essentially from its founding in the late-nineteenth century, the privately owned electric utility industry in Dixie had wrestled with these same matters.

As the story of southern electrification is most often told—in as much as it has been told at all—the nineteenth century would not be the starting point. Electrical modernization, it seems, only came to this putatively backward section of the United States after federal government intervention through agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). As it is commonly understood in both the scholarly and

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<sup>1</sup> "Southern Chairman Fanning Talks Energy Policy at US Chamber," *Atlanta Business Chronicle*, Apr. 13, 2011 <<http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/news/2011/04/13/fanning-talks-energy-policy-at-us.html?s=print>> (accessed Aug. 27, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Reuters, "Factbox: Largest US Electric Companies by Megawatts, Customers," *Reuters*, Apr. 29, 2014 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-efh-bankruptcy-utilities-idUSBREA3S0P420140429>> (accessed Aug 28, 2015). It is critical to note that Southern Company is a utilities holding company, not an operating utility. Southern Company generates, transmits, and distributes no electricity and issues no bills directly from customers. It controls financing and coordination for its operating utilities. The operating utilities in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi in which Southern Company owns controlling shares are responsible for generating, transmitting, and distributing electricity directly (and in some cases indirectly) to customers across much of the South.

popular mind—despite the existence by the early 1920s of sophisticated networks of hydropower dams and coal-fired generating stations as well as the United States’ most expansive regional transmission system—the history of the TVA, and to a lesser extent that of the REA, *is* the story of southern electrification.<sup>3</sup> As such, the corporate-directed electrification of the South before the New Deal years has drawn very little scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup>

Southern power companies’ pre-New Deal innovations constitute only part of the story. During and after the Second World War, private electric utilities in the South enthusiastically continued to follow utility mogul Samuel Insull’s “grow-and-build” model, expanding their generating capacities and customer bases by leaps and bounds with each passing decade.<sup>5</sup> Increases in production and transmission capacity during the 1940s and after—in concert with the South’s long-practiced policies of unfettered environmental modifications, cheap and abundant energy, and low-wage, non-unionized labor—coincided with a dramatic surge in both federal aid and private investment that, by the late 1960s, helped transform the New South into the Sunbelt South. And as its electrical capabilities grew, the region’s prominence in the nation grew as well. In fact, it was this southern model of development, trumpeted for so long by southern electric company leaders and political-business elites, which became the national

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to diminish the undeniably momentous impacts the TVA or the REA have made on southern, US, and even world history. The volume of work dedicated to explaining and understanding these agencies testifies to their importance. For the TVA see Preston J. Hubbard, *Origins of the TVA: The Muscle Shoals Controversy, 1920-1932* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961); Thomas K. McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-1939* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971); North Callahan, *TVA: Bridge over Troubled Waters* (South Brunswick, NJ: AS Barnes, 1980); Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study of Politics and Organization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); Michael McDonald and John Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections of Roosevelt’s America, Mussolini’s Italy, and Hitler’s Germany, 1933-1939* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007). The REA has received far less scholarly attention. See D. Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for REA* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> The one shining exception here is Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped A Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> The “grow-and-build” model is discussed in Richard F. Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation in the American Electric Utility Industry* (Cambridge, 1989), 19-21.

standard for large-scale, corporate-driven, and federally-supported economic growth in the second half of the twentieth century. The private utility industry in the South stood at the cutting edge of American energy development before, during, and after the TVA's heyday.

To make the case for southern electrification as a national model is not to deny the region's peculiarities. The South was different from the rest of the American nation. Given the weight of southern history—including its experiences with slavery, defeat, poverty, racial violence, segregation and disfranchisement, and slow rates of urbanization and industrialization—it could hardly have been otherwise. The burdens of southern culture, as we will see, affected the process of southern electrification; and these differences make the South a useful case study for American energy history. “Different,” however, does not mean “exceptional.” The South did not stand so far apart from the rest of the United States that its past has little instruction to offer. It was at once particular and universal.

In any case, in spite of the region's reflections of and impacts on national processes of electrification, environmental historians and historians of technology have neglected to study this phenomenon in the southern states. For their part, southern historians have only sparingly discussed the importance of electricity to the Dixie's post-Reconstruction history. Focusing largely on the Georgia Power Company—a company based in Atlanta, in many ways the South's most important city—this project addresses these gaps in the scholarship by exploring the process of southern electrification from the early 1880s to the mid-1970s.

More than just attempting to fill in lacunae, though, this study aims to offer a fresh way to think about the southern past. Readers familiar with southern historiography will instantly recognize “Regenerating Dixie” as an obvious riff on the idea of a “New South”—an unofficial but nonetheless powerful program inaugurated in the late 1870s. Pitched by hosts of politicians

and business leaders, as well as by newspaper editors such as Henry Grady, the New South idea sought to modernize a thoroughly defeated and desperately impoverished region through rapid urbanization and industrialization and through tranquil race and class relations. Many historical accounts lock the New South as a more-or-less discreet program into the three or four decades following the conclusion of Reconstruction, or discuss a “second” New South that emerged in the middle of the twentieth century, and focus largely on cotton mill magnates, planters, and race-politicians.<sup>6</sup> In “Regenerating Dixie,” I conceive of a “long New South” that was in many ways driven by the electric utility industry. Indeed, without an accounting of electricity’s career, we remain unable to fully understand the modern South.

The rise and growth of the electric utility industry was no mere adjunct to the long New South. Following a sluggish and uncertain beginning in the 1880s, electricity quickly came to stoke the engines of urban commerce and transportation. By the 1910s electric power had solidified its reputation as an almost required luxury in well-appointed homes and became the prime mover behind the South’s push to take the lead American textile manufacturing. In the middle of the twentieth century, electricity powered an expanding (if often troubled) southern industrial sector, drove southern military production, made its way into non-elite homes, and began to illuminate farms. After World War II, electricity played a vital role in virtually every facet of daily southern life and served as the foundation on which many southerners could finally

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<sup>6</sup> The literature on the New South is vast. Some of the more prominent works on the subject include C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1938-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Edward L. Ayers, *Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

stand as full and equal participants in the dream of American abundance. From the beginning, those who led the electric utility industry's expansion claimed that their business would be crucial to Dixie's regeneration following the bloody upheavals of the 1860s and 1870s. They were not wrong to do so. In addition to the coal-fired units, hydroelectric dams, power lines, and streetcar networks they constructed, electric utility executives acted as investment conduits for the South. The leaders of what would become the Georgia Power Company, for example, arranged for increasingly large amounts of capital from across the United States and around the globe to flow into Dixie. When the Georgia Railway and Power Company (the immediate predecessor to Georgia Power) claimed in 1926 that it operated as "the key which has opened a veritable treasure house of advantages to the manufacturer," it was on to something.<sup>7</sup>

Yet neither the long New South nor the phenomenon of electrification was ever the unquestioned property of financial-industrial elites. The quest to regenerate Dixie was a constantly contested process. From the 1890s to the 1970s, ordinary southerners played a vital role in making both the modern South and electric utility industry. In the late-nineteenth century, many average people envisioned and fought for a South that would best serve their interests. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Populist revolt of the 1890s, but the spirit of populism carried on for decades in fights for control over electricity.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have recently argued for the importance of "watershed democracy" and "carbon democracy."<sup>9</sup> For their part, ordinary southerners in the city and on the farm strove for the realization of an electrical democracy, and thereby, a more democratic New South. While utility executives most often

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<sup>7</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Georgia Railway and Power Company* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1926), 15.

<sup>8</sup> See Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Donald Worster, "Watershed Democracy: Rediscovering the Lost Vision of John Wesley Powell," in *Water: Histories, Cultures, Ecologies*, Marie Leybourne and Andrea Gaynor, eds. (Crawley, Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2006); and Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011).

realized at least some version of their stated goal to preserve electric energy's status as a privately controlled commodity, people's efforts to define electricity as a public service—through municipal ownership campaigns, environmentalist movements, and rural electrification crusades—made deep imprints on the process of electrification.

One of the most consequential of these impacts concerned the role of government. Certainly ordinary southerners tried to restructure the state to better serve the people's needs, but, so did the private utility managers. In fact, government played a large role in the making of the electric industry. Despite Fanning's objections to new federal guidelines—just one example of such rhetoric in a long history of castigating federal interference in their business—southern utilities actively courted governmental involvement. They did so, in large part, as a reaction to the people's influence. Government—at the local, state, and federal levels—worked as a protective shield and as a generous benefactor for private utilities in the South. Though minimized by electricity's historians, the near-constant conflicts between private power and public power forces formed one of the core themes in the development of the electric industry from the late-nineteenth century to the late-twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> Business leaders were thus not simply rational economic actors concerned only with profit-and-loss statements and the internal workings of the firm. Neither were consumers their helpless pawns. A consideration of both the corporate and popular sides of southern electrification provides a productive way to discuss the story of electric energy and the long New South.

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<sup>10</sup> See Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1888-1940* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990); Paul W. Hirt, *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s to 1970s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012); Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*.

The southern electric business was also deeply influenced by, and helped shape, environmental factors, politics and culture. Electrification was a fundamentally environmental project. It involved not just the interactions of infrastructures and human institutions, but, critically, of the forces of nature as well.<sup>11</sup> Until recently, electricity's historians have ignored these connections. "Regenerating Dixie" argues that environmental factors must be taken into account. The way southerners imagined the natural world and their relationship to it conditioned the manner in which they worked to seize and use the environment to their advantage. The exploitation of landscapes and waterscapes for the generation, transmission, and distribution of electric power was from the outset foundational to the realization of modern life in metropolitan cores from the 1880s to the 1970s.

If historians of technology have sidelined the role of nature in the electrification of America, environmental historians have had very little to contribute to the history of electrification—aside from the ways that people's technological choices have resulted in devastating but nonetheless unintended consequences.<sup>12</sup> This history, however, is more than just one of byproducts that have resulted from a growing society's perceived needs. The rhetoric surrounding and the "successes" in altering land and waterways did not simply reflect the appetites of swelling urban-industrial cores. Rather, southerners cast the manipulation of the

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<sup>11</sup> I have formed this perspective based on the work of several historians, including Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); James C. Williams, *Energy and the Making of Modern California* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1997); Paul N. Edwards, "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems" in Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg, *Modernity and Technology* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003); Needham, *Power Line*; Jones, *Routes of Power*; and Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*.

<sup>12</sup> The environmental historians who have recently undertaken to study electrification are much more attuned to unintended consequences of electrification—particularly the impact on fish—than to the fact that the degradation of land- and waterscapes was fundamental to modernity generally and to electrification specifically. See for example Karl Boyd Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams: The Hells Canyon High Dam Controversy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); and Hirt, *Wired Northwest*. Examples of other historians whose works have considered the environmentally unfortunate byproducts of electrification include Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Eugene Levy, "The Aesthetics of Power: High-Voltage Transmission Systems and the American Landscape," *Technology and Culture* 38 (July 1997): 575-607.

environment through storage reservoirs, dams, power plants, transmission lines, distribution systems, and other technologies as a necessary precondition for Dixie's rehabilitation in the years following Reconstruction. Of course such projects did result in river modification, landscape degradation, and air pollution. But these changes enabled even more metropolitan development and thus fed back into civic booster-leaders' and utility executives' ethos of perpetual growth in their region, leading to increasing infusions of distant capital and ever more consequential environmental alterations.<sup>13</sup>

“Regenerating Dixie” also demonstrates that specific physical and cultural landscapes of a region make indelible marks on the form of electric utility business.<sup>14</sup> Across the South the natural environment played a prominent role in the process of electrification. Georgia, for example, was blessed with powerful rivers flowing south from the Blue Ridge Mountains but lacked any substantial deposits of fossil fuels such as coal or natural gas. The energy of falling river water thus became integral to the construction of an industrial South after the 1890s and remained so for several decades. But the geography of southern power also influenced the shift away from hydroelectricity. Though the southeast is a relatively humid region, it has long suffered from recurring droughts. Even as environmental historians have cast water problems as unique to the American West, the southeast suffered from its own issues with devastating water shortages through a series of droughts in the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s. In each case, drought, along with emerging federal power enterprises in the 1930s, threatened to cripple private electrical production.<sup>15</sup> By the beginning of World War II, southern utilities accepted a vision of the future powered by coal. Coal would help southern power companies defeat drought,

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<sup>13</sup> Here, in emphasizing the tripartite forces of nature, technology, and capital, I am borrowing from the thinking of Needham, *Power Lines*.

<sup>14</sup> See Hirt, *The Wired Northwest*, 2-5; and Williams, *Energy and the Making of Modern California*, where much the same point is made.

<sup>15</sup> See Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*.



the ongoing public power movement, and the continued incursions of the federal government. It would also provide a firm basis for the consumerism that would underlay the postwar economy. As a result, private electric utilities in the southeast spent the next four decades steadily abandoning hydroelectricity and dotting the landscape with coal-fired generating stations.

The contours of cultural landscapes, as noted above, shaped the electric utility industry as well. Southern culture to a large extent informed public-private power debates on electrification. For instance, electric company managers and other southern boosters claimed that the harnessing of rivers by privately-owned, well-regulated electric utilities for use in the city would—at least metaphorically—empower white men and women of all social standings to regain the racial dominance they had lost in the Civil War and Reconstruction.<sup>16</sup> Thus race, an especially important element in southern history, played a key role in the region's electrification. Not only did power companies try to sell their product and stay in the public's good graces by deploying racial tropes, opponents of public-power enterprises during and after the 1930s combined ideas about race, federal power, and socialism in an attempt to halt direct government involvement in southern electrical markets. Class likewise had significant impacts on electrification in southern cities and states. Labor strife in the urbanizing and industrializing South, constantly fraught with racial overtones, made its mark on questions surrounding municipal ownership of utilities, regulation, the streetcar system, and environmental change.

In addition to rethinking the materiality and discursivity of electricity, my project also seeks to expand the historical periodization of electrification. Historians have generally considered only limited timeframes of the rise of the electric energy business.<sup>17</sup> The broader

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<sup>16</sup> For an example of this position, see Marion Jackson, "Idle Slaves in the South," *Survey Graphic*, Mar. 1, 1924, 613.

<sup>17</sup> See Hughes, *Networks of Power*, and Nye, *Electrifying America*. Paul Hirt's recent book, *The Wired Northwest*, claims to cover the history of electric power from the 1870s to the 1970s, yet only one of 13 chapters—which takes

chronology that I pursue in my work permits a fuller understanding of electricity's impacts on southern society in three primary ways. First, viewing electrification across a century demonstrates that this process was more than the construction of generating stations, the establishment of transmission systems, the laying of streetcar lines, and the formation of utilities. A broader temporal scope allows us to trace the remarkable changes electrification wrought on everyday lifestyles in the city and the country, in the workplace and the home, for the rich and the poor, and for black and white southerners beyond the 1930s. The process of electrification should be seen as a transformative force in everyday life that was incomplete until it substantially penetrated the domestic sphere in the decades after World War II. This view of electricity's spread is all the more germane to a study of the US South where, until the 1960s, rates of domestic and farm electrification fell far behind national averages. Only by tracing the spread of electricity in the 1960s and 1970s will we grasp a more complete picture of electrification.

Second, by extending the narrative of electrification beyond the 1930s, my work reinforces a point made above: that the TVA was neither the genesis nor the final culmination of massive ecological manipulation and the process of electrification in the southeast. Private energy companies had altered southern rivers and crisscrossed southern landscapes with power lines well before the TVA's creation. Moreover, they reacted to the challenge of the valley authority idea (and that of rural electrification) during and after the New Deal years by aggressively pursuing domestic and agricultural electrical markets for the first time. Private utilities and their congressional allies were also instrumental in destroying the TVA model in

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a "telescoped view" of nearly 30 years of critical post-World War II electrical history—is devoted to the second half of the twentieth century. Other examples of the same limited timeframe include Mark Rose, *Cities of Light and Heat: Domesticating Gas and Electricity in Urban America* (University Park, PA, 1995); and Harold Platt, *The Electric City: Energy and the Growth of the Chicago Area, 1880-1930* (Chicago, 1991).

other parts of the nation and in limiting the spread of federal government electrical enterprises in the post-World War II South.

The final reason that an expanded chronology enriches our understanding of electrification concerns energy transitions. The initial phase of electrification coincided with the shift from coal-powered electricity to hydroelectricity in much of the United States and in many parts of the world. From the turn of the century to the late 1930s, hydropower enjoyed unquestioned supremacy in many of the southern states. Between the mid-1920s and the early 1940s, however, water's once dominant position as the region's primary fuel source began to steadily wane. By the early 1940s, steam-powered electricity constituted a majority of southern utilities' generating capacity and total output; by the middle of the next decade, coal accounted for over 75 percent of electrical production in the South and would continue to increase for the rest of the century. Although nuclear energy briefly represented a threat to its reign (and most recently natural gas has reduced the amount of coal used in power generation), coal has maintained its place as king of southern electrical production since the late 1940s. The public debates, political fights, technological innovations, cultural matters, and, not least, ecological factors attended and influenced the shifts from one primary energy source to another.

Electric energy was foundational to the formation of the modern South, and the history of the South's electrification has implications for the larger American experience with energy and economic development. Southern electrification speaks to the inextricably intertwined elements of environment, technology, politics, business, and culture in the development of energy regimes and modern society. A study of this process adds not only to our understanding of broader national process of economic development but could offer some insight into our current and future predicaments with energy and sustainability. I develop this argument over five chapters.

Chapters 1 and 2 examine the initial phase of electrification in the southeast. They demonstrate the importance of energy resources to the creation of an urban-industrial South and consider the environmental, technological, and cultural forces that led the southern utilities away from coal and toward a new geography of power anchored in the water. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the political battles surrounding the federal government's foray into the realm of hydropower. These chapters explore the effects of the TVA, the Department of the Interior, and the US Army Corps of Engineers on southern electrical and physical landscapes through the mid-1950s. This section also considers the interlocking elements—including the exigencies of war, Cold War politics, technological innovations, and natural disasters—that both influenced the southern transition back to coal and, through the use of Appalachian bituminous, brought an effective end to the spread of public power in the region. The final chapter discusses the simultaneous expansion in southern electrical expansion, coal usage, economic growth, and consumerist ethos from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s. It furthermore shows that in spite of the rise of environmentalism, the intertwined economic and energy crises, and the potential rivalry of nuclear power, the modern South—and thus the Sunbelt—has remained addicted to and overly reliant on coal (and, more recently, natural gas) as fuel in the quest for perpetual growth and Dixie's regeneration.

## 2 CHAPTER 1: THE ELECTRIC CITY

In anticipation of the upcoming festivities on an October evening at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, an *Atlanta Constitution* reporter expressed exhilaration at the thought that “tonight the exposition grounds will be a blaze of glory.” In concert with flame-spewing volcano-like structures, the expo’s electric arc lights, suspended above the fairgrounds by a tower that extended upward from an “electric fountain,” cast “innumerable shadows, grotesque and grim...about the place and will dart back and forth among the buildings like fiery serpents. Everything will be weird in the peculiar glow.”<sup>1</sup> The fair’s official guidebook emphasized the festoon-style electric lighting at the fair, which offered as its most stunning feature “this electric fountain that glitters over beautiful Clara Meer like a rainbow of the night.”<sup>2</sup> These types of expressions were not limited to those with a direct stake in Atlanta’s fortunes. A writer for *The Nation* likewise confessed that the “electric illuminations” at the Atlanta expo produced a “fine artistic effect...and the general effect is fairy-like.”<sup>3</sup> (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

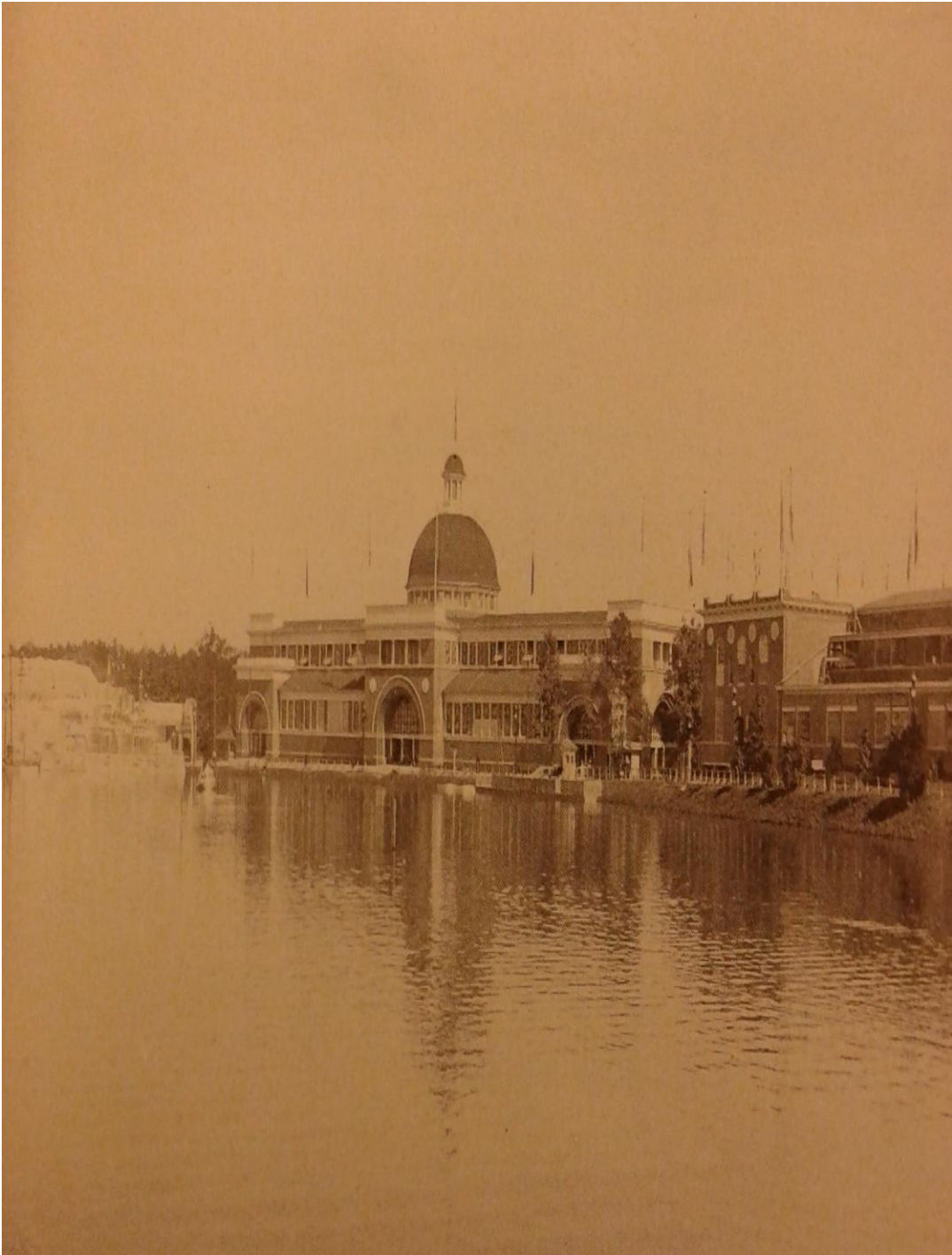
Such spectacular scenes of electrical glory, and glowing descriptions of them, were not uncommon in *fin-de-siècle* America. World’s fairs, most notably the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, almost as a matter of course featured awe-inspiring electric light shows, electrically illuminated buildings and fairgrounds, and “electricity departments.” Yet more than simply standing as gaudy exhibitions of the latest technological developments, electric lighting at late-

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<sup>1</sup> “Today at the Fair,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 11, 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Quote from Bartow J. Elmore, “Hydrology and Residential Segregation in the Postwar South: An Environmental History of Atlanta, 1865-1895,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 94 (Spring 2010), 60.

<sup>3</sup> William A. Coffin, “The Atlanta Exhibition,” *The Nation*, Nov. 7, 1895, 325.



*Figure 2.1 Electricity Building at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, 1895.*



*Figure 2.2 "Electric Fountain," Fred L. Howe 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition Photographs, Atlanta History Center.*

nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century expositions signified America's civilizational supremacy. These demonstrations, geographer John Jakle writes, gave "all Americans a feeling of participation in a national experience superior to all others, the fairs serving to establish America and Americans as special."<sup>4</sup> Historian David Nye likewise notes that electric lights at expositions symbolically confirmed white America's assumed position atop the world's cultural-racial hierarchy. "Electrification was placed quite consciously at the apex of an evolutionary framework," he argues. "Only the most advanced societies had electric machines and lighting. Darkness was a metaphor for the primitive; light was the exemplification of Christianity, science, and progress."<sup>5</sup>

With displays of electrical prowess, in concert with those of industrial and racial progress, southerners announced their membership in the elite club of advanced societies at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition.<sup>6</sup> Indeed Atlantans called on electricity to narrate in both symbolic and concrete terms the success of the "New South" program, which sought to modernize the region through rapid urbanization and industrialization.<sup>7</sup> In the words of Henry Morrell Atkinson, chairman of the expo's electrical department, "electricity at Atlanta's

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<sup>4</sup> John Jakle, *City Lights: Illuminating the American Night* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 143.

<sup>5</sup> David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990), 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> Purported industrial developments and racial progress have dominated historians' discussions of the 1895 Atlanta Expo. For a book-length analysis of the Cotton States and International Exposition that focuses particularly on racial issues, see Theda Perdue, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010). For briefer accounts of the Atlanta Exposition of 1895, see Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Myth Making* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 209-212; and Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 322-326. Also see Nathan Cardon, "The South's 'New Negroes' and African American Visions of Progress at the Atlanta and Nashville International Expositions, 1895-1987," *Journal of Southern History* LXXX (May 2014): 288-326.

<sup>7</sup> The literature on the New South is vast. Some of the more prominent works on the subject include C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Gaston, *New South Creed*; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*; and Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).



exposition will do its part in demonstrating the progress of the age and the latest improvements in the comforts and necessities of life. And this is what the success of an exposition consists in.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet electricity’s special role at the expo went beyond conspicuous display. For Atkinson, electric power was the “unseen force” that “put the throb of life into every section of the exposition grounds” and would “have as much or more to do with the making of the exposition than any other one feature.” Not only did electricity illuminate the buildings and fairgrounds and pose as a grand “symbol of the latest developments of the field to which it belongs.” It powered the less obvious but crucially important elements of the fair as well. Electricity was responsible for “the general beautifying of the exposition as a whole, the patrol and alarm systems, supplying motive power, transportation by land and water,” and a host of other ostensibly unremarkable functions. In addition, demonstrations of electricity’s utility went beyond the limited scope of the exposition. Electricity had helped turn Atlanta into the glowing New South capital. The unseen force “signalized and manifested in many ways the general gains and advances in governing conditions of everyday life...in social welfare...[and] in industrial progress.” All of these lessons in electrical development became possible through the efforts of the electrical department, whose members proceeded “harmoniously and full swing” with a “swiftness and accuracy of purpose which are undoubtedly proofs of genius in those” who had made electric power a reality.<sup>9</sup>

Atkinson’s remarks about the significance of the “unseen force” are instructive in two primary ways. First, they point out that electricity was not marginal to or simply a decorative aspect of the exposition. It proved essential to seemingly mundane but indispensable operations at the fair; it made the functions of modern life in a regional capital possible. Atkinson’s plea for the importance of electricity furthermore underscores the rapid, and perhaps radical,

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<sup>8</sup> H.M. Atkinson, “The Unseen Force,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 29, 1895.

<sup>9</sup> Atkinson, “The Unseen Force.”

transformations in everyday urban life wrought by electricity. City dwellers interfaced with electricity in public on a daily basis in 1895, and these day-to-day interactions under electric lights and on electric streetcars spoke to the lived experiences in and popular reaction to the New South program. People's access and reaction to electric lights and electric streetcars worked as proxies for their responses to authorized versions of the success and wisdom of the New South program.

Atkinson's pitch is also telling in that, while it helps reveal electricity's generally unrecognized role in the making of Atlanta and its exposition, it contains a fundamental deception. As Nye writes about extravagant electrical shows at world's fairs, "the entire scene was completely artificial, a simulacrum of an ideal world."<sup>10</sup> Atkinson's version of electricity at the fair, and by extension in daily life in the New South, likewise presented a "simulacrum of an ideal world." The depiction of electrification as having appeared as an abstract "unseen force," as having proceeded swiftly and harmoniously, as having gained acceptance as a universally awe-inspiring, beautifying, and progressive force in daily life obscures as much as it illuminates.

The realities of the initial stages of electrification—from the early 1880s, when arc lights appeared on city streets, to the early 1900s, when state-level regulation of electric utilities became law—offer a different account. The story of electricity's ascent, and indeed the entire history of electrification, was far more messy, concrete, and problematic than Atkinson and electrical boosters generally allowed. It was not one of easily won achievements, harmonious cooperation, and uniform popular acceptance of a technological wonderworker emerging from the magic of the free market. Rather, it was one of near-constant friction. Utility company failures, conflicts between business leaders, resistance from discontented citizens, and governmental interventions marked the dawn of the electrical age.

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<sup>10</sup> Nye, *Electrifying America*, 41.

Electric power as a force in daily life was made possible through the rise of big business. Despite inauspicious, modest, and fractured beginnings, the southern electric industry, even in the supposedly backward US South, was a full participant in the late-nineteenth-century corporate consolidation craze; as historian Paul Hirt points out, electricity and the modern corporation emerged simultaneously.<sup>11</sup> This process was not a smooth and coherent one. Fierce rivalries over market control within the chaotic and highly competitive world of modern capitalism characterized the beginnings of the electrical age in the South. In this context, romantic southern notions of gentlemanly cooperation and traditional decorum and honor would not do. In the making of this industry, cold-blooded calculation reigned. Only after several decades of corporate battle and political wrangling would the fractured landscape of the 1880s and 1890s become the monopolistic field of the early-twentieth century. Indeed Henry Atkinson spoke not simply as a civic booster in 1895, but at the same time as president of Atlanta's near-monopoly electric lighting company with designs to overtake both the lighting and streetcar business in the entire city.

Yet Atlanta's electrification did not occur simply because men like Atkinson and his elite cohorts and rivals desired it. Ordinary black and white southerners made significant contributions to the development of this business as well. Urbanites' interactions with an electric city changed the fabric of everyday experience, which altered urban inhabitants' beliefs about what modern life could or should be. In Atlanta, these expectations were tightly interwoven with issues of race—a particularly neglected element in the history of capitalism and of electricity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Paul W. Hirt, *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s-1970s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 21.

<sup>12</sup> In a recent survey of the literature on the history of American capitalism, historian Sven Beckert, in only a brief mention of race and racism, notes that "Racism, for example, was a persistent feature throughout American history. See Sven Beckert, "History of American Capitalism," in Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr, eds., *American History Now* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 320. In another recent discussion of business history and the history of capitalism, historians Kim Phillips-Fein and Julian Zelizer completely omit race. See Kim Phillips-Fein and

In the struggles over electric power, it becomes clear that “race” and “racism” were not transhistorical constants that affected the provision of electricity only in the final analysis. Race and modern capitalism were co-produced in specific historical contexts. Class, virtually inseparable from race, was likewise a significant factor in electrification’s early decades. In fact, the influence of working white Atlantans proved so great that for a time it appeared that a public-ownership movement—largely propelled by a post-Populist, racially-tinged antimonopoly politics—might cast privately owned utilities aside.

The initial process of electrification was fragile. Historians have demonstrated early electrical systems’ technical frailty; but social, cultural, and political realities threatened this emerging business as well.<sup>13</sup> In the face of such precarious circumstances, the budding electric industry had to rely on the power of government, at both the local and state levels, in order to become viable and ultimately to stay in business. Exclusive municipal contracts in the 1880s and 1890s and, in 1907, state-level regulatory legislation that seemingly guaranteed utilities’ monopoly status were necessary to support and then to cement the place of private power companies in the early-twentieth-century metropolis. Prior to receiving public assistance, however, when limited to the nascent street lighting business, it appeared that electric power might have a difficult time even surviving its infancy.

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Before electricity became the “unseen force” behind the functioning of the electric city, it operated as the animating power behind the very-well-seen arc light. It is likely that millions of

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Julian E. Zeilzer, “Introduction: What’s Good for Business,” in Kim Phillips-Fein and Julian E. Zeilzer, eds., *What’s Good for Business: Business and American Politics since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3-15.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the fragility of early electrical and other infrastructural systems, see Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 214-251; also see Peter Soppelsa, “The Fragility of Modernity: Infrastructure and Everyday Life in Paris, 1870-1914” (PhD diss., Univ. of Michigan, 2009).

people saw electric lights for the first time at expositions, but the use of spectacular lighting as a lesson in civilizational advancement was not limited to world's fairs. Electric arc lights debuted in American streets, just as in expositions, as examples of what historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls "technical monumentalism." The arc lamp, which produces a brilliant "arc" of light in the open space between two carbon electrodes heated by electric current, served as an shining emblem of progress, not primarily as a tool meant to improve the functionality or safety of public spaces.<sup>14</sup> In the first forty years of the electric light's career, Nye similarly argues, "America's use far exceeded necessity, employing light as a form of symbolic expression" not just in expositions but in streets, "theaters, public events, and electrical advertising signs."<sup>15</sup> Only with the emergence of so-called Great White Ways in city centers across the United States did these lights come to serve the utilitarian function of stoking the engines of commercial activity. Atlanta's early experience with electrification in part confirms the position that lighting symbolically combined and showcased social and technological modernization. Yet it also demonstrates that the people supporting the establishment of a system of electric illumination in Atlanta called on this brilliant symbol for an explicitly utilitarian function.

Atlanta held a special place in the post-Reconstruction South. It was most often cast as the New South capital, the leading edge in the region's thrust toward urban-industrial modernization, an enlightened trend that would bring southerners into the national fold of prosperity and progress. In short, Atlanta, along with other emerging southern cities, would help transform Dixie's residents, to use historian David Potter's phrase, into a "people of plenty." Since early colonial days, according to Potter, Americans had believed in and enjoyed unlimited

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<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 127.

<sup>15</sup> Nye, *Electrifying America*, 28; also see Nye, *Consuming Power: A Social History of American Energies* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1998), 165-167; much the same point is made in Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 17-21;

natural resources and unbounded economic abundance.<sup>16</sup> Yet, at least since the early-nineteenth century, because it relied on slavery and thus shunned urbanization and industrialization, the South had been outside of the shared faith and participation in American abundance. Certainly, the region had no shortage of natural wealth; what it lacked, many southerners believed, were the mechanisms (factories and cities) to convert raw materials into locally distributed and widely shared profits. The benefits of the South's natural bounty flowed instead to the more developed North. Dixie witnessed the results of that system most acutely in the 1860s, when the Confederacy suffered devastating military losses to the industrially superior Union, and after the war, when it watched its economy languish while that of North boomed.<sup>17</sup>

Especially against a deep and burdensome backdrop of defeat, poverty, and underdevelopment—a history not of abundance but of scarcity—many southern civic boosters advocated for a “New South” of growing cities and factories. Leading entrepreneurs thus installed ornamental electric lights in streets, shops, places of entertainment, and world's fairs to serve as both evidence of and the basis for the rapid expansion of their newly urbanizing-industrializing society. The Atlanta City Council asserted in 1895 that, despite a devastating situation in the 1860s, its city could now call itself “one of the best illuminated in the Union.” As such, and in concert with street railways, a mild climate, and other advantages, Atlanta offered potential investors “everything that is favorable to successful manufacturing.”<sup>18</sup> So alluring was the promise of this new technology that even small municipalities in the region expressed the belief that electric lights would spark growth. “The next thing” in its development, a small

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<sup>16</sup> David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954).

<sup>17</sup> See Gaston, *New South Creed*, 45-51; also see Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 136-158; and Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 20-21, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Atlanta City Council, *A Few Points about Atlanta*, 4, 15; for a similar perspective also see, Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, *Atlanta: A Twentieth-Century City* (Atlanta: Atlanta City Council, 1904).

Alabama town's newspaper predicted in 1892, "will be electric lights, then will come factories, etc. Let the good things come." Similarly, a North Carolina man joked that "electric lights, etc. are booming here; N.Y. and Boston will be mere suburbs of Chapel Hill, N.C. soon!"<sup>19</sup>

Pronouncements about the utility of electric lighting were not simply the fantasies of Dixie's self-aggrandizing cities or middling towns. The National Electric Light Association (NELA), the US electric industry's trade organization founded in 1885, explicitly encouraged cities to embrace the electric light's role as both spectacle and tool for growth. "A city is judged by impressions," explained a NELA pamphlet. "It may have the finest climate in the world; it may be fortunately situated near rivers and railways; it may have every natural advantage that a business man may desire. Yet, if it be unattractive, dirty and gloomy, its development will be slow." Ornamental street lighting, NELA concluded, was absolutely necessary to any city's development: "Every dollar invested in an ornamental lighting system for business sections, residential districts, and parks is not only returned manifold in higher real estate values and in greater prosperity, but returned in prestige, in heightened civic pride, and in better citizenship."<sup>20</sup>

Even if Atlanta's boosters emphasized the functional purposes of electric lighting as much as its symbolic uses, the debut of the arc light in the late 1870s nevertheless inspired in Atlanta residents, or at least in booster-journalists, a sense of awe. Though city leaders began calling for the installation of electric lights as early as 1878, many Atlantans witnessed the arc lamp's sublime power for the first time in 1879 when W.W. Cole's New York and New Orleans Circus, Museum, Menagerie, and Congress of Living Wonders visited their city.<sup>21</sup> Anticipation for the "mythical" and "mammoth" show to come built across the autumn of 1879. Although

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<sup>19</sup> Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 72-73.

<sup>20</sup> National Electric Light Association, *Ornamental Street-Lighting: A Municipal Investment and its Return* (New York: National Electric Light Association, 1912), 7, 37.

<sup>21</sup> "The Electric Light: A New Atlanta Project," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 18, 1878.

Cole's travelling circus promised an array of expected attractions—freak shows, performing animals, exotic foreign enticements—the Atlanta press was thrilled most by the news that the show would feature arc lights. Advertisements in the city's papers peddled the show as the “first exhibition in Atlanta of the wonderful electric light,” which would make “dense night as brilliant as a southern sun” (figure 2.3).<sup>22</sup> The *Sunny South*, an Atlanta-based literary newspaper, urged readers to attend the circus because it “opens with the wonderful *Electric Light* which we are all anxious to see.”<sup>23</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* billed Cole's circus and its technological marvels as phenomena that even Biblical wisdom could not adequately frame: “The Electric Light Show: Something New Under the Sun.”<sup>24</sup>

When Cole's troop finally arrived in early November, some 3,000 to 4,000 people attended daytime activities to gawk at a pair of giants, a trapeze act, and a clown routine. The show included daring interactions with dangerous beasts, which were deemed successful after a “man went into the lions' cage and put his head in the monster's mouth and no ladies fainted.” The dazzling demonstration of electric lights, however, stood out as the big hit of Cole's stop in Atlanta. The *Constitution* reported that “the night performance was even better, if possible, than that of the afternoon, the wonderful electric light being seen to better advantage, and the crowd on hand larger by a thousand or two than in the afternoon.”<sup>25</sup>

Yet a circus-going populace, or favorable press coverage, did not necessarily signify a widespread desire for the creation of an electric city. Nor did it foretell the electric lamp's ultimate triumph. In fact, electric illumination suffered through a series of failures and false

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<sup>22</sup> W.W. Cole's advertisement, “A Dazzling Orion among the Satellites,” *Sunny South*, Oct. 25, 1879. Also see W.W. Cole's advertisement, “First Exhibition in Atlanta of the Wonderful Electric Light,” *Weekly Constitution*, Oct. 28, 1879.

<sup>23</sup> “A Truly Wonderful Show,” *Sunny South*, Oct. 25, 1879, emphasis in original.

<sup>24</sup> “The Electric Light Show: Something New Under the Sun,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 9, 1879. Also see, “The Electric Light Show,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 2, 1879.

<sup>25</sup> “The Circus,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 5, 1879.



# A DAZZLING ORION AMONG THE SATELLITES!

## The Darkest Night Made Bright as Day

BY THE GREAT

# ELECTRIC LIGHT!

Which is used to illuminate  
the Canvass of this Vast  
Show, making  
DENSE NIGHT AS BRIL-  
LIANT AS A SOUTH-  
ERN SUN.



FIRST AND ONLY  
Exhibition of this Wonder-  
ful Invention under Can-  
vass.  
The Light will be in op-  
eration afternoon and eve-  
ning, so that all may see  
its workings.

At Atlanta One Day Only,

## TUESDAY, NOVEMBER THE 4th, 1879,

COMING ON THREE SPECIAL TRAINS,

### The Million Dollar Moving Mastodon!

# W. W. COLE'S

Famous New York and New Orleans CIRCUS, MUSEUM, MENAGERIE and Congress of  
LIVING WONDERS

**W. W. COLE,** ..... Sole Owner and Proprietor.

Figure 2.3: Sunny South, Oct. 25, 1879.

starts, as well as a lack of popular enthusiasm, in the decade following W.W. Cole's visit to Atlanta. Indeed it took the intervention of municipal government, which finally came to believe that lights would help bring the city more investment capital and tax revenue, to establish this business as a permanent fixture in the urban landscape.

Despite evidence of at least some popular fascination with the arc light in the late 1870s, Atlantans only started serious discussions about the possibility of bringing this technology to their city following the International Cotton Exposition of 1881.<sup>26</sup> The grounds and the buildings at the 1881 expo, brought to Atlanta by leading booster-businessmen including Samuel Inman, Hannibal Kimball, Robert Maddox, Richard Peters, and Evan Howell, featured electric lights. The fair's inaugural ball was also "lighted by blazing electric lights, whose rays, as bright as polished silver, yet as soft as the mellowest moon light, created a scene as enchanting as from fairy land."<sup>27</sup> Atlanta's streets, however, had not yet received electric lights. The organizers of the fair feared that, as NELA in later years would warn, their city might lag behind others in the region if it failed to quickly adopt electric street lamps. The South's largest city, New Orleans, had already negotiated the installation of dozens of arc lamps. By 1882, a five-mile stretch of the New Orleans's wharf and river front glowed under electric lights.<sup>28</sup> Atlanta's boosters believed that if the arc lamp illuminated their streets, their town would stand out as a progressive and modern metropolis that might soon surpass New Orleans in national prestige and regional importance.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas H. Martin, *Atlanta and its Builders: A Comprehensive History of the Gate City of the South*, Vol. II (Atlanta: Century Memorial Publishing Company, 1902), 462.

<sup>27</sup> "It's Brilliant Opening Last Night," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 19, 1881.

<sup>28</sup> Jakle, *City Lights*, 47.

<sup>29</sup> Wade H. Wright, *History of The Georgia Power Company, 1855-1956* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1957), 15.

To accomplish this goal, Atlanta businessmen Jacob and Aaron Haas welcomed representatives of Cleveland's Brush Electric Company, which dominated the American arc light equipment manufacturing business through the 1880s, to negotiate the establishment of an electric light company and the construction of a central electric generating station. The two parties agreed in principle to a deal in the summer of 1882, provisionally forming the Brush Electric Light and Power Company of Atlanta, with a proposed capitalization of \$50,000. For the Haas brothers, the arc light's sheer brilliance alone would bring electricity, and handsome profits, inevitably and quickly to Atlanta. In an interview with a reporter, Jacob Haas asserted that the "pure radiance" of electric light would soon supplant the "sickly glare of gas in our shops, offices and drawing rooms" as well as "in dark and dismal factories," and, eventually, in "every street in Atlanta." Despite this democratic vision of brightening every street, shop, factory, and office in the city—and without an officially organized company or a contract for street lights—Haas and his brother in fact secured lighting subscriptions only from leading enterprises in the central business district. Chief among these were the posh Kimball House and Markham House hotels. Located near Union Railroad Station in the western portion of downtown, Kimball House and Markham House provided lavish accommodations for Atlanta's elite visitors and bachelors, and served as a meeting space for business and political leaders.<sup>30</sup> The arc light would shine a light on the exclusive locations in Atlanta's vibrant central business district.

Unfortunately for the Haas brothers, the arrival of the arc light in Atlanta was still several years away and its rival, the gas lamp, still seemed firmly entrenched in the city's urban and political landscapes. The Atlanta Gas Light Company, which had been in business since 1856, could boast a network of nearly 450 gas lamps in the early 1880s and had plans to add 25 to 30

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<sup>30</sup> "The Brilliant Blaze," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 23, 1882; Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 36.

more street lights each year. Because the city owned about one-fourth of the gas company's stock, and realized handsome annual revenues from the venture, the city council was reluctant to approve an investment in an as yet unproven technology. The Haas brothers' venture thus ended before it truly began: Brush Company representatives withdrew from the deal with the Atlanta businessmen when they realized that, because city fathers would not grant the company a franchise, downtown's streets, hotels, shops, and factories would not soon feature electric arc lights. Atlanta, it seemed, would be a gas-lit city for some time to come.<sup>31</sup>

The electric light's slow start in Atlanta continued for the next several years. Over a year after the Brush-Haas electric company failure, another group of Atlanta entrepreneurs formed the Georgia Electric Light Company of Atlanta (GELCA) in order to "furnish patrons from a central station...electric lights for stores, dwellings, machine shops, depots, inside and out, or to introduce said lights wherever desired." The GELCA never managed to construct a central power plant, but by the end of 1883 it did install a small isolated plant in the basement of the Atlanta Elevator Company's building that powered lights on the most heavily trafficked downtown roads, including Peachtree, Whitehall, and Marietta streets. The company's first arc lamps were again intended to shed light on Atlanta's elite establishments: Kimball House, Markham House, and De Give's Opera House. In addition, the arc light would highlight Atlanta's position as a commercial and financial center, with brass lamps strategically located near places such as P.H. Snook's furniture store, M. Rich and Bros. department store, and the Gate City Bank.<sup>32</sup> From the outset, then, the placement of electric lamps established this new technology as a marker of elite privilege and New South values. Yet the early geography of electric light was not strictly limited to the realm of the symbolic. The intention of such displays was to dispel the notion that "Atlanta

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<sup>31</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 14-15; Hank McQuade, *Light up Our Land: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation: The First Fifty Years* (Atlanta: Georgia Electrical Membership Corporation, 1990), 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> "Let Us Have Light," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 29, 1883.

was the poorest lighted city of her size in the country” and thus to help realize the New South program by luring new businesses and capital investment to the city.<sup>33</sup>

Though it showed more promise than that of the Haas brothers, the GELCA’s business proved to have sluggish beginnings as well. The company’s officers had difficulty raising a paltry \$8,500, or about \$198,000 in 2014 dollars, for the initial minimum investment. (By contrast, in 1881 a group of 25 Atlanta businessmen reportedly raised \$250,000, some \$5.8 million 2014 dollars, for a new cotton mill within one hour of announcing the availability of the stock.) Perhaps in response to the firm’s inability to secure adequate capital, the Atlanta City Council reduced the original franchise agreement of forty-five lights to twenty street lamps. What was more, the council admitted that it contracted with the GELCA only to “erect a few lights, more as an experiment to test their efficiency than anything else.”<sup>34</sup> By the conclusion of 1886, the city’s streets had only twenty-five electric arc lights, a meager accomplishment compared to that of New Orleans, which had over 650 by the end of 1885.<sup>35</sup> At that point, the GELCA’s prospects seemed destined to replicate those of the Haas brothers.

Fortunes changed for the electric light in Atlanta in 1887. In the spring of that year, the city began preparations for the Piedmont Exposition, which would take place in the autumn of 1887 at newly completed Piedmont Park (the same park at which the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition would take place in 1895). Much like the Atlanta Expo of 1881, the 1887 Piedmont fair was designed to entice northern capital to come south by collecting “together the evidences of the resources of the Piedmont region of the Southern States” and by exhibiting “the progress of this section in its machinery, manufactures, its flocks and herds, and its methods

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<sup>33</sup> “Electric Light Tonight,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 14, 1883.

<sup>34</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 22.

<sup>35</sup> “Atlanta’s Electric Lights,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 14, 1884; McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 12-13; and Jakle, *City Lights*, 47.

and results of agriculture.”<sup>36</sup> The expo’s executive committee, which featured leading New South booster-prophet Henry Grady, decided to open the fair at night to showcase the city’s technological progress in adopting electric lights. One of the Piedmont Exposition’s directors, S.H. Phelan, excitedly predicted that, based on the strength of the displays planned for the fair, “you will see an enormous crowd here from the north. The Piedmont region,” he continued, “is the winning section, and there is going to be more capital seeking investment...than has ever been seen together in the south at any one time.”<sup>37</sup> Viewing the electric lights as a tool to help raise Atlanta’s profile, city fathers began to show more favor to this emerging enterprise. Not only did the city council sell the city’s equity in the Atlanta Gas Light Company—in large part to help fund the 1887 Piedmont expo—but it opened the way for a more extensive electric lighting contract with the GELCA and for franchises with other electric companies, such as the newly formed Empire State Electric Company, to install lights on Atlanta’s streets.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps as a way to realize all of the progress on display in the summer 1887, the adoption of electric lights around the city gained momentum after the Piedmont Exposition. By March 1889, the streets in the central business district contained 150 arc lights and over 400 incandescent lamps.<sup>39</sup> Those numbers rapidly expanded, so that by the end of 1895, the year Atlanta hosted the Cotton States and International Exposition, nearly 600 arc lights and 1000 incandescent lights brightened Atlanta’s main commercial thoroughfares as well as a few residential streets.<sup>40</sup> While the clear, angular encasement of the gas light fixture could still be seen in parts of the city, the hundreds of electric lights that now shone on Atlanta’s streets took a different form and symbolized the transformation of urban space and atmosphere. The new lights

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<sup>36</sup> Martin, *Atlanta and its Builders*, 462.

<sup>37</sup> “The Piedmont Fair,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 29, 1887.

<sup>38</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> “Those Street Lights,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 9, 1889.

<sup>40</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 39.

on Peachtree and Whitehall Streets were contained in large white globes. With one sphere dominating several smaller, lower-hanging orbs, the lamps were reminiscent of the moon and the stars, both mimicking nature and testifying to humanity's domination of it. These faux celestial bodies were, like the moon and the stars, meant to be romantic and brilliant in and of themselves. Yet, more importantly, by illuminating paved streets and sidewalks and vibrant shops and office buildings, they were designed to reinforce the New South creed that capitalist development and material prosperity would beget regional and social progress.<sup>41</sup>

Whether all of these new lights brightened everyday life or brought moral advancement for ordinary residents is another question. Though some citizens doubtlessly agreed with boosters that arc lights enhanced the functionality and beauty of the city, others griped about electrification's dark side. An Atlanta woman explained that on a summer evening in 1888 when she became "wild with heat" and her "eyes were burning like balls of fire" due to her gas lamps, she opened her bedroom window for relief. But the electric "street lamp made spots of light on my walls that I could not keep from seeing." Even after closing her eyes, the brilliant arc light "seemed to shine through [her eyelids] as if through glass," and thus she had to "lay all night in torture."<sup>42</sup> Another Atlanta resident, identified as W.P. Patillo, complained that any functional improvements electric lighting introduced to city life were far outweighed by the ugliness it foisted on Atlanta's neighborhoods. "The vandalism now being committed in this city," Patillo raged, "is almost beyond endurance." Because of the erection of increasing numbers of electric lights—which, Patillo claimed, worked sporadically at best—the city's elms and water oaks were being destroyed with "wanton recklessness." What was more, Patillo challenged claims that

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<sup>41</sup> Prescriptions for street light design are discussed in National Electric Light Association, *Ornamental Street-Lighting*, 9-15. For the connections between material and moral progress in the New South, see Gaston, *New South Creed*, 45-79.

<sup>42</sup> "Walks and Talks," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 10, 1888.

electrical modernization would bring widespread prosperity, foreshadowing the rhetoric of an early-twentieth-century movement borne of popular discontent with electrification's effects on daily life. He blamed the destruction of Atlanta's trees on an "overpaid and unsatisfied corporation, whose large profits out of the contract for lighting the city only serve to make them more greedy of other gains and more blind to the interest of others."<sup>43</sup>

Despite some city residents' complaints about the electric light's effects on public space, the push for more light preceded apace following in the late 1880s and early 1890s, but went beyond simply placing more arc lamps on the city's main thoroughfares. Now the glow of the incandescent light illuminated some of Atlanta's more well-known interiors. Produced in an evacuated glass bulb when electric current courses through and heats a carbon filament, incandescent light, unlike arc light, could be effectively "subdivided," or designed to shine at varying levels of brilliance.<sup>44</sup> It thus proved much more flexible and made for far more agreeable interior illumination than arc light. It also served well as an outdoor lighting source. Arc lights, like gas lights, would not disappear from city streets for decades, but, at least in the eyes of electric lighting firms, the incandescent bulb's enlightenment of interior spaces clearly represented the future.<sup>45</sup>

The market for electric lighting inside Atlanta's prominent places of commerce began to flourish in the late 1880s and provided the GELCA and other fledgling electric companies more opportunities to bring their lighting businesses indoors. Though some Atlanta institutions, such as the *Atlanta Constitution*, experimented with incandescent systems as early as 1884, several

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<sup>43</sup> "Letters from the People: A Strong Plea for Shade Trees," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 5, 1890.

<sup>44</sup> Jakle, *City Lights*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Of course, engineers and a few members of the elite attempted in the late 1870s and early 1880s to devise arc lamp designs that could successfully illuminate interiors, but they almost all met with failure and by the mid 1880s gave way to the incandescent light. See Graeme Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity: Technology, Uncertainty, and Gender, 1880-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008), 155-162.



years would pass before those systems became permanent.<sup>46</sup> One of the first downtown establishments to enjoy permanent indoor lighting was M. Rich and Bros. department store, commonly referred to as “Rich’s.” Founded by Hungarian-Jewish immigrant Morris Rich (born Mauritius Reich) in 1867, Rich’s by the late 1880s had become one of the shining symbols of New South progress: in one location it displayed a blossoming consumer culture, a concentration of people, and the fruits of industrial production in an urban core made possible by modern transportation systems. To help dramatize the array of consumer goods on offer at his store, Rich installed electric lights in late 1887. Passersby, including a visiting President Grover Cleveland, could gawk at the “22 electric lights [that] bit chunks of gold out of the sky.” That same year, as the “Christmas rush” began, customers could shop for gifts late into the evening under the warm glow of electric lights.<sup>47</sup> In the following year, the GELCA worked with the Thomson-Houston company of Lynn, Massachusetts—whose southern representative, H.E.W. Palmer, was the president of the GELCA—to make the incandescent light a lasting fixture in other prominent locations. In May of 1888, Thomson-Houston agreed to install a coal-fired electric generator, or “dynamo,” at the Markham House hotel in exchange for equity in the Atlanta utility.<sup>48</sup> Also in 1888, the Edison Electric Light Company equipped the Kimball House hotel with Thomas Edison’s patented incandescent lighting system. “In a short time from now,” the *Atlanta Constitution* wrote in gleeful anticipation of the lights’ debut in the hotel, “the Kimball house will be a blaze of beauty from top to bottom with from 2,500 to 3,000 Edison electric lamps.” Housed in the hotel’s basement, the coal-fired generators, according to a proud engineer, “are

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<sup>46</sup> “The Electric Light,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4.

<sup>47</sup> Henry Givens Baker, *Rich’s of Atlanta: The Story of a Store Since 1867* (Atlanta: Foote & Davis, Inc., 1953), 49, 251; Jeff Clemmons, *Rich’s: A Southern Institution* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012), 15-16. Also see William R. Leach, “Transformations in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925,” *Journal of American History* 71 (Sept. 1984), 323-325.

<sup>48</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 24; “Through the City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1888.

models of simple and beautiful machinery.” Even more telling for the future of electricity, this new dynamo would provide current for lighting “just as strong half a mile from the engine,” which would permit the extension of this system beyond a single hotel.<sup>49</sup>

But there was another development underway that the GELCA and competing companies saw as perhaps a means for even greater growth: the application of electric power to street railways. Inventors tinkered with the idea of creating electrified streetcars as early as the 1830s, but that dream only became reality after the perfection of the dynamo in the 1870s. By the mid-1880s electric street railways emerged, and, because of technical and financial problems, failed in cities across North America; but the first permanently successful electric streetcar system appeared in Richmond, Virginia in 1887.<sup>50</sup> Alongside several other potential investors in Atlanta, the Haas brothers tried to enter the streetcar fray in 1887 by electrifying their old “dummy” line, the Metropolitan Street Railway Company.<sup>51</sup> Not to be outdone, the GELCA, still the city’s dominant provider of electric light, sought to join the traction business as well. In late 1887, in addition to applying for an amendment to its corporate charter for an increase in capitalization to \$250,000, the GELCA petitioned the state to allow the company to supply motive power for this new and potentially lucrative form of urban transportation.<sup>52</sup>

The rise of incandescent lighting systems and electric streetcars represented the beginning of an important moment for the electric city. Beyond the purported simplicity and beauty of the dynamo and lights in Kimball House and Markham House, incandescent illumination wrought what Jakle terms the “maturation of the lighting industry”: the

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<sup>49</sup> “A Blaze of Beauty,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1888.

<sup>50</sup> Nye, *Electrifying America*, 86-88.

<sup>51</sup> “Dummy” streetcars were essentially miniature locomotives, called “dummies” because they were considered small, inadequate replicas of larger steam-driven locomotives. Each train in a dummy line had an inefficient and highly polluting self-contained coal- or wood-powered steam engine, which carried passengers across cities rather slowly and with much complaint.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 24; “The Electric Motors,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1887.

demonstration that electricity had become a viable and profitable power source, and the standardization of this nascent business.<sup>53</sup> The incandescent system featured interchangeable, uniform parts and, as the engineer at Kimball House in 1888 declared, consistency of electric current at distances relatively far removed from the dynamo. Until the rise of integrated systems like Edison's, electrification proceeded in a diffuse, patchwork manner. The uniformity of Edison's incandescent system opened the path to the first integrated electrical networks, which could rapidly stretch across and distribute light and power to an entire city. These networks would operate most efficiently if supplied not by isolated dynamos but by central power stations controlled not by multiple rival electric companies but by consolidated energy corporations. The emergence of the streetcar as a potential consumer of large amounts of power reinforced and enlarged this trend. In requiring more electricity, more expansive networks, and more investment capital, the trolley provided the spark at the end of the 1880s for the rapid consolidation of utilities and the construction of powerful, centralized generating plants that could send currents across citywide webs of power lines, ushering in the beginning of a new, more intense phase in electrification and capitalist competition.

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In cities across the United States by the end of the 1880s, entrepreneurs faced trends similar to the one developing in Atlanta. Not only did electricity seem likely to compete with (or even eclipse) gas light, but, unlike gas, it could power trolleys as well. Both applications of electric power only promised to expand and become quite lucrative as cities experienced rapid growth, which, to a significant extent, resulted from the utility industry's rise and maturation. In this setting, electric companies began to proliferate. The electrical industry spawned not only multiple companies in each city but fierce rivalries among them for control over rapidly

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<sup>53</sup> Jakle, *City Lights*, 59-76.

centralizing and integrated power systems. The early era of electrification, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch writes, prompted and “witnessed changes in the economic structure of capitalism. The transformation of free competition into corporate monopoly capitalism confirmed in economic terms what electrification had anticipated technically”: chaos followed by consolidation and expansion.<sup>54</sup>

The scramble for control over power markets, which precipitated a frenzied atmosphere of corporate competition in cities across the country, took place perhaps most notably in New York and Chicago.<sup>55</sup> The power supply market in Atlanta, too, experienced the type of expansion, competition, and combinations that led to the rise of multi-million-dollar consolidated corporations and the electric city. Between 1887 and 1902, after a series of fierce corporate scuffles culminating in a fight known as the “Second Battle of Atlanta,” nearly two dozen electric light and streetcar companies operating in the South’s most important city had combined into one electric utility controlled by Bostonian Henry Morrell Atkinson. Given Atkinson’s importance to the consolidation of electrical networks in Atlanta, it is worth considering his biography in some detail.

From his first days in Atlanta, Atkinson displayed a shrewd business sense that, perhaps paradoxically, seems to have been sharpened not solely in New England boardrooms but also while working as a ranch hand on the rough terrain of the Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming territories. Born to a wealthy and well-connected textile mill owner in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1862, Atkinson attended elite private schools in Boston before graduating from Harvard in 1884. After graduation, young “Harry” went to the American West, where he reportedly made the acquaintance of Theodore Roosevelt, to work as a cowboy for ranchers who had extensive

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<sup>54</sup> Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 74.

<sup>55</sup> See Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 31-32. For a discussion of utility consolidation in Chicago, see Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 201-212.

connections to Boston investment capital.<sup>56</sup> To some extent, Atkinson's flight from Boston could be characterized as a repetition of Horace Greely's exhortation to overly refined young men from the northeast, much like Roosevelt, to seek out an adventurous life in the Great West in order to find true manliness, sow wild oats, and tame the frontier. Yet Atkinson found little about which to wax romantic in his trek. "This life is severe hardship to anyone just from the East," he wrote to his father while passing through Laramie, Wyoming in October 1884. "Any romantic feelings the newcomer has about cowboys, and galloping over the prairie with a broad brimmed hat on, and all such nonsense is soon knocked out of him. It only takes a few cold nights of herding to do it. It is reality in its sternest form, I can tell you....I shall be very glad to get a little civilization again."<sup>57</sup>

More likely, according to the editors of a collection of letters from his cowboy years, Atkinson journeyed to the American West as an emissary of New England capital to scout land that he could purchase for mining or railroad development. Considering that he quit ranching and went to Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah, it is possible that he went to the West on a mission to search for grazing land to help expand and consolidate his father's cattle interests. President of Massachusetts Cotton Mills and other enterprises in Brookline, Atkinson's father George in 1884 became one of the principle investors in the Arizona-based Aztec Land and Cattle Company, the third largest such firm in the United States until its collapse in 1902.<sup>58</sup> Though Atkinson apparently bought no land for his father or himself in the Southwest, he gained experiences in his time out west that served him well when he moved to the South. He worked with local actors who had connections to New England money, surveyed opportunities on the frontier, and

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<sup>56</sup> Lucian Lamar Knight, *A Standard History of Georgia and Georgians*, Vol. VI (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1917), 2819-2820.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Calhoon, J.D. Huddleston III, and Lynn Speno, eds., *The Cowboy Letters of Henry M. Atkinson, Founder of the Georgia Power Company* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Heritage Preservation Club, 2007), 47.

<sup>58</sup> Calhoon, Huddleston, and Speno, eds., *Cowboy Letters of Henry M. Atkinson*, 7.

attempted to make strategic investments in properties that would enable growth and, eventually, dominance in his chosen field.

Soon after his return to New England in late 1885, the Atkinson family arranged for young Henry to relocate to Atlanta to work as an apprentice for Samuel Inman in his cotton buying firm, S.M. Inman and Company. Perhaps the largest cotton dealer in the South, Inman was friendly with the Atkinson family. In particular, Inman had close connections to Henry's uncle, Edward Atkinson, an economist who helped plan and delivered an address at the Atlanta International Cotton Exposition of 1881.<sup>59</sup> Not content to remain a cotton sampler and buyer for long, however, Henry Atkinson quickly worked his way into the ranks of Atlanta's business elite. In the spring of 1888, he married May Peters, daughter of Atlanta founder and railroad magnate Richard Peters, and within the next year assumed the vice presidency of the Home Loan and Banking Company. In 1891, along with Atlanta business associates and New England investment capital, Atkinson organized the Southern Banking and Trust Company (eventually to become the Third National Bank), which he used as a pipeline to investment banks in Boston, New York, and London. He also used his capital connections to solidify his position as a favored member of the city's business elite. Following the panic of 1893, as the city faced severe financial shortfalls and a possible bankruptcy, Atkinson loaned the city of Atlanta hundreds of thousands of dollars at below-market interest rates. By the dawn of World War I, Atkinson made several seemingly altruistic contributions to city coffers and had funneled over \$100 million into Georgia and Alabama to establish railroad, steam shipping, and coal mining ventures.<sup>60</sup>

Atkinson's most significant and lasting endeavor in the South, however, was in the electric utility industry. Much like his time out west, Atkinson carefully surveyed Atlanta's

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<sup>59</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 152-153.

<sup>60</sup> Knight, *Standard History of Georgia and Georgians*, 2819-1821.

electrical frontier, hoping to make key acquisitions that would enable him to take a controlling position in the future. After nearly two years of studying the burgeoning electric industry, in 1888 Atkinson began slowly and quietly acquiring equity in the Georgia Electric Light Company of Atlanta. Intrigued by the possibilities of electric lighting and street railways, the former cowboy thereafter collaborated with several prominent Atlanta businessmen to organize a rival power company, the Atlanta Electric Illuminating Company. Incorporated in October 1890 with Atkinson as president and William Inman and Hugh Inman (Samuel Inman's uncle and brother) as board members and officers, Atlanta Electric was originally capitalized at \$100,000 in order to use Edison's integrative technology and philosophy to supply streets, businesses, and residences with electric lighting. Even more importantly, the new utility aimed to construct a large power plant that would provide motive power for the city's budding streetcar lines.<sup>61</sup>

Atkinson clearly recognized, as Thomas Edison had insisted throughout the 1880s, that the key to the domination of a city's electrical market lay not in the arrangement and management of isolated generators and copper wires but in the creation of a fully integrated electrical network anchored in a powerful central generating station. For its part, the GELCA's management, which had pursued electrification in the 1880s through installing individually located dynamos throughout the city, foresaw the same thing. They thus aimed to enlarge and consolidate their company's share of the Atlanta power market through the construction of a central generating station through which it could drive streetcar growth and could potentially integrate and monopolize the electric power market in Atlanta.

The GELCA's goals synched well with those of an Atlanta real estate mogul named Joel Hurt, who wanted to link electric streetcars to suburban neighborhood development, each pressing the other's expansion and that of the city as well. With financial backing from

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<sup>61</sup> "Light and Power," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 3, 1890.

Baltimore-based banks, the Inman brothers, and other Atlanta businessmen, Hurt had established the East Atlanta Land Company in 1886 and immediately began construction of a fully planned, High Victorian enclave called Inman Park (named for Samuel Inman) located about two miles east of downtown. Just two years later, Hurt chartered the Atlanta and Edgewood Street Railway Company, Atlanta's first viable electric trolley line, which connected downtown to Inman Park, Atlanta's first electric streetcar suburb. The GELCA furnished power for Hurt's Edgewood streetcar line from one of its dynamos located in downtown, but both interests sought to grow larger.<sup>62</sup>

To that end, in February 1890 the GELCA and Joel Hurt collaborated to raise \$100,000 for the construction of a 3,000 horsepower (approximately 2,200 kilowatt) generating plant at an old rock quarry site on Davis Street slightly west of downtown. Powered by coal shipped to Atlanta from mines primarily in Tennessee, this new power station, which the GELCA would own, would not only fuel the city's existing street lamps and trolleys. It would also serve as the center of a web of copper wires stretching across the city that would enable the installation of even more lights and streetcars lines—as well as elevators, printing presses, sewing machines, and, in a few private residences, other electrical appliances—which would stretch the city's boundaries, helping to transform it into a modern metropolis.<sup>63</sup> Under such circumstances, all electrical generation, transmission, and distribution in Atlanta, and perhaps beyond, would fall under the GELCA's and Joel Hurt's control. Indeed, backed by the promise of more electric power for his operations, Hurt in 1891 combined some three-fourths of Atlanta's trolley lines

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<sup>62</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 195-196; "For Inman Park," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 21, 1889.

<sup>63</sup> "A New Electric Plant," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 9, 1890.



(many of which were old dummy or horse-drawn lines that were undergoing electrification) into a new firm called the Atlanta Consolidated Street Railway Company.<sup>64</sup>

Given the GELCA's and Hurt's apparent ascendancy, Henry Atkinson made several moves in 1891 meant to ensure his control over Atlanta's electric power scene. Whereas he had begun quietly and slowly purchasing GELCA stock in 1888, Atkinson became more aggressive thereafter, acquiring a controlling interest in the company by the autumn of 1891. In December 1891, Atkinson surprised the other stockholders by announcing that he now owned a majority stake in the GELCA. He then directed the company to sell all of its assets, including the recently completed Davis Street power plant, to a newly chartered corporation called the Georgia Electric Light Company (GELC), initially capitalized at \$600,000 (about \$15.8 million in 2014 dollars), which he soon thereafter combined with his Atlanta Electric Illuminating Company.<sup>65</sup>

Shortly before taking over the GELCA, Atkinson had also cemented his place in the streetcar business. Along with William Inman, Atkinson bought a substantial share of the Atlanta, West End, and McPherson Barracks Railway in April 1891. By the end of October, the major stakeholders in that company had agreed to purchase the Grant Park Railway Company. A merger of these two streetcar companies resulted in the birth of the Atlanta Traction Company, which featured Atkinson as the new president and held an initial capital stock of \$300,000.<sup>66</sup> Not only did Atkinson now pose a threat as a potential competitor in the trolley business, but his power plant supplied a majority of the electric energy to Hurt's Consolidated streetcar line. Soon a bitter rivalry would develop between the two.

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<sup>64</sup> "Growth of Atlanta's Transportation, 1866-1974," box 32, folder 3, Mule to Marta Papers, MSS# 619, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta GA (hereafter MtM); also see Julian C. Chambliss, "A *Question of Progress and Welfare: The Jitney Bus Phenomenon in Atlanta, 1915-1925*," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 92 (Winter 2008), 489-491.

<sup>65</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 25, 31.

<sup>66</sup> "In New Hands," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 31, 1891.

By the eve of the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition, the GELC had gained complete control over of the electric lighting business in the city and drew great praise from Atlanta's two main dailies. The *Atlanta Constitution* gushed over Atkinson's work, stating that his "skillful management" of the city's electrical works had ensured that there was "not a better lighted city in America than Atlanta." The *Atlanta Journal* concurred. "Atlanta's greatest boast is her superb electric system," the paper reported in March 1895. Alongside its "great industries," the article continued, Atlanta's electrical accomplishments demonstrate to the world "that the Gate City of the South is a growing metropolis."<sup>67</sup> Atkinson's star was certainly on the rise in Atlanta, which was in part confirmed when he became a Cotton States Exposition board member and chair of the fair's electric department. For his part, Joel Hurt drew popular scorn for his contribution to the 1895 Atlanta Expo. Having received the contract to build new streetcar lines from several points in town to the fairgrounds at Piedmont Park, Hurt charged riders twice the normal five-cent fare to travel to the expo.<sup>68</sup> To make matters worse for Hurt, Atkinson's side of the trolley business was growing. Although Atkinson's Atlanta Traction Company had fallen into receivership in 1894, as had many electric light and streetcar companies following the panic of 1893, his close associates, prominent Atlanta attorneys Alex King and Luther Rosser, purchased and merged that firm with the Atlanta City Street Railway Company in 1895. The newly enlarged trolley line operated as the Atlanta Railway Company.<sup>69</sup>

The conflict between Atkinson and Hurt simmered below the surface for several years following the Atlanta Exposition of 1895. Starting in 1899, however, it boiled over into a two-year campaign of corporate warfare—waged in the press, in board rooms, in court houses, and, at

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<sup>67</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 6, 1894 and *Atlanta Journal*, Mar. 31, 1895 originally quoted in Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 36, 38-39.

<sup>68</sup> "Fare to the Fair," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 22, 1895.

<sup>69</sup>Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 32; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 10-12.

times, in the streets—often referred to as the “Second Battle of Atlanta.”<sup>70</sup> By 1898, Atkinson’s interests held near-monopoly control over electric power in Atlanta. The GELC enjoyed an exclusive lighting contract with the city and provided all of the power to Atlanta Railway and half of the power to Hurt’s Consolidated. Yet Joel Hurt had plans to usurp his rival from Boston. In November 1898, after the beginning of a franchise fight between Atlanta Railway and Consolidated, a group of Baltimore investors with connections to Hurt began secretly acquiring considerable interest in the Atkinson affiliated streetcar line. In the spring of 1899 the Baltimore syndicate had acquired enough equity to wrest control of Atlanta Railway, which it subsequently combined with Hurt’s Consolidated to form the Atlanta Railway and Power Company (ARPC). The ARPC boasted a huge initial capitalization of \$3 million (\$85.7 million 2104 dollars) and faced competition from only one other traction line in the South’s most important city (image 2.4).<sup>71</sup>

Hurt’s plans for his new company went beyond monopolizing just the urban transit system. As the new company’s name indicated, Hurt would try to outmaneuver and overtake Atkinson by building and producing electricity for lighting and motive power at a potent new generating plant. First announced in 1899, construction of Atlanta Railway and Power’s generating station at Butler Street began in early 1900. By the standards of the time, the new power plant was massive. At over 12,000 square feet, the building contained five generators—three were dedicated to streetcar service, two serviced lights—capable in the aggregate of producing some 6,700 kilowatts (9,000 horsepower). Yet Atlanta Railway and Power was not simply a producer of power. Just as critically, it was a large consumer of natural resources. The

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<sup>70</sup> For a detailed discussion of the “Second Battle of Atlanta,” see Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 45-75; also see Jean Martin, *Mule to MARTA*, Vol. I (Atlanta: Atlanta Historical Society, 1975).

<sup>71</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 41, 45; “New Company Been Formed?” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 23, 1898; “Will Make Last Payment Today,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 5, 1899.



Figure 2.4 Joel Hurt's Atlanta Railway and Power Company Streetcar Map, 1901.

Butler Street plant stood at the southeastern edge of downtown adjacent the tracks of the Georgia Railroad, which delivered Appalachian bituminous coal, primarily from mines in Tennessee, to each of the plant's five 1,000-ton coal storage bunkers. Each of the coal bins fed one of the five generators, which for cooling purposes used a total of 12,000,000 gallons of city water per day, more than the entire municipal waterworks' daily usage.<sup>72</sup> With the largest power plant the South had ever seen, Hurt's utility could both drive the entire streetcar network in Atlanta and fuel all of the electric lights and appliances in the city. He aimed to do just that with a bid for an exclusive city lighting franchise and, reportedly, with plans to completely buy out the GELC.<sup>73</sup>

Though on the defensive in the battle for dominance over Atlanta, Atkinson weakened Hurt's strangle hold over the city's streetcar market—aided once again by city government action—by combining forces with the ARPC's sole remaining competitor, the Collins Park and Belt Railroad Company. Changing the name to the Atlanta Rapid Transit Company in the spring of 1900, Atkinson and his new partners applied for franchises to construct tracks on some fifty Atlanta streets. Though some of its planned routes were still under consideration until well into 1901, many of Atlanta Rapid Transit's proposed lines won instant approval—on the strength of Atkinson's offer to donate \$50,000 to the city help fund a new viaduct on heavily trafficked Whitehall Street—and installation of new lines, some directly beside those of the ARPC, began immediately (figure 2.5). An incensed Hurt took Atkinson to court and filed injunctions against Atlanta Rapid Transit's construction program. In court and in the press, Atkinson and Hurt

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<sup>72</sup> "Working on New Light Plant; New Railway Underway," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 18, 1900; Richard F. Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation in the American Electric Utility Industry* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 5, 36-37.

<sup>73</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 45-46; "Light Contract is Given Georgia Co." *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 14, 1899.

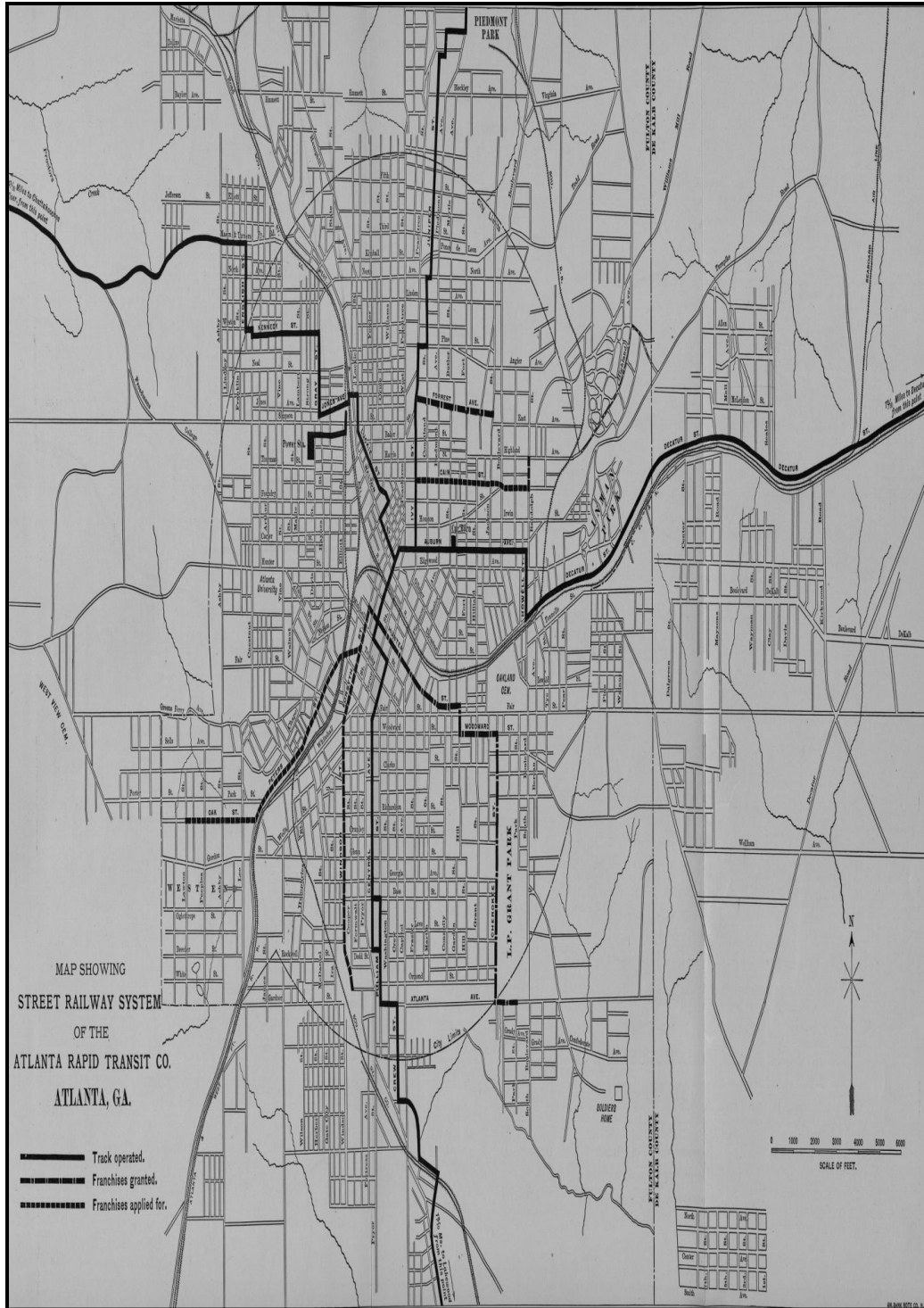


Figure 2.5 Henry Atkinson's Atlanta Rapid Transit Company Streetcar Map, 1901

hurled insults at one another; one affront from a Hurt associate reportedly provoked Atkinson into a mildly violent street scuffle.<sup>74</sup>

In the end, however, the affair ended with a hand shake and a large buy out. Tiring of the destructive competition between the two camps, Samuel Inman, perhaps at the behest of both Atkinson and Hurt, brokered a settlement that concluded the decade-long rivalry. By the end of the summer of 1901, Inman prevailed upon Hurt to sell all of his properties, including all streetcar lines and the Butler Street power plant, to Atkinson for \$1.14 million (some \$32 million in 2014 dollars). Following several months of political wrangling between the Atkinson forces and the city council over annual tax rates, streetcar fares, and payments to the city for infrastructural improvements, the “Consolidating Ordinance of 1902” formally permitted Atkinson to combine his three companies—the Georgia Electric Light Company, the Atlanta Railway and Power Company, and the Atlanta Rapid Transit Company—into a new firm, the Georgia Railway and Electric Company (figure 2.6), originally capitalized at \$14,650,000 (\$406.9 million in 2014 dollars).<sup>75</sup>

With the 1902 consolidation, the Georgia Railway and Electric Company (GREC) had joined the ranks of big business; indeed, the former cowboy now enjoyed legally sanctioned virtual monopoly control over one of the largest businesses in the region. And that business, along with the city it called home, only continued to grow thereafter. In 1903, Atlanta’s population reached about 97,000 and the metropolitan area grew to over 125,000. That same year, the GREC acquired the Atlanta Steam Company and the Atlanta Gas Light Company so that, along with electric light, traction, and power, it could provide the swelling city with heat

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<sup>74</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*.

<sup>75</sup> *The Southeastern Reporter*, Vol. 98 (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1919), 696-700; Frederic Nicholas, *American Street Railway Investments: The Electric Railway Red Book* (New York: McGraw Publishing Company, 1910), 44-45.



*Figure 2.6 Georgia Railway and Electric Company Streetcar Map, 1902.*



and gas light. Perhaps more importantly, Georgia Railway and Electric stretched the boundaries of the growing metropolis by extending its streetcar lines in the surrounding towns of College Park, Decatur, East Point, and Hapeville. Also in 1903, even further expanding the city's reach into its hinterland, the GREC established a twenty-mile interurban electric trolley line—operating under the name of the Atlanta Northern Railway—that linked Atlanta to the town of Marietta. With all of these properties combined, the company could boast well over \$24 million in total assets, or some \$650 million in 2014 dollars. Although its profit margin was not thick (the company averaged an annual return on investment of 5 to 7 percent in the early 1900s), the GREC's increasingly diverse holdings and large capital investments helped the company to realize over \$1 million in annual profits as early as 1906.<sup>76</sup>

Yet what operated as a money-making machine for Atkinson and as a tool to create a new South for boosters served other functions for electricity's consumers. In little more than a decade, a technological novelty had become a thoroughly interwoven strand in the fabric of everyday life: the steam-driven and gas-lit city of the mid-nineteenth century had by the dawn of the twentieth century become the electric metropolis. While residential service remained out of reach for nearly all ordinary urbanites and farmers until well after World War I, constant interactions with electric power in public places, especially through streetcar travel, brought changes in everyday life for Atlantans. Electricity was more than just a question of business. It was an arena in which southerners could work out issues of modernity and urban-industrial progress in the New South.

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<sup>76</sup> Georgia Railway and Electric Company, *1907 Annual Report*, (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Electric Company, 1908), 3-4, Folder 4, Box 11, Atlanta Gas Light Company Records, MS 1881, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia (hereafter AGL); Nicholas, *American Street Railway Investments*, 44-45; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 84-87.

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In his classic 1941 study, *The Mind of the South*, Wilbur J. Cash looked back upon the history of his native Dixie and determined that at a fundamental level, there was truly only “one South.” For Cash, the region still bore the marks of “a fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly definite social pattern—a complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values” that “always marched away...from the present toward the past.” The glue holding the unified southern mind together was the “Savage Ideal,” a tacitly but doggedly agreed upon commitment, particularly among white men, to act in concert for the preservation and defense of the region’s culture. This was a worldview in which “dissent and variety are completely suppressed and men become, in all their attitudes, professions, and actions, virtual replicas of one another.”<sup>77</sup> If Cash had studied the rise of the electric city, he would have seen that southerners could not be classified as a backward-looking, like-minded people. He would have seen that this new power source helped southerners form visions of the future—visions they did not always relish. What is more, white and black as well as elite and working-class southerners’ ideas about what an electrified world might be were far from unified. Deeply divergent perspectives over the dramatic changes of electrified life point out not only that dissent and variety were alive and well in the South. They demonstrate that discourses surrounding electricity profoundly affected the making of the electric city as well.

As noted above, early electrification proceeded in a patchwork manner, affecting certain spaces and emphasizing certain values more than others. Public places frequented by affluent southerners—posh hotels, opera houses, banks, department stores—received electric light first, establishing this new source of artificial illumination as the province of the wealthy and as a

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<sup>77</sup> Wilbur J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991, orig. 1941), quotes from xlvi, 1-li, and 90-91.

beacon highlighting the success of the New South program. Rich's department store exemplified this trend. Electric lights helped establish M. Rich and Bros. as a prime example of New South progress in the late 1880s. According to the *Atlanta Journal*, the store stood as a "monument—a great white emblem—of the unbounded faith" in Atlanta of urban-industrial progress.<sup>78</sup> But the use of electric lighting at the opening of a new, expanded store just after the turn of the twentieth century further cemented Rich's, and its customers', elite status.

Opened in January 1907, the brightness of the new building mimicked the electrical glory of the "Great White Way" in the city's central business district. The *Atlanta Journal* believed that "Rich's great white store [will be] truly a paradise for shoppers," where "the feminine heart will flutter with real delight at its manifold treasures." The façade's design afforded shoppers "an unbroken vista of plate glass set on bases of green marble that extend between two rows of white colonial columns." Inside the store, visitors strode on mahogany floors set against white walls and walked under "two immense skylights" flanked by "electric globes" that enabled the customer to "see by night as well as by day the texture of all goods...as if she were standing out in the light of the midday sun." Each of the store's levels, which housed silk, suit, dress, glove, lingerie, piano, and crockery departments, was accessible by electric elevators and benefited from flattering electric light. "Immense cases of plate glass bound by weathered oak finishings," the *Journal* continued, were accompanied by "curtains, chairs, and panel mirrors, where the buyer may see the exquisite Paris models, the lime-light revealing every light and shadow, every graceful line and curve of the gowns."<sup>79</sup> Modernized department stores such as Rich's confirmed that patterns of consumption would be different in the electric city; no longer would shoppers be forced to haggle in muddy streets with seedy vendors hawking suspect wares. Now they could

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<sup>78</sup> *Atlanta Journal* quoted in Baker, *Rich's of Atlanta*, 109.

<sup>79</sup> *Atlanta Journal* quoted in Baker, *Rich's of Atlanta*, 108-111.

comfortably and leisurely shop in a well-appointed store at virtually any time of day under enchanting electric lights.

Ostentatious displays of electric power in the homes of the elite, essentially the only residences to enjoy electricity until after World War I, further reinforced the position that electric city delights belonged primarily to the elite. In this version of the electrical age, the affluent alone would be empowered to benefit from a new form of domestic lighting that was sufficiently stylish and conspicuous for their level of sophisticated living.<sup>80</sup> An 1889 party at the “palatial mansion” of Atlanta resident W.B. Lowe serves as a case in point. Described as a “royal entertainment” and a “brilliant society event,” the gala at Lowe’s home featured three hundred members of Atlanta’s upper crust and took place under a “glow of enchantment” made possible by incandescent light. The dramatic entrance to the residence “was brilliantly illuminated with electric lights, and the house had electric lights shining softly through rose-colored globes.” Electricity permitted the party to begin late in the evening, with dinner served at midnight, and shone a light on the standard of living and the attendant adornments—including East Indian palms, Persian silk, exotic fruits, fine art, and polished silver—that such wealth and social rank allowed Lowe to cultivate and flaunt, and, perhaps, to model for other members of Atlanta society.<sup>81</sup> As historian Graeme Gooday has argued, “patronage by the wealthy and aristocratic was a key feature of electric lighting” in the 1880s and 1890s, and such support proved “essential to its success as a glamorous...feature of the respectable home.”<sup>82</sup>

The potential domestic transformations in the “respectable home” made possible by electric light were not limited simply to aesthetic displays that helped raise social profiles. For some well-to-do urbanites, electric amenities became required additions for a better home life

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<sup>80</sup> Nye, *Electrifying America*, 242-243.

<sup>81</sup> “In Society’s Domain,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 10, 1899.

<sup>82</sup> Gooday, *Domesticating Electricity*, 165.

and, ultimately, a better society. Georgia Supreme Court Justice Samuel Lumpkin confessed in 1893 to be “delighted” with the incandescent lights in his Piedmont Avenue residence. Although proud to be an Atlanta citizen “foremost in home decoration,” Lumpkin reported that his lights did more than beautify his home. “Clean, bright, steady and beautiful, and incomparably superior to any lights I have heretofore enjoyed in a home,” his electric lights helped him realize a higher plane of living. Along with Lumpkin, other prominent Atlantans, including Samuel and William Inman, believed that a “residence is no longer ‘modern’ unless lighted with electricity.”<sup>83</sup> Inman Park, the exclusive enclave named for Samuel Inman, made possible to a large extent by the motive power of electricity, also promised an improved life, one that would aid in the daily regeneration of a work-weary business class.<sup>84</sup> Promoters cast Inman Park as an “Eden” where “all the fruits of civilization and the refinements of the city are brought into the pure air and freedom of a suburban retreat,” a place where “beauty and poesy and all the daughters of music flourish.” Nothing stood between the hustle-bustle of downtown and “this haven of rest”—equipped with the modern amenities of “water, gas, and electric lights”—but a “five-cent fare” on the electric trolley line.<sup>85</sup>

Inasmuch as middle- and upper-class southerners looked forward to a bright electrical future in the suburbs, they also shared with many other Americans anxieties about the conditions of urban-industrial life. Indeed perceived inner-city decay in large part prompted their flight to places like Inman Park. Yet in electricity, progressive-minded reformers saw the power to eradicate the squalor of the city, especially for those who lacked the means or will to escape to

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<sup>83</sup> “Electric Lights in Residences,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 19, 1893.

<sup>84</sup> According to historian Jackson Lears, in the years between Reconstruction and the Great War, Americans shared “a widespread yearning for regeneration—for rebirth that was variously spiritual, moral, and physical.... As daily life became more subject to the demands of the modern corporation, the quest for revitalization became a search for release from the predictable rhythms of the everyday.” Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 1.

<sup>85</sup> “A Beautiful Place,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 23, 1890; “To Sell the All,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 12, 1891.

suburban havens. Translating the research of engineer Francis Crocker for consumption by southern reading publics, journalist J.A. Morris wrote in 1894 that even though cities “naturally domicile most of the wealth, culture and intelligence of the world’s population,” they are nevertheless “not as healthy as the country.” Coal smoke, animal waste, and raw sewage all polluted the life of the city. But, Morris wrote, electricity transmitted into the city center from remote power stations would be “the magic wand” that would dispel Atlanta’s dirt and grime. “With our streets rid of the horse, the mule and the ox, superseded by the horseless wagon and carriage, our drinking water sterilized by the electric current, our sewerage rendered innocuous and odorless by electrolysis and our very atmosphere purified and sweetened by electric current,” Morris predicted, “we are certainly advancing rapidly and surely to ideal living” that would mimic the best elements of both the city and the countryside.<sup>86</sup>

While Morris and many urban reformers waxed romantic about the purity of life in the country and the prospects for the electric city, other reformers, prefiguring post World War-I promotions aimed at improving farmers’ daily lives, believed that rural areas desperately needed the improvements that electricity could bring. Many farmers, and particularly the elites who claimed to represent them, seemed to believe that “the electric” would make them happier, more efficient, and more productive.<sup>87</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission reported that farmers with electricity could expect to enjoy a number of improvements “for cheap transportation, for lighting their homes, and for innumerable uses in the daily tasks on the farm.” Farm wives in particular would benefit from the “general elevation of country living” that would attend the adoption of electrical “labor-saving devices” and “mechanical help.” With working

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<sup>86</sup> Francis B. Crocker, “Coalless Cities,” *Cassier’s Magazine* IX (Apr. 1896), 231-239; J.A. Morris, “Scientific and Industrial: The Ideal City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 9, 1896. The belief that electricity could create a utopian middle ground between the city and the farm was widely shared in the late-nineteenth-century United States. See Nye, *Electrifying America*, 287.

<sup>87</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 9-24.

days filled with less drudgery, the farm wife could contribute more not only to the moral well-being of her family but “she may serve the community by participating in its vital affairs” as well.<sup>88</sup> The Atlanta-based farming magazine, *Southern Cultivator*, concurred. The magazine asserted that “electricity on the farm” would be a “useful servant to do the bidding of man.” With electricity, production time and costs would drop, transportation expenses on the farm and to the market would decrease, the conditions of family life would improve, and a whole host of other, as yet unimagined benefits would be realized.<sup>89</sup>

Not content to allow reformers’ dreams to become reality only at some point in the future, promoters at the turn of the century tried to pitch electrical benefits directly to farmers. Georgia progressive crusader, women’s rights advocate, and country life proponent Rebecca Latimer Felton recalled that during her trip to the 1904 St. Louis Exposition, the agricultural department was filled with wonderful electric appliances. She was taken in particular with the electric range, which produced a “delicious bread called ‘Scones.’” When “cooked by electricity,” she continued, they proved “good enough for the most fastidious.”<sup>90</sup> Sears, Roebuck likewise offered farmers electric appliances in the pages of its catalogs, including table lamps, chandeliers, and fans. Yet farmers would have to wait for decades to realize the improvements of electrical modernization: by 1910, only 2 percent of American farms had been electrified. Standard cook books, such as Mrs. A.E. Kirtland’s *New Southern Cook Book* (1906), declined to mention electric cookery.<sup>91</sup> Even Fannie Merritt Farmer’s best-selling *Boston Cooking-School Cook Book* (originally published in 1896) failed to include the electric range in her work until the

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<sup>88</sup> *Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1909), 4-5, 47. For a discussion of the Country Life Movement, see Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-15.

<sup>89</sup> “Electricity on the Farm,” *Southern Cultivator* (Jun. 1896), 299.

<sup>90</sup> Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919), 114.

<sup>91</sup> Mrs. A.E. Kirtland, *New Southern Cook Book* (Montgomery, AL: n.p., 1906).

third edition was published in 1918; even then she listed no recipes or instructions specific to electric cooking. Instead, Farmer focused on teaching her readers to hone the traditional practices of preparing meals over wood fires and of drying, preserving, and canning fruits and vegetables.<sup>92</sup> What is more, even if a southern farmer had an electrified home, prices for appliances such as lamps, chandeliers, fans, and hotplates (from \$4 to \$10 in 1902) would have proved prohibitively expensive. With southern farmers' annual income averaging about \$150 to about \$200, a single appliance could have amounted to nearly as much as one month's earnings.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the slow adoption of electric appliances in the farm and home, observers nevertheless had strong reactions to electricity's effects on everyday life. Rebecca Felton in particular seemed deeply disturbed at the quickening pace of the electric city. "Electricity," she wrote in 1899, "is the coming factor in all modern progress, but dangers lurk in every passing breeze, and lie dormant under great manifestations of its lighting power." More particularly, Felton worried over southerners' physical health in the tightly networked world of the late-nineteenth century. "Bacillus," she warned her readers, "destroys the purity of drinking water, it even makes kissing a hazardous recreation." The amenities of the electric city that brought speedy communication and transportation made the danger of contagions even greater. "The late epidemic of grip [influenza] is attributed to the indiscriminate use of the telephone in crowded cities," she wrote. "Old ways were slow," Felton concluded, "but is it a question whether new ways are always safe ones."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Fannie Merritt Farmer, *The Boston Cooking-School Cook Book*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Boston: Little, Brown, 1896).

<sup>93</sup> Sears, Roebuck & Co., *The Sears, Roebuck Catalogue, 1902*, with an introduction by Cleveland Amory (New York: Crown Books, 1969), 661-663. Statistics on farmers' wages drawn from US Dept of Agriculture, Bureau of Statistics, Bulletin 99, *Wages of Farm Labor* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1912), 29-30.

<sup>94</sup> Mrs. W. H. [Rebecca Latimer] Felton, "The Farm Home," *Southern Cultivator* (Mar. 15, 1899), 14.



Felton cringed most notably at the perils women on southern farms faced in the fast paced environment of the New South. Because they had dispatched the supposedly benevolent patriarchal protections of the antebellum days for a focus on production for the market, farm husbands, Felton regretted, had essentially left farm wives to tend to the home and fend for themselves seven days a week. As a result, an even graver threat to women's welfare lurked. The market-oriented New South to which farm men were so tethered, Felton and many other southerners feared, also bred "the black fiend who lays unholy and lustful hands on" vulnerable white women. Freed from the civilizing school of slavery, set loose in the big city, and encouraged by Yankee agitators, African American men, according to Felton, had descended into a state of savagery that inevitably manifested itself in rape in dark alleys and in isolated farm houses.<sup>95</sup> "I know of no evil which more unsettles farm values," she announced in 1897, "than this lurking dread of outrage upon their helpless ones—in their homes and highways." To combat this disturbing trend, Felton advocated summary justice by manly southern vigilantes. "If it takes lynching to protect woman's dearest possession from drunken, ravening beasts," she raged, "then I say lynch a thousand a week."<sup>96</sup>

If not explicitly encouraging mass murder, other farm reformers nonetheless saw in technological innovation the possibility to devise violent implements to combat the purported degeneracy of African American men brought on by modernity. In 1902, Atlanta's leading daily newspaper casually remarked that a newly invented "electric whip" could serve as a tool to discipline, in exactly the same brutal and dehumanizing manner, the working rhythms of plow horses and African American laborers. Plans for the "electric whip," the paper reported, included

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<sup>95</sup> Felton was by no means alone in this perspective. According to Joel Williamson, a generation of "radicals" believed that emancipated African Americans were rapidly descending to a state of savagery. See Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 111-223, Felton quoted on 128.

<sup>96</sup> Felton quoted in LeeAnn Whites, "Rebecca Latimer Felton and the Wife's Farm: The Class and Racial Politics of Gender Reform," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76 (Summer 1992), 368, 369.

an “attachment whereby both the mule and the plow hand shall be shocked every few minutes. It is believed that such an attachment would find a tremendous sale all over the south as by its use farmers could be very sure that no negro would go to sleep between the plow handles.”<sup>97</sup> While it is possible that the tenor of this article was tongue-in-cheek, the paper in any case played on stereotypes of African American laziness and notions that electric power—in part responsible for the tumult of the modern world—might contribute in some manner to the recovery of the antebellum racial order.

Undeterred by violent rhetoric and actions to replicate the world of slavery, many African Americans saw in the electric city not a completely degraded future or a return to the plantation, but genuine prospects for greater freedom. This was especially true of the streetcar systems whisking passengers across cities in Dixie. Electric streetcars had become not only the core of the southern utility industry little more than a decade after their introduction but critical features of urban life as well. In city after city, track mileage, and thus the metropolis, quickly expanded. Ridership increased dramatically as well. In 1902 Americans took 4.8 billion streetcar rides, and, in large cities, averaged from 235 to 260 yearly trips per capita. Southern rates of streetcar travel lagged behind the national average (about 150 annual rides per person) but the ridership rate in large cities such as Atlanta came closer to national figures (210 rides per person per year).<sup>98</sup> Readily accessible mass transit made city life more convenient for all citizens, but African Americans as much as any demographic took advantage of this new urban amenity, often constituting large proportions (and sometimes majorities) of ridership even after the passage of the first Jim Crow laws. After the US Supreme Court essentially sanctioned segregation in the *Civil Rights Cases* of 1883, laws for segregated rail travel appeared only slowly and unevenly

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<sup>97</sup> “An Electric Whip the Latest Invention,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 15, 1902.

<sup>98</sup> Nye, *Consuming Power*, 166; Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 72-73; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 96;

across the South. In many instances, these statutes received only half-hearted enforcement. The Georgia law, passed in 1891, required streetcar conductors to “separate the white and colored races *as much as practicable*,” which often meant only that white passengers boarded through the front doors and black passengers boarded from the back. In fact, the very language of the law allowed streetcar companies to avoid rigidly enforcing Jim Crow seating, which electric utilities often found overly burdensome. In other cases, lax enforcement prompted white citizens and lawmakers to press for the erection of physical barriers between or separate cars for whites and blacks with varying degrees of success. Yet in most places across the South, seats on trolleys—front, back, or middle—generally went to whoever boarded first. Just like white southerners, African Americans of all classes rode the streetcars to work, church, shops, and places of entertainment.<sup>99</sup>

African Americans’ ability to ride on trolleys without strict rules for separate seating derived not from a liberal attitude or apathy on the part of electric companies. Through constant acts of resistance from the 1890s to the 1910s, black southerners demanded equal treatment on electric streetcars without the ignominy of screens, assigned seats, or other devices to physically divide the races. Such indignities provoked black southerners to speak publically against attempts to relegate them to second-class citizenship, testifying to the significance they placed on the symbolic and material freedom of unfettered movement across the cities in which they worked and lived. Reverend Robert Jones lambasted a New Orleans ordinance that forced African American streetcar passengers to sit humiliatingly “behind screens, as if they were wild

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<sup>99</sup> Blair L. M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Age of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 33-34, 88-91; Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 38-43, 129-130; Railroad Commission of Georgia, *The Report of the Railroad Commission of Georgia* (Atlanta: Franklin-Turner Company, 1908), 98, emphasis added.

or obnoxious animals.”<sup>100</sup> An 1896 editorial in the New Orleans-based *Southwestern Christian Advocate* condemned an early post-*Plessy* Atlanta court ruling that would have forced black passengers to the last two rows of streetcars as “the most disgraceful decision ever rendered.” The writer reminded readers that African Americans had “spent enough money riding on the street cars in Georgia to own a line in the state,” intimating that by withholding their fares, black southerners could force trolley line managers to compromise.<sup>101</sup>

For a time, they did just that, taking their protests beyond mere rhetoric. In southern cities including Atlanta, Jacksonville, Mobile, New Orleans, Richmond, and Savannah, both working- and middle-class African Americans participated in boycotts against trolley companies that implemented Jim Crow. Streetcar traffic accounted for a large proportion of power companies’ income. Across the United States by 1902, trolley fare receipts amounted to an average of 50 percent of electric utilities’ revenues; in Atlanta, they accounted for an outsize 70 percent.<sup>102</sup> Southern street railway operators were thus quite sensitive to even modest dips in streetcar revenue. In response to the fear that boycotts would jeopardize annual dividend payments, trolley companies worked—through political machinations, espionage, and outright payoffs—to negotiate a middle ground between white calls for complete racial separation and African American demands for equal treatment. Though power companies sabotaged boycotts and ultimately sided with a southern social order grounded in white supremacy, seating arrangements on streetcars in the region, and particularly in Atlanta, remained relatively fluid for decades to come.<sup>103</sup> At least to some extent, then, the electric city for African Americans of all classes

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<sup>100</sup> Jones quoted in Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 104.

<sup>101</sup> Untitled editorial, *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, Aug. 20, 1896.

<sup>102</sup> Jones, *Routes of Power*, 167; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 84.

<sup>103</sup> Kelley, *Right to Ride*, 2-6, 185-187; Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 188; Mixon, *Atlanta Riot*, 35-36.

proved open for negotiation, a site in which limited, but still important, power could be exercised.

The autonomy and influence that electric city life afforded African Americans in their pursuit of equal rights served as a source of immediate anxiety for white working-class southerners, but it portended larger, graver changes as well. African American agency fueled fears that white people's historical position as a superior racial group, and moreover their place in the (white) American democratic polity, was in jeopardy.<sup>104</sup> According to predominant thinking of the time, the goal of equal treatment on trolleys, and in everyday life in general, was not about equality at all. Indeed equality was impossible: one race would inevitably dominate the other. Thus, many whites held, equality on streetcars both contributed to and was symptomatic of a larger, horrific inversion of the southern racial hierarchy reminiscent of the one they purportedly witnessed in Reconstruction: blacks were becoming superior, working whites were becoming subordinate.<sup>105</sup> In the words of a Mrs. George Ball, ordinary white southerners, especially women, had been forced "to quietly submit... to the domination of the negro" in the New South—a situation that would not be tenable for much longer.<sup>106</sup>

Nowhere did white Atlantans face their perceived degradation more tellingly than in day-to-day exchanges on the streetcars where they came into close bodily contact with African Americans. In the tight quarters of trolley cars, whites often complained of being "crowded," of having to stand eye-to-eye with members of a putatively inferior race on equal terms dictated by the material and financial realities of urban mass transit. According to historian Mark Smith, the term "crowded" (or "crowd," or "crowding") operated as widely legible euphemism for forced

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<sup>104</sup> See Joel Olson, *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xv-xvii.

<sup>105</sup> David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 25-32; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 259-261.

<sup>106</sup> Mrs. Geo. C. Ball, "The Race Problem from a Domestic Point of View," *Atlanta Georgia*, Sept. 8, 1906.

social equality between the races experienced in the most corporeal, visceral sense. “Being ‘crowded,’” Smith writes, “meant having not just to see blacks but to feel, smell, and, hear them (the inability to close nostrils or ears making ‘crowding’ especially transgressive and invasive for whites).”<sup>107</sup> One scandalized Atlanta citizen, who identified herself only as “E.K.F.,” conveyed her disgust at the “crowding” on Atlanta’s trolleys in a 1905 letter to the *Atlanta Constitution*. She found it unacceptable “that the ladies and children, the mothers, wives, and children of Georgia men, should be compelled to ride in street cars crowded...with a motley gang of negro laborers, reeking with the most sickening of odors.”<sup>108</sup>

The offenses did not end with these unsavory sensory encounters; crowding also meant that whites were often prevented from sitting or were forced off of streetcars completely. African Americans, E.K.F. wrote, occupied not only “the seats reserved for them, but frequently every seat in the car. White men and ladies are compelled to stand in the aisles over this mass of dirty negroes...who gloat over the fact that the white ladies have to...listen to their low, coarse language.”<sup>109</sup> It was not only an incensed E.K.F. who objected to such treatment; white citizens frequently complained about such “deplorable situations” in which they were “crowded off of the street cars.” On a Sunday in late August 1906, for example, a “Mrs. J. F. Saunders was [reportedly] crowded off of a car by negroes [who] took possession of the car at the corner of Houston and Piedmont streets.”<sup>110</sup> If black passengers sometimes pushed white riders out of trolleys, economic conditions in many other cases prevented working whites from even boarding. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the standard streetcar fare across the United States, as well as in Atlanta, was a nickel. A typical urban family of four might thus conceivably spend

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<sup>107</sup> Mark M. Smith, *How Race is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>108</sup> “Letters from the People: Separate Cars for Negroes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 19, 1905.

<sup>109</sup> “Letters from the People: Separate Cars for Negroes,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 19, 1905.

<sup>110</sup> “City Council Urged to Take Stand against Street Car Company,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Aug. 31, 1906.

about \$50 per year for street car travel, or some 10 to 20 percent of annual household income. With southern wages at about half and streetcar fare the same as the national rate, a typical southern factory worker faced prohibitively high annual transportation costs. That any African Americans, especially those with some means, could take advantage of mass transit systems while white workers often struggled to afford to ride added severe insult to the perceived injuries whites endured on streetcars on a daily basis.<sup>111</sup>

Of course, considering the deeply held white belief in black inferiority, African Americans would not have been able through their own power to oust white Atlantans from their lofty position on the racial hierarchy—or from their seats on streetcars. Thus the blame for this outrageous situation, for working white southerners and their champions, lay squarely with the Yankee-funded corporations rapidly turning Dixie into the New South. According to E.K.F., the reason the law did not effectively mandate a full separation of the races was that, despite signs of growing racial tensions on streetcars, the GREC's executives simply did not want to enforce Jim Crow seating. To do so would only reduce profits for the company and dividends for stockholders. "The ladies and children must continue to be crowded into the street cars with the negroes," she sardonically wrote to the editor of the *Atlanta Georgian* in September 1906, "because the street car company is too poor to furnish separate cars, for if they did what would become of the watered stock?" Simply put, from E.K.F.'s viewpoint, the GREC valued the bottom line more than white supremacy.<sup>112</sup> Populist leader and white supremacist firebrand Tom Watson held the same opinion. The love of profit above all else, he penned in 1906, had seen southern corporate interests invite northern capital to Dixie with the disastrous result that women

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<sup>111</sup> That any African Americans, and especially members of the middle class, might take advantage of rail travel while some whites struggled to afford fare was an affront that white southerners had long taken as a symbol of a rapidly crumbling racial order. See Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 136-140; also see Nye, *Electrifying America*, 96-97.

<sup>112</sup> "Trail Cars for the Negroes," *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 8, 1906.

and children had been dragged from the countryside and enslaved to an urban-industrial machine that “is grinding up their tender limbs into dividends.”<sup>113</sup> At the same time, these same forces had transformed former “savages” into “black masters” who, in some outrageous cases, held “white slaves” in “bestial degradation.”<sup>114</sup> Now, Watson lamented, “the state of Georgia has been completely conquered by a Wall Street Combination” that supported railroad and electric company managers bent on modernization even at the cost of white racial superiority.<sup>115</sup>

For Watson and his cohorts, these ravenous corporations could only force ordinary white southerners into bestial degradation under the protection of New South-oriented Democrats who had kept themselves in power through a Faustian bargain. In order to stay in office, and thus to ensure the steady flow of northern and British investment capital to their region, New South Democrats, most notably *Atlanta Constitution* editor and gubernatorial candidate Clark Howell, had traded away white supremacy for black votes. Not only had it “perpetuate[d] the negro’s...political power,” Howell’s machine—a “desperate political clique anxious to perpetuate itself in power”—also tried to disfranchise working whites who reeked of the lingering populist insurgency or favored limiting the influence of the corporations they blamed for their plight.<sup>116</sup> The consequences for such an unholy deal materialized in the everyday life of the electric city. The city of Atlanta, many whites seemed to agree, shuddered under a “reign of terror” in which haughty and lusty black men on a daily basis forced themselves on helpless white damsels with near impunity on the GREC’s streetcars.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Watson, “Editorials: Down in Georgia,” *Tom Watson’s Magazine* 4 (March 1906), 1.

<sup>114</sup> Watson, “Editorials: The Ungrateful Negro,” *Tom Watson’s Magazine* 4 (April 1906), 168, 171.

<sup>115</sup> Watson, “Editorials: Northern Capital in the South,” *Tom Watson’s Magazine* 2 (July 1905), 17.

<sup>116</sup> “The Nigger in the Woodpile,” *Atlanta Journal*, Nov. 10, 1905.

<sup>117</sup> “Letters from *Georgian* Readers, with Especial Reference to the Race Question: The Inevitable Remedy,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 11, 1906; Mixon, *Atlanta Riot*, 73-81.



To counter this trend, wrote prohibition crusader Reverend Sam Jones, white men must act as one to demand reform and lead “a great revolt against” the corporate-dominated political machine whose love of money had sullied Dixie with “negro domination.” And if their call for white “reconquest” went unanswered, the *Atlanta Georgian* chillingly predicted in early September 1906, the city’s white sons would rise up in violent reprisal against their oppressors.<sup>118</sup> Referencing the inseparable issues of white political impotence, black political ascendancy, and ruinous corporate domination—all, according to working whites, experienced daily on Atlanta’s streetcars—the *Georgian* warned the GREC and the city’s Democratic establishment, in a twisted adaptation of *Proverbs* 15:1, that “a soft answer turneth away wrath and considerate hearing removes opposition, but contemptuous silence and arrogant indifference will stir the stones of Atlanta to rebellion and protest.”<sup>119</sup> By late September 1906, after a summer filled with alleged streetcar improprieties and black-on-white rape, Atlanta’s white men made it clear that they no longer had faith that the city’s political and corporate leaders would lend considerate hearing to calls for swift reform.

At about half past 10:00PM on Saturday, 22 September 1906, the Georgia Railway and Electric Company’s 207 car arrived at the busy intersection of Peachtree and Marietta Streets, where thousands of angry white men had gathered—following several reported black-on-white sexual assaults earlier that day—in order to bring the “reign of terror” to a decisive and bloody end. Noticing that the 207 car carried both black men and white women, the mob pounced. Not simply boarding the trolley, the horde disabled the car, smashed its windows, and ripped open its doors before viciously bludgeoning at least three black men to death and severely wounding several other men, women, and children. Moments later, another GREC trolley passed through

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<sup>118</sup> Jones quoted in Mixon, *Atlanta Riot*, 67.

<sup>119</sup> “The Spirit of Our Corporations,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 10, 1906.

the same intersection. Both the car and the passengers inside suffered the same fate as the 207: severed overhead wires, broken windows, wrenched doors, and slaughtered African American passengers. By Tuesday, September 25, hundreds of people had suffered injuries and at least sixty African Americans and ten whites had been killed in the Atlanta Race Riot. In addition, rioters disabled, damaged, and/or boarded more than twenty streetcars on the evening of September 22 alone.<sup>120</sup>

For the mob, assaults on the streetcars had a practical—albeit sinister—element. Trolleys, the site of so much racial anxiety, shuttled unsuspecting passengers directly to the bloodthirsty crowd that focused its wrath at the hub of Atlanta’s street railway network; the cars also provided convenient traps for the rioters’ victims. Yet even more significantly, assaults on the streetcars and their riders held powerful symbolic political value. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes in a discussion of “lantern smashers” in Revolutionary France, attacks on both society’s infrastructure and supposed tormenters “represented the unleashed power of the people” who felt compelled to mete out “popular justice.” By crushing the objects—both bodies and technologies—that exemplified the state’s illegitimate power and exploitative practices, the “symbols of the treacherous king’s authority were destroyed.”<sup>121</sup> Similarly, white rioters in turn-of-the-century Atlanta were not simply sating their racist bloodlust by murdering African Americans in the streets and on streetcars. They were also rebelling against what they believed their treacherous New South kings had foisted upon them: corporate ruination of Dixie humiliatingly experienced as “negro domination” in the everyday exchanges of electric city life.

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<sup>120</sup> “Attack by Mob on Street Cars,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 23, 1906; Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 91-93, 107-108. For lengthy discussions of the 1906 Atlanta Race Riot, see Mixon, *Atlanta Riot*; and Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 209-223;

<sup>121</sup> Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*, 103, 105.

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Electric streetcar travel, and to a lesser extent electric lighting, had clearly become embedded in the experiences of daily life in the modern city and, at least in the minds of working-class whites, produced more harm than good. Electrical modernization, many believed, had elevated black southerners to a state of equality with whites, bringing deadly racial conflict to the city that had supposedly traded retrograde racial hatred for moderation, progress, and industrial success. Working-class southerners and middling reformers believed that in order to save their civilization from the decay and chaos of “negro domination” they must swiftly enact strict public control over corporations, which could only truly be achieved if done in concert with the expansion of white male democracy and the disfranchisement of African Americans.

For much of the first two decades of its career, electricity in Atlanta and in cities across the United States appeared to be a fundamentally undemocratic enterprise. Because of the technical expertise, managerial sophistication, and outsized capital investment required to establish and maintain electric power businesses, ordinary people seemed to have had little say in utility operations and policies.<sup>122</sup> By the dawn of the twentieth century, however, especially within the context of the push for greater white male political participation, African American exclusion, and corporate regulation, many people thought that the management of electricity should be a democratic process and acted to make it so (at least for white men). The resulting movement, a broad-based campaign not for regulation, but for municipal ownership of electric utilities that drew on the abortive Populist Party crusade, made an indelible mark on the path of electrification in the New South’s capital.

In the 1890s, Populists across the United States had pressed in general for popular oversight of corporations and in particular for government ownership of railroads and the

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<sup>122</sup> See Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 21.

telegraph. They argued that since transportation and communication systems proved crucial to the functioning of modern society, and leaned heavily on government assistance, public institutions should acquire and control these indispensable technologies.<sup>123</sup> By the turn of the century, populist-minded politicians like Tom Watson and working-class whites in Atlanta conceived of electric power companies as a tentacled beast on the verge of slithering into the South and destroying white society (figure 2.7). Joining a nationwide movement, southern activists turned the earlier focus on government ownership of railroads toward municipal ownership of the increasingly important electric power industry. Even if the municipal ownership movement did not descend directly from Populism, it certainly inherited Populism's spirit and rhetoric. In the words of Populist standard bearer Tom Watson, the way for ordinary whites to affect the "impeachment of heartless commercialism" and to "sound the death-knell of legalized Greed and Murder" was to "abolish privilege [and] nationalize and municipalize public utilities."<sup>124</sup>

Municipal ownership movements sprang from progressive political activity in cities across the United States starting in the late 1880s and early 1890s and, following the collapse of Populism, began to gather momentum by the end of the 1890s. Almost invariably, activists cited the high cost and poor quality of electric lighting, resulting largely from political corruption, as the motivation for their campaigns.<sup>125</sup> The call for municipal ownership became a leading issue in Atlanta affairs in the late 1890s; yet at that point, the public ownership movement remained, in the words of former mayor Charles Collier, the preserve of the city's most "substantial and trustworthy citizens." Alongside other substantial and trustworthy figures, business and

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<sup>123</sup> Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 146-150, 177-178.

<sup>124</sup> Watson, "Editorials: Socialism and One of its Great Books" *Tom Watson's Magazine* 4 (May 1906), 321, 329.

<sup>125</sup> See Richard Rudolph and Scott Ridley, *Power Struggle: The Hundred-Year War over Electricity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 22-56; and Jay Brigham, *Empowering the West: Electrical Politics before FDR* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 1-9.

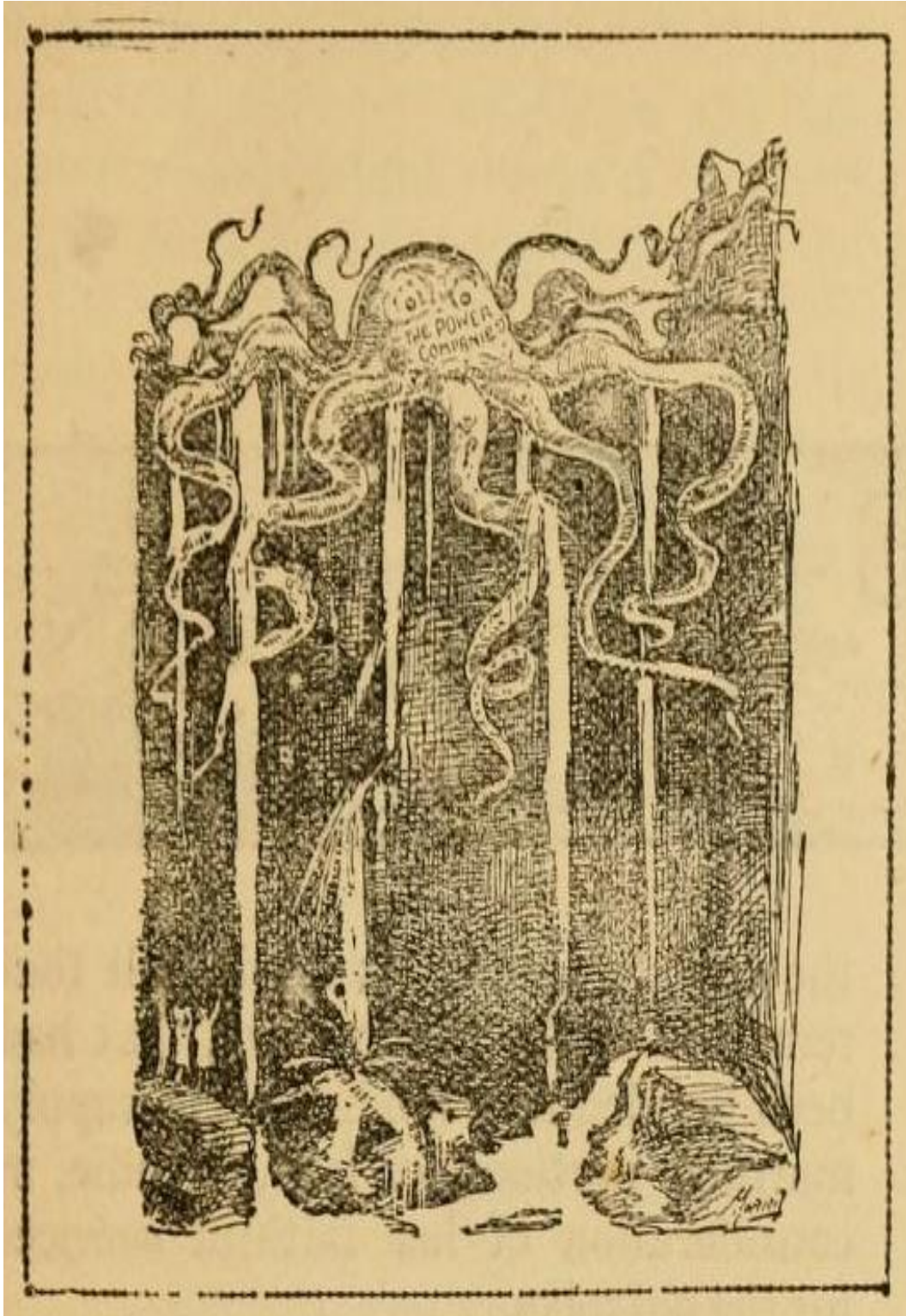


Figure 2.7 Tom Watson's Magazine, April 1906

manufacturing leaders such as Hugh Inman and Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills owner Jacob Elsas agreed that “the city should control the electric light plant” because it would amount to enormous annual savings. They were careful to note, however, that they did not favor city ownership of the far more lucrative streetcar system. For Inman, Elsas, and the business elite in general, the city’s ownership of trolley lines would be a drastic and expensive move that was “out of the question” as it would soon be “put on a political basis [where] corruption would inevitably follow.”<sup>126</sup>

After the turn of the century, when ordinary whites in the city began to express—and violently act on—the fear that political malfeasance had forced them to live “under the nervous terror of the criminal negro” and corporate theft, the rhetoric surrounding municipalization took on a somewhat radical tone.<sup>127</sup> Municipal ownership proponents now went beyond issues of cost and quality, arguing that energy corporations’ greed threatened white democracy and as a result must immediately come under popular control. Alderman James L. Key lamented that Atlanta’s working whites had fallen into the “hands of grinding monopolies” that watered their stock in order to rob the people. With mayoral ambitions in mind, he pledged to “support the work that is going to be done to give the people relief through municipal ownership.”<sup>128</sup> The *Atlanta Georgian*, an evening paper that in the months before the 1906 Race Riot actively drummed up support for violent reprisals against corporate-enabled “negro domination,” took up the cause of municipal ownership as well. In a string of editorials and articles in 1906 and 1907, the *Georgian* savaged the GREC, railroads, and corporations in general as ruinous to the people of the South. Support for public control over electric utilities (as well as gas, steam heat, and telephone

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<sup>126</sup> “Citizens Favor City Ownership,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 30, 1899. Also see “New Municipal League Will Ask Candidates for Views on Lights,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 9, 1898; and Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 42-43.

<sup>127</sup> Quote from Mixon, *Atlanta Riot*, 75.

<sup>128</sup> “Let City Own Her Utilities, Say the People,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 23, 1906. Also see “Key Gives Reasons for Need of League,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 21, 1906.

service) was thus an expression of true white democracy. By the same token, opposition to public control of utilities, from the paper's view, was plutocratic, indeed it was "treason to the government under which we live" because it was an "aspersion upon the capacity of the people to rule" and denied them the chance to do so.<sup>129</sup> The *Georgian* specifically identified Henry Atkinson as the party chiefly responsible for this attitude. His propaganda and backroom dealings perpetuated the fleecing of Atlanta's white citizens "for the enlargement of that Boston man's business." If the working Atlantan truly sought to "settle and establish the supremacy of the white race in the affairs of this government and for the peace and welfare of both races" he must join the *Georgian* in lending "his voice and his vote, his full intelligence and...his cooperation without stint to the reform measures" that would restore his power.<sup>130</sup>

Atlanta's labor unions heeded that call and likewise loudly advocated for public ownership not just of lighting but of the streetcar system as well. The *Journal of Labor*, the American Federation of Labor's Atlanta mouthpiece, published a series of editorials in the fall of 1906, declaring that "many of the enterprises which now go to swell the individual bank accounts of private corporations would, no doubt, save money to the citizenry of the cities if municipally owned."<sup>131</sup> Due to corporate greed and unscrupulous political leadership, the paper continued with somewhat garbled metaphors, the "working man is the most pitiable object on earth as he nestles 'neath the shade of the trust-tree with its myriad branches sucking the blood of his weekly earnings." This was not simply the opinion of union leadership. The rank and file, the paper claimed, proudly backed "municipal ownership of electric lights, gas, street cars, steam

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<sup>129</sup> "The Treason of Those Who Oppose Municipal Ownership," *Atlanta Georgian*, Dec. 7, 1906. Also see: "The Southern Bell Telephone Company," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Aug. 17, 1907.

<sup>130</sup> "Municipal Ownership for Atlanta" and "The Governor's Responsibilities," *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 4, 1906. Also see: "Some Municipal Ownership Examples," *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 13, 1906; "Let the Rich Remember Who Made Them So," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Mar. 26, 1907; "The Only Brave and Permanent Policy," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Mar. 30, 1907.

<sup>131</sup> "The Initiatory of Municipal Ownership," *Journal of Labor*, Sept. 14, 1906.

heat, and, in fact, everything which the working man as an individual and a family man, comes in direct contact in his daily walk.”<sup>132</sup>

It is difficult to determine the extent to which union members and working Atlantans in general favored municipal ownership, but there is evidence to suggest that the municipalization movement went beyond the bombast of the vanguard. Since the mid-1890s, but especially from 1905 to 1907, popular support for public ownership had swelled. In cities across the country, citizens voted for hundreds of referendums and candidates favorable to municipal ownership of electric utilities; they also saw to it that municipal ownership became a reality. In 1896, just fewer than 400 municipally owned utilities existed in the United States. By 1906 that number had ballooned to nearly 1,300, a rate of growth twice that of private utilities.<sup>133</sup> Dozens of towns in Georgia created municipal utilities and the public ownership movement in Atlanta likewise showed signs of vitality. 1906 Atlanta mayoral candidate Thomas Goodwin explicitly appealed to working class voters on the basis of municipal control over utilities. “The hope of Atlanta is in her small manufacturers,” a Goodwin campaign advertisement asserted. “There would be three times” as many jobs in the city, the piece claimed, if “cheap electric power were furnished” to the people as a result of the “municipal ownership of electric light, power, and gas plants.”<sup>134</sup>

In addition to working-class support, popular ownership of electricity in Atlanta had the backing of a group called the Municipal Ownership League. Originally formed in 1898, the League gained new life in 1906 and boasted some 4,000 to 5,000 members including Alderman Key, the Reverend Sam Jones, and the editorial board of the *Atlanta Georgian*. Hoke Smith, who won the state’s Democratic nomination (and thus, essentially, the general election) for governor

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<sup>132</sup> “Organized Labor and Municipal Ownership,” *Journal of Labor*, Oct. 5, 1906.

<sup>133</sup> Forrest McDonald, “Samuel Insull and the Movement for State Utility Regulatory Commissions,” *Business History Review* 32 (Autumn 1958), 247-249.

<sup>134</sup> Untitled political advertisement, *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 22, 1906.



in August 1906 after pledging to expand the white franchise, eliminate the black vote, and rein in corporations, half-heartedly indicated that he might join the league as well.<sup>135</sup> According to an unofficial manifesto issued in 1906, the Municipal Ownership League aimed to bring a swift end to the “oppression by an aristocracy of industrial monopoly” that stood “behind the legislatures and the congresses” and “behind the machines, the rings, and the bosses.” The masses had “suffered so much from the monopoly’s extortion and indifference...that the time has come when the people who are the source of power and the object of all government and the supreme consideration of cities and states must awaken to the comprehension of the rights they have lost and the rights they may regain.”<sup>136</sup>

For the Georgia Railway and Electric Company, as for privately owned utilities across the nation, the rise of a vigorous, broad-based movement for local-government ownership of both electric lighting and streetcars posed a serious threat. The danger to the GREC’s interests was especially palpable in Atlanta, which, according to W.E.B. Du Bois, had become the “center of the upward striving of the ‘poor whites.’” As Du Bois recognized, early-twentieth-century Atlanta had emerged as a hotbed of white working-class activity, a city that saw whites’ numbers in both absolute and proportional terms grow precipitously between 1880 and 1910 (a 400 percent overall increase, and a 20 percent proportional increase to two-thirds of the city’s population). And as their ranks expanded, their power grew as well; the demands of growing numbers of white workers clearly influenced the social and urban-industrial landscapes—even if ordinary whites believed their status suffered rapid decline. According to historian Clifford Kuhn, white voting rates and labor union participation in Atlanta outstripped that in the rest of the South and even outpaced national averages. What was more, large proportions of white

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<sup>135</sup> “Municipal Ownership League Being Formed,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 21, 1906.

<sup>136</sup> “Let Us Have Municipal Ownership League,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 22, 1906.

migrants came to the city as ex-farmers who had been ousted from their land and forced into demeaning factory work. Many of these people thus harbored deep resentment for the New South that industrial capitalism—embodied in electric companies, railroads, factories, and city life—represented.<sup>137</sup>

White labor's power commanded the respect of Atlanta's political and business elite. They demonstrated that power, and their refusal to acquiesce to proletarianization, in a number of actions, perhaps most notably in the racially motivated Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills strike of August 1897. After Fulton Bag's management hired twenty-five African American women to work in the factory, outraged white workers led a walk-out that crippled production. Within five days, ownership caved to the strikers' immediate demands that the mill terminate the newly-hired women. The strikers' victory had a larger effect as well: black workers in the aftermath of the 1897 strike found themselves essentially barred from factory work in Atlanta. White union activity had reshaped the city's social and industrial order. No longer would whites have to compete with African Americans for manufacturing jobs.<sup>138</sup> Especially when combined with the show of destructive force several years later in the 1906 Atlanta Riot, the GREC's management could clearly see white labor's influence. The cresting municipal ownership movement demanded a swift and decisive answer.

Georgia Railway and Electric responded to the threat of public control over the electric business by calling on the state to protect its business through regulation. The proposed legislation would confer on electric utilities common-carrier status under the purview of the Railroad Commission of Georgia (a consequential designation that left open possibilities for

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<sup>137</sup> Clifford M. Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 33-34, 40-42, Du Bois quoted on 34. Also see, Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, 21-23.

<sup>138</sup> See Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order*, 24-32; and Mixon, *Atlanta Riot*, 27-34.

industrial power competitors; see Chapter 2), which would grant utilities exclusive control over a defined electric streetcar and lighting service area, and would guarantee a reasonable rate of return on investment, which fluctuated between 6 and 12 percent per annum. In exchange for near-monopoly status, the state's railroad commission would exercise close regulatory control over every element of the electric utility industry. Historian Edward Ayers writes that state-level regulation of corporations represented "the most visible progressive reforms" of the early-twentieth-century South. In southern state after southern state, self-styled reforming politicians, in their attempts to capture and preserve power, saw that regulatory legislation passed in state legislatures by drawing from the still well-stocked fund of populist resentment for the corporations and the "corrupt political machines [that] had long perverted popular government."<sup>139</sup> With an eye trained more on national-level regulatory developments, historian Thomas McCraw similarly wrote that, emerging from the early progressive moment, "protective regulation often cushioned the impact of rapid industrial change" by holding "in check socially destructive forms of behavior" on the part of large corporations.<sup>140</sup> Of course, regulation of electric utilities fit nicely with the larger progressive era rhetoric about the redefinition of the relationship among corporations, state, and society. Yet it did not result primarily from the cynical activities of southern demagogues such as Hoke Smith, from heroic reformer-crusaders such as Louis Brandeis, or even from mass political campaigns. Regulation emerged from the board rooms of power companies. Electric utilities, in the words of historian Forrest McDonald, "energetically studied, worked out the principles of, propagandized, and lobbied for the

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<sup>139</sup> Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 413-414.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas K. McCraw, *Prophets of Regulation: Charles Francis Adams, Louis D. Brandeis, James M. Landis, Alfred E. Kahn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 302.

establishment of state regulatory commissions” as a weapon against popular calls for government ownership of their business.<sup>141</sup>

This strategy was not limited to the South. While serving as president of NELA in 1897 and 1898, Chicago’s Samuel Insull became the first utility executive to publically call for regulation. Even as the remarks on the issue in his keynote address scandalized many of his colleagues at NELA’s annual meeting in 1898, Insull made what proved to be the foundational case for his industry’s support of legislation that would enable regulatory commissions to oversee electric company activities.<sup>142</sup> Such a call became necessary because, in just the second full decade of its existence, the electric utility business already faced several significant problems. The basis of those troubles was open competition in the free market. “Competition,” Insull announced, “is not the true regulative force” in the electric utility industry. In fact rivalries between power companies had proved ruinous to the fledgling industry and the public interest, producing duplicate wires and tracks, tattered streets, grievously overcapitalized businesses, destructive bankruptcies, and an increasingly irritated customer base. Failure to correct these mistakes would see the electric utility industry swept away by the gravest danger facing it, the municipal ownership movement. For Insull, the movement had become a “subject of growing importance” that arose largely from popular discontent with financial and infrastructural chaos. In the late 1890s, it was foisted on the public by radical activists “who believe that the best interests of the greatest number are to be obtained by the creation of a municipal socialism, which, if carried to its logical conclusion, must ultimately result in municipalities

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<sup>141</sup> McDonald, “Samuel Insull,” 248.

<sup>142</sup> For a succinct statement of the early opposition to Insull’s position, see Samuel Insull, *Public Control and Private Operation of Public Service Industries* (Chicago: Other Side Publishing, 1899), 12-15.

performing...such public-service work as we [the electric utility industry] are engaged in, and also in producing the food we eat and the clothes we wear.”<sup>143</sup>

In the years following his 1898 speech, Insull persuaded his colleagues to join him and eventually forged what historian Richard Hirsh has called the “utility consensus,” a widely agreed upon doctrine that, as a “natural monopoly,” the electric utility industry needed protection from competition in exchange for regulatory oversight.<sup>144</sup> One utility executive not in need of conversion was Henry Atkinson. The GREC’s chairman believed in Insull’s prophesy from the outset and served as one of the five original members on NELA’s Legislative Policy Committee, which Insull formed in 1898 to study and make recommendations on the issue of regulation.<sup>145</sup> More than just having faith, Atkinson proselytized for Insull’s creed in Atlanta. The two-year battle between his company and Hurt’s, according to Atkinson, illustrated just how destructive competition in the electric business could be (although, apparently, that critique did not apply to his side of the rivalry with Joel Hurt.) “One has but to look about,” he wrote in 1899, “to find unmistakable evidences of the disastrous nature of the competitions of public service industries. They are natural monopolies. No sane man will put money into such competitions. It is financial suicide. It means the destruction of property.”<sup>146</sup> Following his victory over Hurt and the seeming end of competition in Atlanta in 1902, Atkinson continued to work closely with Insull

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<sup>143</sup> Insull, *Public Control and Private Operation*, 5-11 (quotes from 5, 8). Also see, Gregg A. Jarrell, “The Demand for State Regulation of the Electric Utility Industry,” *Journal of Law and Economics* 21 (Oct. 1978): 269-295; and William J. Hausman and John L. Neufeld, “The Market for Capital and the Origins of State Regulation of Electric Utilities in the United States,” *Journal of Economic History* 62 (Dec. 2002): 1050-1073.

<sup>144</sup> Richard F. Hirsh, *Power Loss: The Origins of Deregulation and Restructuring in the American Electric Utility System* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1999), 2-24. For industries that required high initial investments and included high fixed costs in equipment and/or infrastructure, such as the railroad or electric utility industry, economists (not universally) believed the most sensible method for avoiding the destructive consequences of competition and ensuring economic and social security was to designate one common carrier to operate as a monopoly enterprise in a given service area. In other words, electric companies, phone companies, gas companies, and railroads were (or should be) “natural monopolies.”

<sup>145</sup> McDonald, “Samuel Insull,” 242.

<sup>146</sup> “St. Railway Franchises Intended as a Whip,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug 16, 1899.

and groups such as the National Civic Association (a consortium of economists, labor leaders, and utility managers) to draft and lobby for state-level regulatory laws.<sup>147</sup>

Legislation for statewide regulation of public utilities in Georgia made little progress, however, until 1906 when mass anxieties over racial and corporate issues, and, not least, the municipal ownership movement, reached a fever pitch. But instead of launching a campaign to garner popular support for state-level oversight of their business, power companies in Georgia worked with state legislators to quietly include regulatory control over utilities in another proposed measure. In the 1906-1907 legislative session, newly-elected governor Hoke Smith honored his campaign promises by seeing that bills to expand white political participation and to disfranchise African Americans came to the floor of the Georgia General Assembly. Smith also saw that his pledge to rein in corporations—particularly the railroads—was honored through a bill that would expand of the powers of the Railroad Commission of Georgia (RCG). As originally introduced to the General Assembly by Representative Murphy Candler of DeKalb County (nephew of GREC stockholder and Coca-Cola president, Asa Candler), the bill included strict rate schedules, prohibitions on political patronage, and an increase in RCG board membership from three to five; it did not contain provisions for public utilities to fall under its purview.<sup>148</sup> Yet as the legislative session progressed, Candler included electric utilities in the bill, according to the *Atlanta Georgian*, after the “street railway owners themselves have asked the

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<sup>147</sup> See National Electric Light Association, *Proceedings* Vol. I (Boston: National Electric Light Association, 1904); National Civic Association, Committee on Private Operation and Ownership, *Municipal and Private Operation of Public Utilities* Vol. I (New York: National Civic Association, 1907); and Shelby Schurtz, *The State Public Service Commission Idea* (Grand Rapids, MI: n.p., 1918).

<sup>148</sup> “Larger Powers for Commission,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 29, 1907; “Candler Bill Recommended by Committee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 30, 1907;

amendment so as to place the lines within and without municipalities strictly under the jurisdiction of the commission.”<sup>149</sup>

The Candler Bill passed both houses of the Georgia General Assembly on the last day of the legislative session in 1907, making Georgia one of the first three states, along with New York and Wisconsin, to answer Insull’s call to extend statewide regulatory power over its electric utilities. Yet unlike the New York and Wisconsin laws, the Georgia law included provisions that clearly bore the marks of, and indeed intended to stifle, popular demands for the enlargement of white democracy. Whereas commissioners in New York and Wisconsin gained their seats through appointments, those in Georgia had to face popular election “by the qualified voters of Georgia” as representatives of the popular will and not, primarily, as experts with “experience in law or railway business.” The Candler Act furthermore granted the commission the power to police what activists believed were corporations’ most egregious techniques for swindling ordinary white citizens. The RCG could now investigate the electric companies’ financial status and compel utilities to regularly publish such information. The Railroad Commission also had the sole authority to approve the issuance of power company securities and to set reasonable rates for lighting and for streetcar fare.<sup>150</sup>

Although the Candler bill ultimately resulted from pressure exerted by white working-class activity, the GREC apparently wanted no financially burdensome or boycott-inducing Jim Crow strictures included in the legislation. With the assistance of several paragons of white supremacy, including the chair of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the company successfully resisted such proposed measures in 1907 and beyond.<sup>151</sup> As passed by the Georgia

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<sup>149</sup> “Street Railways under Commission,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Jul. 20, 1907; “Senate Considers Increased Power for Commission,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Jul. 24, 1907.

<sup>150</sup> Railroad Commission of Georgia, *Report of the Railroad Commission of Georgia*, 100-106.

<sup>151</sup> “Separate Cars Will Be Asked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 27, 1908.

General Assembly, the Candler Act made no mention of segregation, though it did include a generic provision that the RCG “shall have the power and authority to order and compel the operation of sufficient passenger service when in its judgment inefficient or insufficient service is being rendered the public or any community.”<sup>152</sup> The Atlanta electric company did, however, agree to stricter enforcement of Georgia’s 1891 Jim Crow law in accordance with a citywide ordinance that passed after the 1906 Race Riot. The new decree was intended to prevent the types of interactions that led to the violence in September 1906 and forced each trolley car in the city to post signs that read “Colored seat from rear toward front, Whites seat from front toward rear.” Technically, if a streetcar were full and contained no white riders, African American passengers could ride in the front. Thus as insulting as it was to African American dignity, the new ordinance to some extent preserved the fluidity of the old seating system (and racial strife on the streetcars persisted for decades).<sup>153</sup> At least in the short term, though, E.K.F. and Atlanta’s white working citizens could feel confident that the city had finally heard their cries and erected an imaginary veil that would prevent them from being crowded in, or even off of, streetcars in the electric city.

Apparently for organized labor, state-mandated laws for reasonable power rates and corporate transparency, along with citywide rules for stricter segregation, proved sufficiently satisfactory to halt the campaign for municipal ownership (though the issue of government control over the electric business surfaced many times across the twentieth century, and will be a persistent theme in the rest of this study). The *Journal of Labor*, for instance, took a softer tack on the issue after passage of the Candler Act in August 1907. The paper’s editor, a member of

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<sup>152</sup> Railroad Commission of Georgia, *Report of the Railroad Commission of Georgia*, 102.

<sup>153</sup> Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joyce, and E. Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 77. Also see Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 188.



the National Civic Federation along with Henry Atkinson and Samuel Insull, wrote in September 1907 that the war on corporations had gone on long enough and that working people had suffered too much from the fights between “demagogues and doctrinaires.” Certainly corporations needed close regulatory management, he granted, but some of the demands for change had descended into radicalism. What corporations needed was rigorous regulation, not crucifixion.<sup>154</sup> The *Atlanta Georgian* likewise abandoned its editorial crusade for municipal ownership, published National Civic League statements in favor of regulatory oversight of electric utilities, and, like the *Journal of Labor*, urged working whites to call off their anti-corporate witch hunt.<sup>155</sup> Shortly after approval of the Candler Act, the *Georgian*’s editors admitted that “we do not wish nor do the people wish to harass or handicap these great public utility corporations, by constant hammering or incessant demands for reform,” and that “nobody wishes to oppress or mistreat these corporations.”<sup>156</sup> The paper could finally adopt that position because of the noble work of the “great and historic legislature of 1907.” “The will of the people as expressed in the thunder” of recent years, the *Georgian* reported, “touched two high and signal issues—the establishment of white supremacy and the regulation” of railroads and public utilities.<sup>157</sup>

Beyond abandoning the issue of public ownership and softening their stances toward corporations, the *Journal of Labor* and the *Georgian* offered support for the idea that, since they were now subject to RCG regulation, streetcar companies such as the GREC should be recognized as working people’s friends and as good citizens. In the summer of 1907, the *Journal of Labor* carried Georgia Railway and Electric Company advertisements proclaiming that “Labor is Well Paid in Atlanta,” and that, moreover, wages were on the rise so the working family would

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<sup>154</sup> “Control—Don’t Crucify—Railroads,” *Journal of Labor*, Sept 20, 1907.

<sup>155</sup> See “America is Unripe for Municipal Ownership, Says Civic League Experts,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Aug. 14, 1907.

<sup>156</sup> “Regulating the Trolley Lines, the Power Plants, and the Telephones,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Sept. 7, 1907.

<sup>157</sup> “The Great and Historic Legislature of 1907,” *Atlanta Georgian*, Aug. 19, 1907.

soon be able to enjoy all of the modern conveniences that electricity could provide. In addition, such ads continued, laborers in Atlanta had access to one of the cheapest and most well-run streetcar and lighting systems in the United States. Management thus felt “justified in asking for the support and patronage of the people who are enjoying these benefits at such reasonable rates.”<sup>158</sup> The *Georgian* likewise published GREC advertisements that touted the utility’s “part in Atlanta’s upbuilding.” The power company, the ad boasted, developed recreational facilities in the city such as the Atlanta Crackers’ baseball stadium and the Ponce De Leon Amusement Park. It also helped create suburban neighborhoods, and paid its workers good wages. And now that it had seemingly become a permanent part of the community though the Candler Act, it would do everything in its power to advance “the public good.” It voluntarily increased its tax payments to the city, granted firefighters and police officers free streetcar travel, and lowered its electric rates “thus allowing the public to share in the company’s prosperity.”<sup>159</sup>

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Writing in the late 1940s, longtime Atlanta civic booster and Chamber of Commerce president Ivan Allen, Sr. proclaimed that Atlanta’s upbuilding in the late-nineteenth century resulted from a simple but effective formula: “Altitude + Attitude.” The city’s rather lofty perch, Allen wrote, “has been Atlanta’s greatest natural asset. It is the first ingredient of the spirit which has made Atlanta” a modern city. In addition to its advantageous location at more than 1,000 feet above sea level, the city also benefitted from a great attitude. Following the hardships of the

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<sup>158</sup> Georgia Railway and Electric Company advertisement, “Labor is Well Paid in Atlanta,” *Journal of Labor*, Jul. 19, 1907; Georgia Railway and Electric Company advertisement, “Some Suggestions for Modern Conveniences,” *Journal of Labor*, Aug. 23, 1907

<sup>159</sup> Georgia Railway and Electric Company advertisement, “Our Corporation’s Part in Atlanta’s Upbuilding,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Dec. 17, 1907.

Civil War and Reconstruction, Atlanta's elite and ordinary citizens stood together as one and displayed "the health...the energy...the spirit to build again!"<sup>160</sup>

As demonstrated above, however, the purportedly "unseen force" on which the electric city was built emerged not simply from the efforts of plucky entrepreneurs and contented workers laboring cooperatively in the free market. Bitter corporate rivalries, violent popular agitation, racial strife, and crucial governmental intervention proved fundamental to the early stages of electrification. What is more, the natural advantages of high altitude alone (if at all) did not create an industrially prosperous city in which high-paid workers could happily ride the electric streetcar to watch a baseball game or frolic under the electric lights at the amusement park. It was the natural wealth stored for millennia under the surface of the Appalachian Mountains that brightened streets, propelled streetcars, powered factories, and lit and heated shops, homes, and offices. The electric city and the larger New South at the dawn of the twentieth century stood on a foundation of combustible black rocks—bituminous coal—extracted from the Appalachian Mountains of Tennessee, Alabama, and Kentucky. Just as it had been established, however, that foundation began to crumble, sending power company managers to the region's rivers in search of a new fuel on which to base the New South. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the emergence of the electric city transformed not only the fabric of everyday urban life and the activities of Atlanta residents, it relied and had a major impact on southern nature as well.

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<sup>160</sup> Ivan E. Allen, *The Atlanta Spirit: Altitude + Attitude* (Atlanta: Allen-Marshall Co., 1948), 4, 11.

### 3 CHAPTER 2: A MIGHTY OUTPOST OF PROGRESS

In a 1926 prospectus, Henry Atkinson's Georgia Railway and Power Company (GRPC), immediate successor to the Georgia Railway and Electric Company, boasted to potential investors that, since its founding in 1911, it had become the dominant utility in all of north Georgia by transforming the once turbulent Tallulah-Tugaloo River system in the mountainous northeast Georgia wilderness into a "mighty outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge." The GRPC, the pamphlet explained, had "imprisoned" the Tallulah-Tugaloo's heretofore fugitive energy behind the "towering shoulders" of its hydropower infrastructure and had forced the river into hard labor.<sup>1</sup>

The shackle that the utility foisted on the Tallulah-Tugaloo, however, consisted not of a single facility but a series of six reservoirs and dams that together impounded a maximum of seven and one-half billion cubic feet of water. With three additional dams on the Chattahoochee River, the Atlanta-based power company in 1926 owned a hydroelectric generating capacity of almost 300,000 horsepower (compared to just 30,000 horsepower in coal-fired plants) and produced over 430 million kilowatt hours of electric energy wrenched from the Blue Ridge.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the 1920s, the "mighty outpost of progress" had become even more productive. In 1929, Georgia Railway and Power's hydroelectric yield reached nearly one billion kilowatt hours and accounted for more than 90 percent of its total output.<sup>3</sup>

The GRPC's designation of its hydropower facilities in the Georgia Blue Ridge as the "outpost of progress" summoned Joseph Conrad's 1897 short story of the same name. Yet such

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<sup>1</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Georgia Railway and Power Company*, (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1926), 4, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Thorndike Saville, "The Power Situation in the Southern Appalachian States: Development of Power Systems of the Southern Power Province," *Manufacturers Record*, Apr. 21, 1927, 69.

<sup>3</sup> Thorndike Saville, "The Power Situation in the Southern Power Province," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 153 (Jan. 1931), graphs between pages 94 and 95. Also see Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1928* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1929), 10.

an invocation seemed to miss Conrad's sardonic critique and repudiation of the European imperial mission to venture into "the dark places of the earth" in order to seize the natural wealth that made possible the affluence of the metropole. Whether the association with Conrad's work was intentional or not, Atkinson's company nevertheless apparently took quite seriously what Conrad mocked as the "rights and duties of civilization" and the work of the "Great Civilizing Company" in seizing the distant hinterland's rich stocks of resources to foster manufacturing, commerce, and progress in the urban-industrial core.<sup>4</sup>

Atkinson's "mighty outpost of progress," like Conrad's, was not sequestered in a remote wilderness. The "mighty outpost of progress" was directly and deeply interconnected with the expanding electric metropolis: the GRPC explicitly built its chain of hydroelectric facilities in the north Georgia mountains to power the engines of industry and commerce in Atlanta, Georgia's upper Piedmont cotton mill towns, and the broader southeast. The growing appetite of the energy-hungry New South program required a source of power that only the resource-rich periphery could provide, bringing radical changes to and establishing enduring links between the metropolis and the hinterland. The falling water of the Tallulah-Tugaloo in the Blue Ridge—made accessible by increasingly large reservoirs and dams—became the lifeblood of the New South.<sup>5</sup> The impacts of the outpost's construction, however, were not solely environmental. Dominance over rivers acted as lever through which Atkinson could transform his utility into a regional cartel, establishing a model for capitalist development in the New South and, indeed, the nation.

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress," *Tales of Unrest* (1898), *Project Gutenberg*, January 2006, <[http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1202/1202-h/1202-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0005](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1202/1202-h/1202-h.htm#link2H_4_0005)> (accessed April 24, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Here I am indebted to the work of scholars such as William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991); Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

Historians have devoted considerable attention to the centrality of natural resource extraction to the New South project.<sup>6</sup> With one notable exception, however, scholars have almost completely sidelined the critical role of “white coal”—a globally shared euphemism for the clean, renewable, and exploitable energy of falling river water for electric power production—in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century US South.<sup>7</sup> Early-twentieth-century southern energy corporations acted as primary agents of environmental change, arranging flows of natural resources from distant sites of production to centers of power consumption in the quest to stimulate wealth creation and economic growth.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, firms such as Georgia Railway and Power embraced and helped establish a regime of “mass destruction,” to use environmental historian Timothy LeCain’s term, and (purportedly) free market capitalism as intertwined prerequisites for southern progress. In this model, nature served as a tool to be applied to (at least some) southerners’ aspirations for industrial modernization, as an asset, to once again borrow from LeCain, “to be simplified, rationalized, and optimized to maximize human wealth, power, and safety.”<sup>9</sup> Corporate-directed environmental exploitation and electric power production proved fundamental to the construction of the “mighty outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge” and the New South creed of southern economic and social improvement.

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<sup>6</sup> Some of the more prominent works include C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) 119-141, 291-320; Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Myth Making* (New York: Vintage, 1970) 45-79; Ronald D. Eller, *Miner, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 39-160; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104-131; and James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004/orig. 1984), 5-50, 121-135;

<sup>7</sup> Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), especially Chap. 2, 45-68. Historians of the New South have at times invoked hydroelectricity and the utilities that built reservoirs, dams, powerhouses, and transmission systems, but have rarely explored their significance to the making of the post-Reconstruction South. See for example, George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 71-75; and Ayers, *Promise of the New South*, 72-74, 336-337.

<sup>8</sup> See Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Timothy J. LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines that Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 18-22, quote on 20.

Tapping into streams of natural capital coursing through the Blue Ridge enabled the Georgia Railway and Power Company to transform falling river water into the most important fuel source for the New South and its promise of industrial progress. Building the “mighty outpost” allowed the GRPC and the state in which it operated to gain increasing access to the financial capital required for industrial development in Atlanta and in Georgia’s upper Piedmont textile mill towns. The company claimed that since its founding in 1911 (discussed below), it had enticed scores of cotton mills, \$450,000,000 in new investments, and over 600,000 manufacturing jobs to move to north Georgia. The so-called “Empire State of the South” was not unique in this regard. By the late 1920s, the South in general had undergone a manufacturing revolution, reorienting the world of American textile production, marginalizing New England and establishing the South as the industry’s headquarters.<sup>10</sup>

The startling expansion of the South’s industrial base in the 1920s was anchored largely in waterpower—a nexus drawn ever closer together in World War I. Developers across the region took advantage of their waterways’ kinetic energy by installing large power dams on virtually every available major southern river system by the 1920s. Indeed by the end of that decade, the southeastern states had become as thoroughly wedded to hydroelectricity as the Pacific states, which were widely renowned for their abundance of water power, and sent the vast majority of their output to factories.<sup>11</sup> This power, though, was not localized. Interconnected

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<sup>10</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 74-78.

<sup>11</sup> Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 45-51; Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 71-74. In terms of productive capacity, the five southeastern states of Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee had virtually as much hydroelectric generating capacity relative to total electric generating capacity (66 percent) as the Pacific states of California, Oregon, and Washington (68 percent) in the late 1920s. With heavily coal-dependent Tennessee (just 38 percent hydropower in 1927) excepted, the southeast was even more thoroughly hydro-electrified (71 percent of total generating capacity in Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas) than the Pacific. See US Bureau of the Census, *Census of Electrical Industries, 1927: Central Electric Light and Power Stations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1930), 42. In terms of total production, the vast majority of kilowatt hours generated in the five southeastern states by the end of the 1920s was hydropower (91 percent of total electric power). See Saville, “The Power Situation in the Southern Power Province,” graphs between pages 94 and 95.

transmission systems linked southern electric companies in a five-state power-sharing network (begun in 1913, completed in 1921). Called the Southern Super Power Zone, the system could instantly transport electric power from remotely located dams to industrial cores across 120,000-square-mile area.<sup>12</sup> For the GRPC, regionally pooled hydroelectricity deserved the bulk of the credit for the New South's industrial success. The company declared that the energy it extracted from rivers had made Dixie "many millions of dollars richer." That trend would only continue "because men of vision have developed and are developing her water power resources" in order "to supply the needs of new industries, new commercial enterprises, new homes, [and] new people" in their everyday lives.<sup>13</sup>

The waterpower-New South connection, though, was not a one-way street or a one-party affair. Hydroelectric moguls did not impose their will on southern rivers because falling water was simply better than coal. As this chapter demonstrates, water was not in a transcendent sense the most important fuel for the New South. It became the dominant fuel source for Georgia and the New South because, as the GRPC's 1926 investment prospectus intimated, control over water and power became deeply interwoven with notions of progress. Despite, or perhaps because of, challenges from competitors, scenic preservationists, working-class activists, and environmental conditions, by the time of national energy crisis in the World War I era privately controlled hydropower gained state-level sanction and protection as the best means to make progress and regenerate Dixie.

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<sup>12</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Industrial Georgia: Cotton Manufactures* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1923), 83; Christopher J. Manganiello, "Hitching the New South to 'White Coal': Water and Power," *Journal of Southern History* 78 (May 2012), 281-285.

<sup>13</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Georgia Railway and Power Company*, 1-8, 23, 40.



Though Atkinson's utility had by the mid 1920s established its hydropower facilities in the Blue Ridge as the "mighty outpost of progress," at the outset of the twentieth century, the New South had not yet dropped its anchor in the water. It stood instead on a foundation of Appalachian bituminous coal. One of the fundamental pillars on which the New South program rested was the widely shared belief that Dixie possessed boundless stores of natural resources that would inevitably breed industrial success and urban growth. Along with fertile land, which produced ever increasing amounts of cotton, and seemingly endless supplies of cheap and non-unionized labor, Appalachian coal played a key role in creating hopeful visions of what historian Paul Gaston dubbed the "Opulent South."<sup>14</sup>

Both the coal mining industry and coal consumption in southern urban-industrial centers expanded dramatically between the 1880s and the 1910s. Based primarily in Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia, coal mining in the South enjoyed an eight-fold increase from 1880 to 1900. Between 1900 and 1910, coal production in Dixie—almost exclusively bituminous—more than doubled to nearly 109 million tons, accounting for some one-fourth of total American coal production.<sup>15</sup> Railroads, steel mills, factories, and gasworks remained large consumers of Appalachian bituminous through the early 1890s, but as electric lighting and streetcar systems quickly spread across urban spaces, electric power stations took the lead. In Atlanta, lighting and streetcar companies relied on coal shipped by rail primarily from the mountains of East Tennessee as the fuel for electric power generation. In the Brushy Mountain, Jellico, Coal Creek, and Poplar Creek mines near Knoxville and in the Glen Mary mine outside of Chattanooga, miners dug chunks of bituminous coal out of the earth and loaded them into railcars destined for Atlanta. On the tracks of the East Tennessee, Western and

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<sup>14</sup> Gaston, *New South Creed*, 68-75.

<sup>15</sup> Manufacturers' Record, *Manufacturers' Record's Annual Blue Book of Southern Progress, 1911* (Baltimore: Manufacturers Record, 1911), 32.

Atlantic, Georgia Pacific, and Cincinnati Southern Railroads, tens of thousands of tons of Appalachian coal flowed into the city each year. Across the 1890s, Appalachia's contribution to the New South, as well as utilities' dependence on coal, only grew. In 1891, Atlanta's electric companies, most notably Henry Atkinson's Georgia Electric Light Company, used about 5,000 tons of coal; the city's gasworks (dependent on gasified coal), by far the largest coal user in early-1890s Atlanta, consumed some 20,000 tons. By 1899, while the yearly tonnage of coal required for a waning gaslight industry steadily decreased, Georgia Electric Light had become the dominant coal user in the city with a rate of annual consumption that exceeded 27,000 tons.<sup>16</sup>

Yet despite coal's significance to urbanization and industrialization in the early years of the New South, many southerners began to harbor serious doubts about its ability to power the southern future. In fact, increasing dependence on Appalachian bituminous as the primary stimulant for the city's electric power supply proved to be a cause for concern. By the end of the 1890s, even as annual usage of coal steadily rose, actors across the city lost faith in coal and shuddered at the prospect of "coal famine." To be sure, Americans in general, as well as many Europeans, became deeply anxious over this problem and worried that coal supplies would soon be exhausted.<sup>17</sup> An 1892 article in *The Nation* on Americans' prodigal coal usage took a Malthusian tone, expressing the fear that at present rates of increase coal consumption would expand geometrically, which would soon result in the catastrophic end of "modern civilization." With this coming disaster, not only would the industrialized world no longer be able to maintain

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<sup>16</sup> "Higher Freight Rates on Coal," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 26, 1891; "Famine in Steam Coal Threatens the City," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 28, 1899.

<sup>17</sup> The most well-known late-nineteenth-century statement on the certain end of coal supplies is William Stanley Jevons, *The Coal Question: An Inquiry Concerning the Progress of the Nation, and the Probable Exhaustion of our Coal Mines* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1865). Also see, David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 217; and T. Foster Brown, "The Coal Question," *The Economic Journal*, 1 (December 1891): 663-674.

its way of life, but “the atmosphere will be so laden with this poisonous product [‘carbonic-acid gas’] that only such unwieldy animals as characterized the Mesozoic period can flourish in it.”<sup>18</sup>

Quite apart from abstract notions about coal exhaustion and a resultant dystopian future, southerners had reason to believe that a coal famine might befall them at any moment. For that frightening prospect, they placed a heavy share of the blame on the railroads. For decades following Reconstruction, railroads drew criticism especially from reform-leaning southerners as “foreign” (read: northern) monopolistic corporations that imposed economic hardships on Dixie’s residents; now the railroads created the possibility of an artificial fuel scarcity by manipulating coal supplies and freight rates in order to fleece consumers and thicken their profit margins.<sup>19</sup> Atlantans in particular grew angry at the railroads’ 1891 price increases for delivery of “steam coal,” a type of high-carbon content bituminous coal used for generating energy on industrial scales, which would fall “hardest on the gas works, waterworks and electric light works, which so closely concern public comfort.” The situation, the city’s industrial leaders concluded, “appears [to be] purely arbitrary extortion.”<sup>20</sup>

The railroads, though, did not shoulder the blame exclusively. Just as often, southerners believed the mines serving their cities faced imminent depletion. According to a January 1893 editorial, Atlantans feared “not coal famine as to the price of coal, but as to a real scarcity of it.” If the unusually cold weather and resulting high rates of coal usage persisted, “there would assuredly be a coal scarcity.”<sup>21</sup> Those concerns had not subsided by the end of the decade. In January 1899, Atlantans worried that they stood “on the verge of a coal famine,” as the city’s

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<sup>18</sup> “Coal Waste in Pennsylvania,” *The Nation*, Aug. 11, 1892, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 379-384.

<sup>20</sup> “The Advance in Coal Rates,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 26, 1891.

<sup>21</sup> “The Coal Famine,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 14, 1893.

dealers held only a “week’s supply” on hand and expected no forthcoming deliveries.<sup>22</sup>

Headlines later that year added to the gloomy atmosphere, grimly declaring that “Famine in Steam Coal Threatens City; Some Plants May Shut Down.”<sup>23</sup> Much like Atlanta, cities such as Anniston, Alabama and Chattanooga, Tennessee claimed to suffer from “an existing scarcity of coal in all the mines” that supplied their utilities, factories, and homes.<sup>24</sup>

Mounting labor strife added to coal’s perceived unreliability. A rash of railroad and mining strikes across the United States in the early 1890s—namely the Pullman strike and Alabama coal miners’ strike—contributed to the widely held belief that the continued extraction and transportation of fuel to sites of energy production and consumption faced severe challenges.<sup>25</sup> Yet labor circumstances specific to Atlanta’s coal supply made the situation there appear even more concrete and more precarious. In 1891, the state of Tennessee leased convict laborers to the mines at Coal Creek. Mine workers in the area, and eventually in five other nearby communities, engaged in a multiyear, and at times violent, struggle to ensure that they would not have to compete with unpaid prisoners. Intermittent work stoppages threatened the flow of coal into Atlanta and other destinations for several years thereafter, but by 1895 the Tennessee legislature capitulated and agreed to end the practice of leasing convicts to the privately owned mines outside of Knoxville.<sup>26</sup> In the following year, though, the state opened a mine near a new East Tennessee prison named Brushy Mountain and forced the prisoners there to harvest coal. Henry Atkinson’s electric company reaped the benefits of the southern convict

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<sup>22</sup> “A Coal Famine Threatened,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 16, 1899.

<sup>23</sup> “Famine in Steam Coal Threatens City; Some Plants May Shut Down,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 28, 1899.

<sup>24</sup> “Coal Famine in Chattanooga,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 18, 1899; “Coal Car Famine is Grave Matter,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 23, 1899

<sup>25</sup> Christopher J. Manganiello, “Dam Crazy with Wild Consequences: Artificial Lakes and Natural Rivers in the American South, 1845-1990,” (PhD diss., Univ. of Georgia, 2010), 76-77.

<sup>26</sup> See Karin A. Shapiro, *A New South Rebellion: The Battle against Convict Labor in Tennessee Coalfields, 1871-1896* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). For a book-length discussion of the southern convict-lease system in a broader sense, see Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008).

lease operated by the state of Tennessee: by 1902, Brushy Mountain had become one of Atlanta's principal coal suppliers. But East Tennessee miners' continued rejection of convict labor expressed in strikes and other acts of resistance leveled a constant threat to the amount of coal available to the electric generating stations and other power producing machinery in Atlanta.<sup>27</sup>

Added to the problems of fuel supply and costs, Atlanta's coal-fired power plants suffered from significant inefficiencies. Although cutting-edge electrical generation technologies made possible the production of one kilowatt with about four and one-half pounds of coal, the equipment at Georgia Railway and Electric's Davis and Butler Street plants by 1902 still required some six pounds of coal per kilowatt. These plants, moreover, proved unable to handle peak loads consistently. Frequent blackouts and trolley system failures forced the GREC to supplement its generating capacity with an expensive and complex system of batteries as well as with a 6000-horsepower gasoline engine.<sup>28</sup> In short, the costs and risks of a coal-based power system ran too high.

Fears of coal scarcity across southern society, and especially among business leaders, helped give birth to the age of hydroelectricity in the Georgia Piedmont and Blue Ridge. Falling river water would be the sustainable natural resource on which the Opulent South was built. Yet even as coal had been coded as an unreliable natural resource, water was not without its own problems; it was not simply the best or most important fuel source for the New South. Many southerners agreed that before hydroelectricity could power the engines of industry, the water first had to be conquered and harnessed. In adopting this mode of thinking, southerners joined in a transnational exchange of ideas about humanity's relationship to nature. Across the Western

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<sup>27</sup> "Their New Plan," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 21, 1896; "The Passing Throng," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1896; "Coal Famine is Unabated," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 10, 1902; Shapiro, *New South Rebellion*, 243-247.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, *History Georgia Power*, 73, 83-84.

world in the late-nineteenth century, societies embarked on “Promethean” projects to free themselves from the strictures and dangers of the natural world, in the process rationalizing and instrumentalizing their non-human environments. This rationalism sustained a perspective on humanity as ontologically separate from the non-human natural world.<sup>29</sup> In parts of Europe, such an orientation led actors to conceive of nature as an enemy, and states launched what could be called eco-martial conservationist crusades against waterways. Terms like “conquer,” “subjugate,” and “war” peppered treatises on strategies for attacking rivers. In Spain, a nation reeling from the loss of its last colonial holdings in 1898, a group of reformers, state actors, and capitalists sought to regenerate their nation by waging “internal war” against the Ebro, Tajo, and Duero Rivers. In Germany, engineers drew praise from Kaiser Wilhelm for their victorious dam-building campaigns on the “great battlefields” of the Rur and Urft Rivers.<sup>30</sup>

The forces behind the remaking of Dixie’s waterscape into a power-production machine for industrial progress hewed to this same general thinking, but put a distinctly New South-style spin on it and forged their own ideological justification for conquering rivers. In evaluating the destruction the South had faced in the Civil War and in Reconstruction, the first generation of New South boosters determined in the 1880s that the Old South suffered fatal flaws rooted in the slave system’s disdain for industrialism and urbanism, and in its reverence—at least among the mythical planter class—for leisurely agrarianism. In order to build a region of bustling cities and humming factories, then, New South leaders argued that “a gospel of work” must replace romantic notions of the “genteel loafer.”<sup>31</sup> As devotees of the New South creed and of broader

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<sup>29</sup> See Maria Kaika, *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature and the City* (London: Routledge, 2005), 3-12; and James C. Williams, “Understanding the Place of Humans in Nature,” in Martin Reuss and Stephen Cutcliffe, eds., *The Illusory Boundary: Environment and Technology in History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 9-25.

<sup>30</sup> Erik Swyngedouw, “Modernity and Hybridity: Nature, *Regeneracionismo*, and the Production of the Spanish Waterscape, 1890-1930,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89 (September 1999), 451; and Blackbourn, *Conquest of Nature*, 189-228, quote from 191.

<sup>31</sup> Gaston, *New South Creed*, 54-63, 107-108.

national ideas about conservation's importance to future prosperity, prospective hydropower developers adapted this way of thinking to their purposes. They held that in the past, southern rivers, like Old South society, had been unproductive and lazy. The potential wealth-producing energy inherent in their flowing streams had been squandered. North Carolina tobacco magnate James Buchannan Duke lamented that, until he founded the Southern Power Company in 1904, the region's river water had flowed as "waste to the sea."<sup>32</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* similarly reported that before the creation of power dams and long-distance transmission systems, "the best streams ran idle" and produced nothing more than "magnificent waste."<sup>33</sup> Especially given coal's downfall, the continued construction of the New South required the reversal of such lethargy.

The solution to the problem of southern rivers' indolence was to impose on them a new type of discipline, to instill in them a new work ethic. Turn-of-the-century southern hydropower boosters often classified waterways as untamed beasts, particularly horses, which needed to be brought to heel and directed to toil for the New South. The notion of putting horses to work, of tapping into fluid "horsepower," proved a useful symbol for a still heavily agricultural society, many of whose members harbored doubts about electricity's usefulness. Scottish inventor James Watt fashioned the horsepower metaphor in the late-eighteenth century to equate the power of horses (a single one of which, he determined, could tow about 33,000 pounds one foot in one minute) to the ability of his steam engine for London brewers reluctant to forsake muscular energy.<sup>34</sup> There was a critical difference, though, between the way Watt and southern

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<sup>32</sup> Duke quoted in Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 47.

<sup>33</sup> "South's Unharnessed Water Power among her Greatest Cotton Assets," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 27, 1904.

<sup>34</sup> See David E. Nye, *Consuming Power: A Social History of American Energies* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1998), 22; Paul W. Hirt, *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s-1970s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 28; and Alfred W. Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2006), 75-76.

hydropower champions used the expression. Whereas Watt linked horsepower to machines (a usage that would become, and has remained, almost universally adopted to describe the productive capacity of an engine), southerners applied the idea directly to rivers. To justify their ownership and instrumentalization of their region's waterways, electricity's developers would transform a natural resource into a beast of burden for the betterment of southern society. An 1897 announcement for a dam on the Chattahoochee River near Atlanta, for example, promised that the river would soon be "bridled to furnish electric power for the entire city."<sup>35</sup> Several years later, an article on another proposed dam imagined the Chattahoochee as a wild steed whose boundless energy would do immeasurable good for the South if only it were broken and put to work for humanity's benefit. The piece remarked that "the bit is a dam that is 1,000 feet long, rising 50 feet above the bed of the river," and the "bridle is composed of the power house and its immense steel turbines." With such a facility in place, the capital of the New South would be poised to make great progress by taking advantage of the recently channeled "horse power that was flowing untamed past the gates of the city."<sup>36</sup>

Many Georgians heartily cheered the push to yoke their state's rivers for the purposes of illuminating street lights, propelling streetcars, and, most importantly, powering industry. But through the 1880s, transmission technologies limited hydraulic energy's effective range essentially to the water's edge. By the early 1890s, however, German and Italian engineers demonstrated that the long-distance transmission of alternating current was a viable enterprise. The development of this technology was critical to the practical application, and indeed the feasibility, of hydroelectricity. Because the best sites for the placement of dams and powerhouses were almost invariably far removed from centers of electrical consumption, hydroelectricity

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<sup>35</sup> "River's Power for City's Use," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 21, 1897.

<sup>36</sup> "Bull Sluice Dam has Bridled the Chattahoochee," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 6, 1904.



would have proven essentially useless to urban-industrial prosperity without a proficient means of power transportation. In the words of historian Thomas Hughes, “long-distance transmission...provided the market needed for large, efficient hydroelectric plants.”<sup>37</sup> By 1895, many dams, especially in California and Oregon, shipped electricity over long distances (usually not more than twenty miles at the time) to cities and industrial sites hungry for energy. But the hydroelectric facility that would set the standard for humanity’s awe-inspiring ability to harness and transport hydraulic energy, the Adams power plant at Niagara Falls, began sending its current over high-voltage transmission lines some twenty miles away to Buffalo, New York, inspiring many American capitalists to do the same.<sup>38</sup> Southerners tapped into these national and transnational flows of technological innovation and by the end of the 1890s began to create a geography of power, to borrow historian Andrew Needham’s term, anchored in the falling water of the Blue Ridge.<sup>39</sup> Soon after exhibitions of long-distance transmission’s viability in Germany, Italy, California, and New York, the efforts of a complex web of local, regional, and international businessmen, engineers, and capitalists resulted in the materialization of hydroelectric facilities that radically altered Georgia’s land- and waterscapes and generated energy far removed from where power would be consumed.<sup>40</sup>

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The first developers to attempt to force rivers into hard labor for Atlanta’s betterment were not directly associated with Henry Atkinson’s electric utility. They were competitors who

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 262-284, quote on 262; also see Jones, *Routes of Power*, 161-194.

<sup>38</sup> James C. Williams, *Energy and the Making of Modern California* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1997), 174-175. Niagara Falls and its power-generating and transmitting capabilities serve as prime examples of the “technological sublime” in David Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990), 60-62.

<sup>39</sup> Todd Andrew Needham, “Power Lines: Urban Space, Energy Development, and the Making of the Modern Southwest” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2006), 158-162.

<sup>40</sup> Manganiello, “Dam Crazy,” 72-74.

had cultivated engineering and business expertise across the United States and in Canada. Perhaps more importantly, they were aspiring southern hydropower magnates who had to access to national and global investment networks and, with the capital they brought to Dixie, sought to build water-based electrical generating capacities that would far outstrip that of Atkinson's coal-based business. Their potent hydroelectric plants, whose output could be transported across long-distance transmission lines, would potentially enable them to make inroads into Atlanta's lucrative power market. What was more, because of the hefty amounts of highly leveraged capital required to meet hydropower facilities' enormous construction costs, prospective energy companies were compelled to try to gain footholds in the largest possible markets in order to generate sufficient revenue to service their debt obligations and pay dividends. Thus the fragmentation-to-consolidation trajectory that marked the dawn of the electrical age would be revived in the dawn of the hydropower age, but on a much larger scale. Competing hydroelectric firms, however, faced a significant problem. For a fledgling waterpower company, securing enough power supply contracts in Atlanta to meet minimum income requirements proved exceedingly difficult, especially after passage of the Consolidating Ordinance of 1902 and the Candler Act of 1907 (see Chapter 1), which granted the Georgia Railway and Electric Company a virtual, though not ironclad, monopoly over the largest power market in the US South. An infrastructural build-up and attempted entry into an already well-served territory with insufficient revenue streams would leave a new company vulnerable to bankruptcy or buyout.

The path that Atkinson's competitors followed in the ultimately failed attempt to realize their goal of control over Atlanta engendered a logic of intensification that had enormous consequences for Georgia's rivers. To eventually gain a share of—if not a dominant position in—the Atlanta power market, new hydropower companies first cultivated consumers in the

small urban-industrial centers surrounding the New South's capital. But to satisfy the needs of the hinterland while at the same time crafting plans to invade and overtake Atlanta, hydropower firms began a self-perpetuating cycle of development and environmental exploitation with clear impacts: more and larger dams across Georgia's Blue Ridge and upper Piedmont that drastically altered river basins and, eventually, saw nearly all power generation, transmission, and distribution in the northern half of the state consolidated in one corporation, Henry Atkinson's Georgia Railway and Power Company.

This cycle began not in the "mighty outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge" but on another river that Atlantans found much more accessible. Because of the still relatively limited reach of high-voltage transmission systems, the river that first attracted attention for the hydroelectric yoke was the Chattahoochee. Like the Tallulah and Tugaloo Rivers—the basis for Atkinson's "outpost"—the Chattahoochee originates in northeastern Georgia's Blue Ridge Mountain range. But while the Tallulah-Tugaloo system charts a southeastern course to help form the Savannah River, the Chattahoochee flows southwest toward Atlanta, at points coming within ten miles of downtown (figure 3.1). Beginning in 1895 and inspired by the demonstrations of hydropower generation and long-distance transmission at Niagara Falls and at other sites,

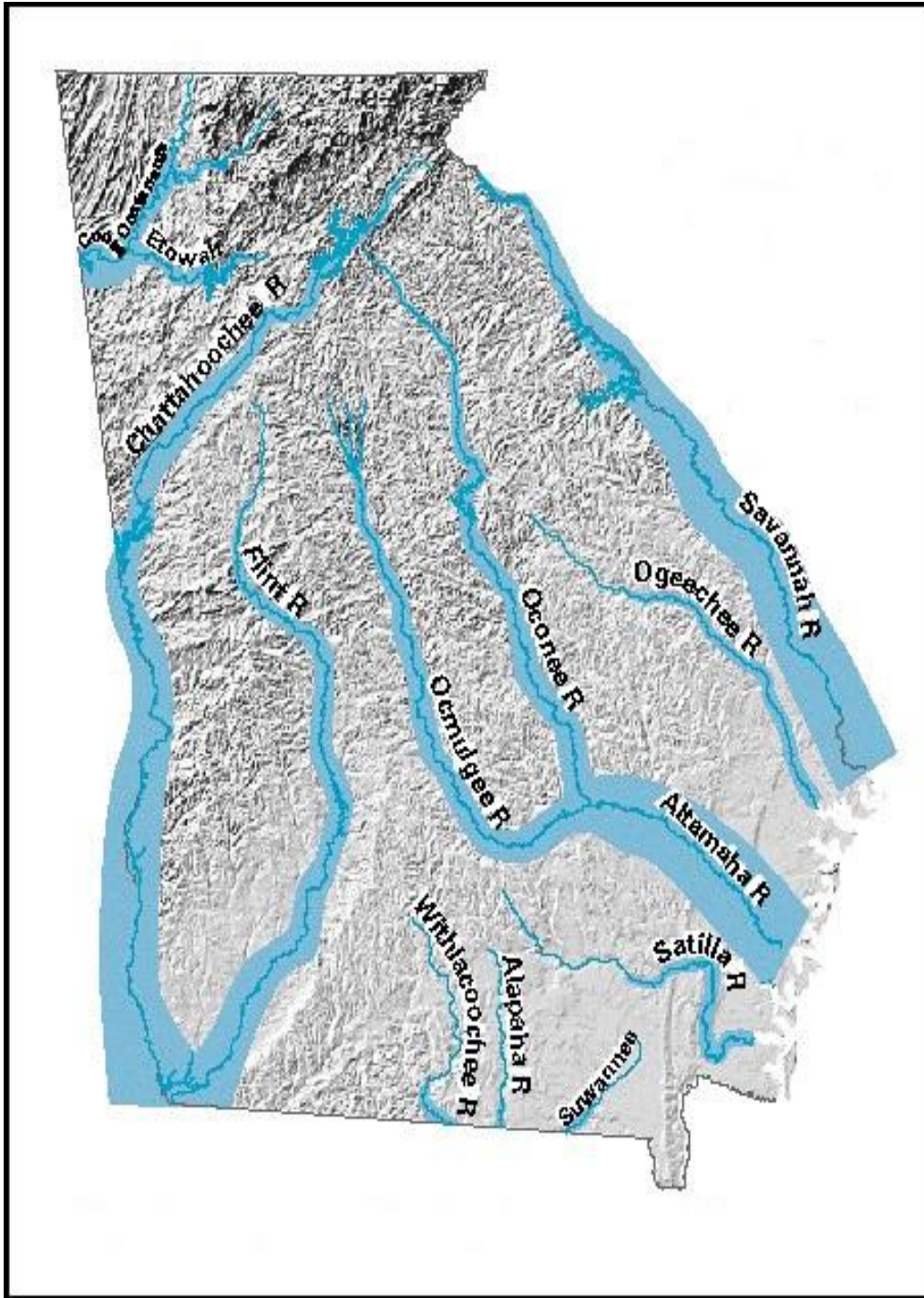


Figure 3.1 Georgia's Rivers, US Geological Survey.

developers announced plans for the Chattahoochee that plainly articulated the perceived links between river alterations and the success of the New South program.

First among potential developers was former Edison assistant and nationally experienced engineer Jonathan H. Vail. With support from a consortium of Atlanta and New York financiers and language appropriate to the New South's prevailing river-as-horse motif, Vail pledged that by the end of 1895 "the Chattahoochee river will have been bridled and the reins will be placed in the hands of the manufacturers of the city." The facility he would build at a site called Bull Sluice, he bragged in a clear challenge to utilities already operating in Atlanta, would be second in "vastness and importance" only to Niagara Falls and would "place at the gates of the city an unlimited supply of electric power, 30,000 horsepower or more, which is more than sufficient to operate every factory, shop, mill, or other establishments... at a wonderful reduction of cost from the present rates paid for those powers."<sup>41</sup> What was more, Vail added, the new energy source would empower electrical consumers to "throw away every steam engine in Atlanta." Even more importantly for the future of hydropower and regional development, it would permit the expansion of electric service beyond Atlanta's borders. "Our wires will be so arranged that they can be tapped at any point between the power house and the city," Vail reported. Soon after completion of the dam, "one of the largest cotton mills ever erected in the south will be put up at some point between the city and the plant and...around the mill will be built homes for nearly a thousand people."<sup>42</sup> Vail's scheme faltered by 1897, but it nevertheless demonstrated that Georgia and the broader South were already well integrated into national and global networks of large-scale hydroelectric and long-distance transmission development.

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<sup>41</sup> "The Plans Ready," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 7, 1895; J. H. Vail, "The Central Station Superintendent," *Electrical Review* 39 (Jul.—Dec., 1901), 32.

<sup>42</sup> "From the River," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 1, 1895.

Despite Vail's inability to successfully construct a dam on the Chattahoochee, the determination to shackle the river continued. In fact, it resulted—quite fortuitously as it turned out—in two waterpower developers finding themselves quite literally in shackles. Shortly after Vail's venture failed, other local and national actors began making claims on the Chattahoochee. Eager to enter the budding southern hydroelectric business, S. Morgan Smith, a water turbine inventor and manufacturer from York, Pennsylvania who had installed hydroelectric equipment in the northeastern United States and in Canada, sent his son Fahs Smith and a New York-based engineer named Ernest Cooke to Atlanta in late 1898 to survey and purchase land near Bull Sluice. Smith's explicit intention, like Vail's, was to extend high-voltage transmission lines from a dam on the Chattahoochee into Atlanta to power factories.

In January 1899, however, Smith's plans were nearly derailed when Fulton County sheriff's deputies arrested Fahs Smith and Ernest Cooke for larceny and conspiracy. The charges stemmed from a disagreement Cooke and Smith had with Atlanta land developer John Taylor over the rights to the properties of Vail's failed enterprise on the Chattahoochee. Fortunately for Morgan Smith, powerful Atlanta attorneys Alex King and Jack Spalding took the case and quickly convinced the judge to dismiss the charges against Cooke and the younger Smith. The potentially ugly situation, however, did not ruin Smith's prospects in Atlanta. Rather, it resulted in a deal that Morgan Smith brokered with the Atlanta lawyers. King and Spalding would serve as general counsel and another prominent Atlanta attorney, Forrest Adair, would handle real estate purchases and water-rights matters for Smith's hydropower ventures in Georgia. In return, Smith's company would sell all of its dam's power to Henry Atkinson's electric utility—a firm with which King and Spalding had long been involved. In February 1902, Smith established the Atlanta Water and Electric Power Company, originally capitalized at \$500,000, and soon after

began construction of a massive installation on the Chattahoochee River at Bull Sluice that, although wholly separate from Atkinson's utility business, did not for the short term pose a threat to the GREC as a competing power source.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, it provided Smith with a reliable revenue stream that protected his company from bankruptcy or a buyout.

Boosters pitched Bull Sluice, as indeed they did all waterpower development, as a key element of the New South's hydropower destiny. Their rhetoric testified to the almost heavenly importance southerners placed on manipulating their waterways. "Nature's own God," journalist R.H. Timmons wrote in the fall of 1902, "prepared for the needs of Greater Atlanta...when He directed the Chattahoochee river to cut its way to the sea through a hill of solid rock." Electric energy had always existed in the water, Timmons asserted, but only with the erection of the dam at Bull Sluice had southerners begun "to take in hand and use the magnificent power for heat, light and industry which has been his to command but which has been going to waste during the decades that have passed." In heeding divine ordinance, Timmons noted, the electricity produced at Bull Sluice would power factories to new levels of success and wean Atlanta off its dependence on fossil fuels. The New South's capital, he wrote, "is rapidly becoming a manufacturing center." Electric power "is needed to turn the millions of wheels which bring into the city millions of money—that power can be furnished by the Chattahoochee. The price of coal and the supply of coal need not cause suffering for a lack of power."<sup>44</sup> Another dam advocate similarly added that although coal had been affordable in the past, it was "becoming dearer, and

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<sup>43</sup> "Plan to Harness River Results in the Arrest of Two Promoters," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 19, 1899; "Cooke Acquitted by Bloodworth," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 21, 1899; "Municipal Ownership has Aroused People to Active Interest," *Atlanta Georgian*, Oct. 3, 1906; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 107-109.

<sup>44</sup> R.H. Timmons, "Chattahoochee Bows before Science and Skill," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 16, 1902.

may never again reach the low price level which existed several years ago. The possibilities of obtaining cheap power from coal are, therefore, limited.”<sup>45</sup>

The facility at Bull Sluice, named Morgan Falls Dam when S. Morgan Smith died shortly before the dam’s completion, began delivering power to Georgia Railway and Electric in October 1904, seemingly fulfilling its mission for the New South. According to the *Atlanta Constitution*, Bull Sluice turned the “powers of the river into channels of commerce.”<sup>46</sup> At fifty feet tall and 1,100 feet long Morgan Falls drew acclaim as the largest dam in the state, which took over \$1,500,000 (about \$42 million in 2014 dollars) and a veritable army to build. Overseen by New York-based engineering firm Westinghouse, Church, Kerr & Company, Bull Sluice’s construction required nearly 300 laborers and some five dozen draft animals as well as 50,000 barrels of cement, countless carloads of stone, a new railroad line to transport materials, and a make shift village to house workers (figures 3.2 and 3.3). With seven turbines of 1,500 kilowatts each (totaling over 14,000 horsepower) and a 22,000-volt transmission line into the city, Atlanta Water and Electric’s powerhouse at Bull Sluice could, when operating at maximum capacity, generate enough energy to furnish the entire load for Atkinson’s Georgia Railway and Electric Company.<sup>47</sup>

Finalized under the management of the late Morgan Smith’s son, C. Elmer Smith, Atlanta Water and Electric’s Morgan Falls dam afforded the company the potential to emerge as a major force in the Atlanta power market. Despite the deal with Georgia Railway and Electric, it also prepared Smith’s firm, eventually, to challenge the dominance of Atkinson’s interests not just in the city but in its hinterland as well. Yet before Smith could contemplate any such plans, other

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<sup>45</sup> “Big Dam will be Built as Rapidly as Possible,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 19, 1902.

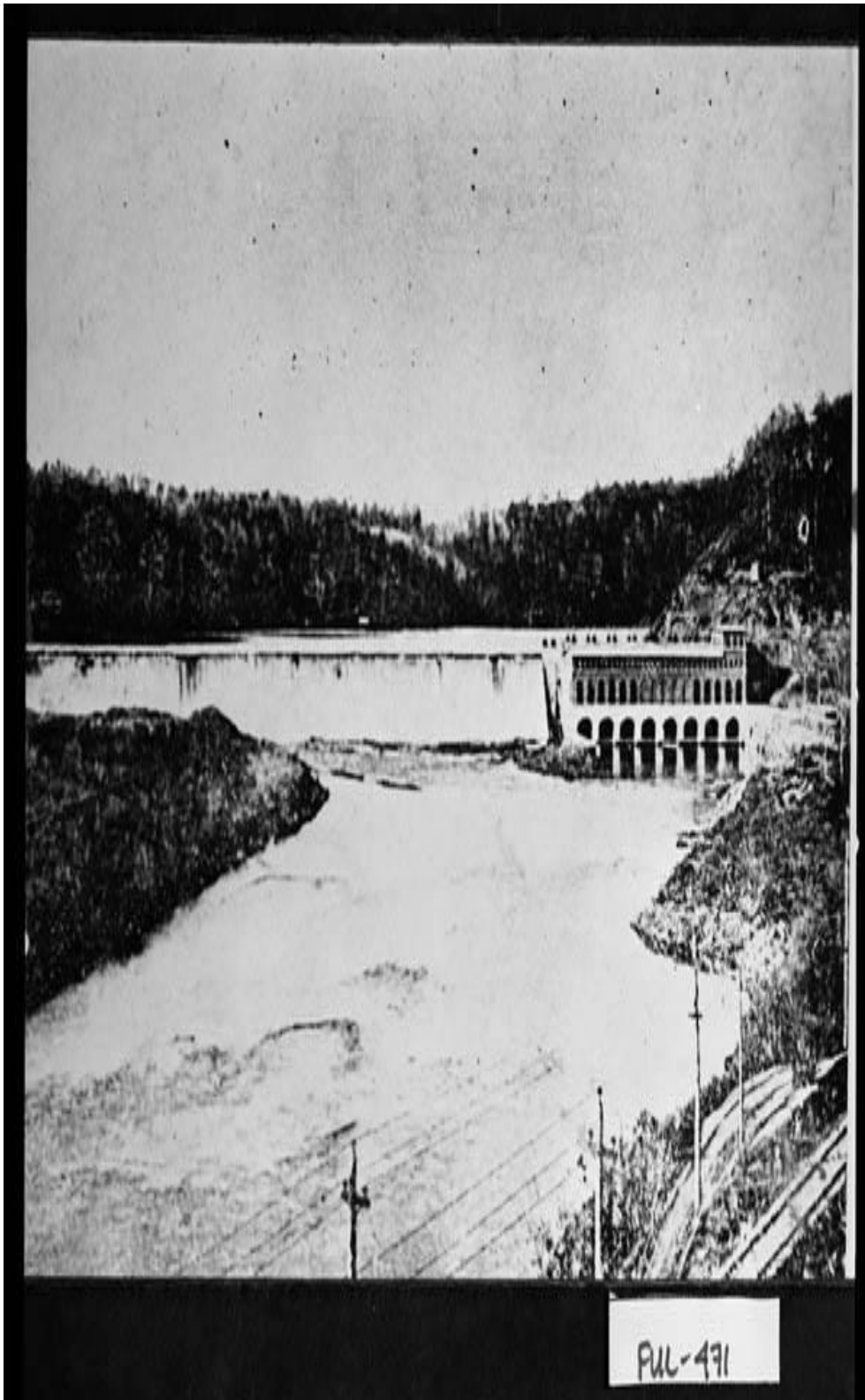
<sup>46</sup> “Bull Sluice Dam has Bridled Chattahoochee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 6, 1904.

<sup>47</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 109; “Big Dam will be Built as Rapidly as Possible,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 19, 1902; “Power Company Officers Named,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 23, 1902.





*Figure 3.2 Morgan Falls under construction, c. 1903*



*Figure 3.3 Morgan Falls Dam at Bull Sluice, c. 1904.*

actors, most notably a railroad and mining mogul named A.J. Warner, stood in to play the role of interloper. A former Union general and congressman from Ohio, Warner and his capital connections, forged in his time building railroads, ventured south in the late 1890s to begin a gold harvesting operation—which he had long believed would deflate the American money supply and reap him handsome rewards—in the northeastern Georgia town of Dahlonega.<sup>48</sup> Although seven decades of gold prospecting at Dahlonega had not completely foreclosed the possibility of continued surface mining, Warner saw a much more lucrative future in underground mines. To expedite his short-term plans for surface mining, the success of which would hasten the start of his deep-mining enterprise, Warner sought out a new energy source that would improve upon the relatively slow progress pickaxes, shovels, and muscles could make. “Electricity” he found, “takes place of the hand, and power is increased a thousandfold.”<sup>49</sup>

Warner’s experience with electric power at Dahlonega’s mines inspired him to diversify his interests. He would try his hand at the electric utility business. In sync with prevailing thinking on hydroelectricity, he believed that in order to exploit this new source of power, one must rearrange nature so that rivers’ kinetic energy would be transformed and channeled to distant sites of consumption. “You no longer go to the river,” Warner remarked. “You bring it to you.”<sup>50</sup> Turning the river to Warner’s purposes required the construction of a small dam and a 1,200 horsepower generating station, called New Bridge, on the Chestatee River, a tributary of the Chattahoochee. Warner originally intended for the New Bridge dam to ship power over transmission lines fifteen miles to a streetcar company in Gainesville (a textile production center nearly sixty miles north of Atlanta) and to an interurban trolley line that ran some thirty miles

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<sup>48</sup> David Brion Davis, ed., *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 192-193; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> Pascal J. Moran, “Getting Lots of Gold from the Heart of the Mountains of North Georgia,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 6, 1901.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

between Gainesville and Dahlonega. These transit projects, however, required only about half of New Bridge's output. Warner used the remaining energy from New Bridge to light streets, hotels, and shops in Gainesville. In addition, the Chestatee's energy reportedly enticed \$500,000 of new capital to come to the "Queen City of the Mountains" in 1902 alone for the establishment of cotton mills and poultry processing plants. The Atlanta-based newspaper, *Sunny South*, cast the "electric harness" at New Bridge as "the greatest development in the history of the Queen City of the Mountains," an innovation that "means more for Gainesville than anything else it has ever known."<sup>51</sup> Waterpower opened a range of opportunities for New South-style development in Gainesville, and for an ambitious Warner, far beyond as well.

The plant at New Bridge marked a good start for Warner's hydroelectric ambitions, but he knew that an incursion into a larger, more lucrative market would necessitate far more waterpower. Warner raised money through connections in Ohio and Pennsylvania and busily worked to build a series of outposts in Atlanta's mountainous hinterland, a hydropower empire that might enable him to successfully invade the New South capital. From 1902 to 1906, he chartered three complimentary utilities, the North Georgia Electric Company, the Southern Light and Power Company, and the Etowah Power Company; completed a dam and 2,500 horsepower generating station on the upper Chattahoochee River at a place called Dunlap Shoals; and purchased properties at nine possible hydroelectric sites across North Georgia, including land at Tallulah Falls on the Tallulah River, which aggregated a potential total of 100,000 horsepower.<sup>52</sup> A radical increase in hydropower capacity would allow Warner in the short term to furnish power to the small towns surrounding Atlanta. To generate enough revenue to fulfill his obligations to his investors, however, he had to bring that energy to the city.

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<sup>51</sup> A.S. Hardy, "Chattahoochee River, Under Electric Harness, Will Supply Light and Power to North Georgia," *Sunny South*, Oct. 17, 1903; also see Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 110-111.

<sup>52</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 111; "Power Company Purchases Site," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 12, 1905.

Warner was not at all shy about making his ambitions known. His fleet of dams and powerhouses across three distinct north Georgia watersheds (the Tallulah-Tugaloo, Chattahoochee, and Etowah Rivers) and a 66,000-volt transmission system, he announced in 1905, would propel his company to the realization of its “ultimate purpose,” which was “to furnish a cheap and reliable power and light service to a territory with Atlanta as a central point, and extending one hundred miles in every direction, comprising one of the most important and promising territories in the United States.” In making his pitch to enter the Atlanta market, Warner and his allies called on familiar New South discourses. In the “water powers which now lie unused in the northern part of this state,” a sympathetic newspaper article reported, “nature has provided for Georgia a force far superior, and more economic, than can be derived from the presence of coal fields...which must in time be exhausted.” The cultivation of rivers would “mean nothing less than the establishment of hundreds of additional manufacturing plants...and the furnishing of pleasant and profitable employment for thousands of industrious producers of the world’s necessities.”<sup>53</sup> “With such power,” Warner averred, there was no reason “Atlanta may not soon become one of the best manufacturing cities for all kinds of work in the United States” and indeed in the world.<sup>54</sup>

Despite protests from Georgia Railway and Electric, in 1905 the Atlanta City Council granted a franchise to Warner’s companies, which had already acquired office space in and had begun construction of a transmission line to Atlanta. According to the terms of the franchise, North Georgia Electric and Etowah Power could make bids for street lighting deals and could contract with shops and factories for lighting and motive power.<sup>55</sup> The grant of franchise rights to

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<sup>53</sup> “Southern Light and Power Company is Knocking Loudly at the Gates of Atlanta with Immense Electric Power,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 3, 1905.

<sup>54</sup> “Power Company Purchases Site,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 12, 1905.

<sup>55</sup> “Mayor Approves New Franchises,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 27, 1905.

Warner's interests exposed serious gaps in GREC's assumed monopoly status in Atlanta; though the Consolidating Ordinance of 1902 permitted Atkinson to combine each of the city's streetcar and lighting companies into one virtual cartel, it did not explicitly forbid competition. In fact, the city council still exercised considerable power in deciding whether to extend franchise offers to competing power companies. Nevertheless, Atkinson's total control over the most profitable element of the electric utility business—streetcars—left Warner little room to work. Unable to secure lighting or power contracts—likely due to Atkinson's influence—Warner found virtually no market for his highly-leveraged product in the New South's capital. In 1907, both North Georgia Electric and Etowah Power defaulted on interest payments for bond issues, forcing Warner to forfeit his Atlanta franchise.<sup>56</sup>

The fragmented landscape and corporate competition borne of hydropower development in Georgia's Blue Ridge and upper Piedmont began to give way to consolidation in the wake of Warner's collapse. Yet it was Morgan Falls owner C. Elmer Smith, not Henry Atkinson, who seized the opportunity to combine north Georgia's fractured hydroelectric scene and create a regionally dominant utility. From 1908 to 1910, Elmer Smith and his brother Fahs scrambled to cement their place in the north Georgia hydropower business and to overtake the Atlanta market. With the capital connections of a New York utility manager named Eugene Ashley, with whom the Smiths had collaborated to build the Spier Falls Dam on the Hudson River in 1903, the Smith brothers bought all of Warner's utilities and undeveloped hydropower sites in Georgia.<sup>57</sup> They also acquired the properties of the Piedmont Power Company, a utility owned by German industrialist Louis Magid, which held unimproved properties at Tallulah Falls. The Smith brothers, like Warner before them, then created three utilities—the Atlanta Power Company, the

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<sup>56</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 111-112.

<sup>57</sup> George E. Howe, "The Spier Falls Dam and Power Plant of the Hudson River Water Power Company," *Engineering Record* 47 (Jan.-Jun., 1903), 688-692.

Blue Ridge Electric Company, and the Georgia Power Company—and completed Warner’s transmission system, which now encircled Atlanta and delivered power to industrial and lighting consumers in the small towns immediately surrounding the city. Smith also extended his enterprise southwest of the city to a promising site on the Chattahoochee at Franklin, Georgia. From this proposed plant, designed to produce 84,000 kilowatts (about 112,500 horsepower), electric energy would flow to small communities on its sixty-mile trek to the capital. The only step left for Smith was to extend his operations to the heart of the city, which looked to be a certainty when the Atlanta City Council granted the Georgia Power Company a franchise in the summer of 1910.<sup>58</sup> As with Warner’s short-lived franchise, prevailing law (both the Consolidating Ordinance of 1902 and the Candler Act of 1907) and the sovereignty of the city government left open the possibility of competition—especially in the nascent realm of industrial power, which was Smith’s target market. Success in that arena might represent the thin end of a wedge that would open the path for dominance of Atlanta and all of north Georgia.

To solidify control over the entire hydropower landscape in the northern half of the state, Georgia Power’s managers, prior to their incursion into Atlanta, wanted to develop the crown jewel of north Georgia’s potential waterpower sites, Tallulah Falls (figure 3.4). With an available head (i.e. the vertical length between the surface of the reservoir and the surface of the river below) of 608 feet, Tallulah Falls, renowned as a holiday destination for its stunning beauty, promised to contain a generating capacity of over 100,000 horsepower. To put that horsepower to work—a potential amount reportedly greater than any site east of the Rocky Mountains—Smith’s company issued stocks and bonds totaling \$20 million (funded mostly by financiers in Detroit and Toronto), marshaled some 61,000 barrels of concrete, 2 million pounds of copper

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<sup>58</sup> “Georgia Power Co. Given Franchise,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 7, 1910; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 112-116.



*Figure 3.4 Tallulah Falls, 1894.*



wire, and hundreds of laborers to build the dam at Tallulah Falls. Although the falls were ninety miles from Atlanta, rapid advances in transmission technologies would enable Smith's company to deliver Tallulah Falls' considerable power to Atlanta quite efficiently. Georgia Power planned to use 110,000-volt power lines—five times more voltage than those at Bull Sluice and 60 percent greater than those at Dunlap Shoals—to link the Tallulah River directly to consumers in Atlanta.<sup>59</sup> A transmission line conveys electricity equal to the square of its voltage. Thus while a 110-kilovolt line has five times the force (i.e. voltage) of a 22,000-volt line, it has the capacity to carry twenty-five times more kilowatts, making the shipment of electricity across ninety miles of rough Georgia terrain from the gargantuan project at Tallulah Falls a worthwhile and feasible undertaking (figure 3.5).<sup>60</sup>

Georgia Power broke ground at Tallulah Falls in early 1911, but Smith made a grave miscalculation. Not only did construction at the site quickly begin to exceed original cost estimates. Much like Warner and Magid, Smith also encountered trouble generating adequate demand for the output of his impressive hydropower portfolio, a problem that plagued prospective hydroelectric companies across the nation. In 1910, most electrified factories produced their own power with onsite coal-fired dynamos. What was more, electrified factories in the aggregate produced some three-fifths of the nation's electricity and were reluctant to sacrifice their independence by switching central-station electricity.<sup>61</sup> Despite this reality, Henry Atkinson's company had long drawn the blame in Atlanta for the limited industrial market. Commenting on hydropower developers' inability to gain a foothold in the city's power market,

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<sup>59</sup> Eric A. Lof, "The Hydro-Electric Development of the Georgia Railway and Power Company at Tallulah Falls, Georgia," *General Electric Review* (June-July, 1914), 3-5, Georgia Railway and Power Company: Georgia Railway and Power Company Notebook, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Belk Library Special Collections, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina (hereafter Eury Collection); also see Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 117-118.

<sup>60</sup> Needham, *Power Lines*, 127.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, *Routes of Power*, 187.

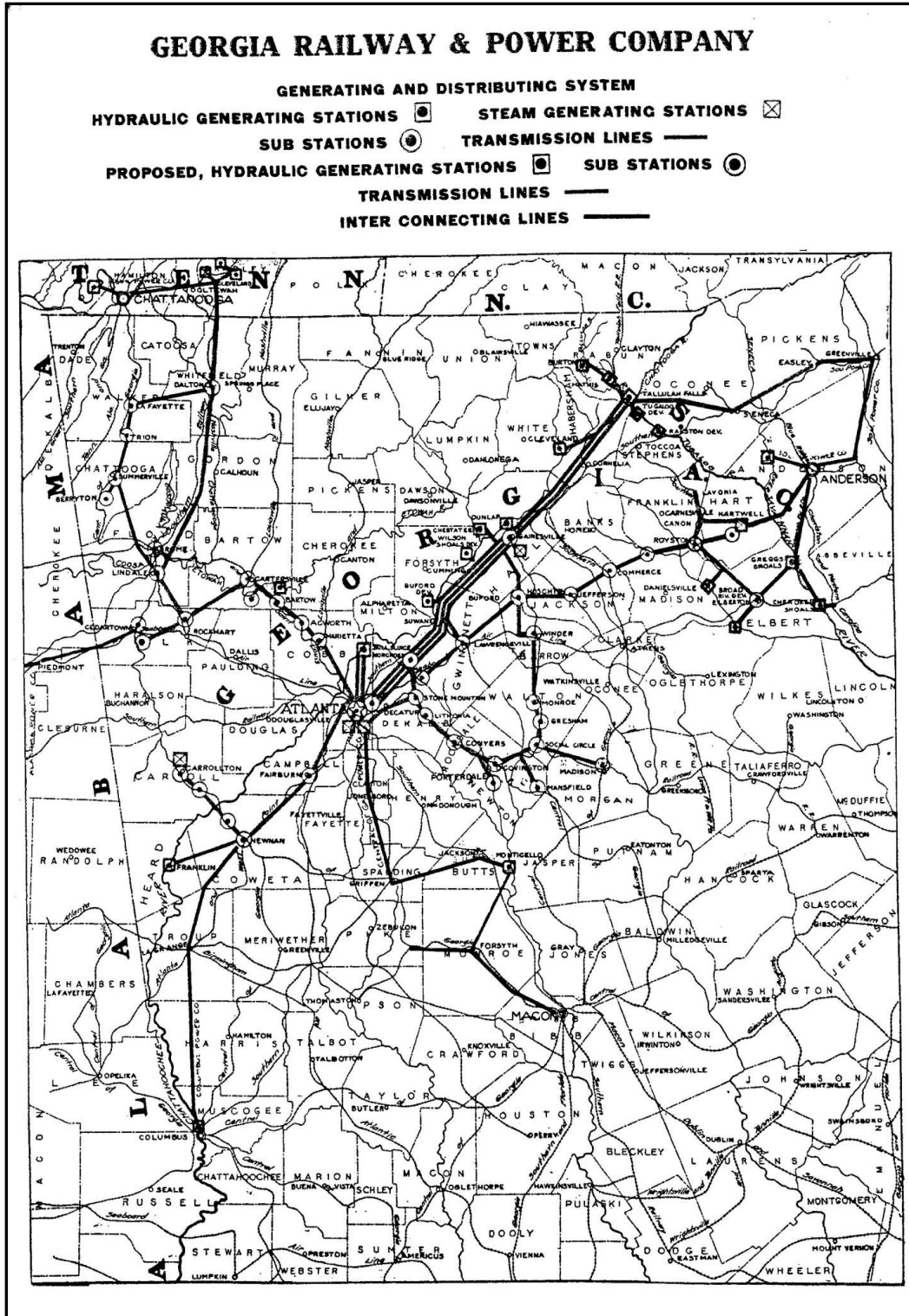


Figure 3.5 GRPC Transmission system, 1917.

an Atlanta attorney involved in the electric utility business bitterly complained that anyone who cared to look could “see the corpses of such enterprises which bear the death stab of the deadly dagger of the Georgia Railway and Electric Company.”<sup>62</sup> That killer instinct, Smith once again realized, also made Atkinson a valuable ally.

In need of a bailout and an outlet for the Tallulah River’s energy, Smith approached Atkinson in early September 1911 to discuss a partnership for Tallulah Falls that would replicate the deal they had negotiated a decade earlier for Bull Sluice. Now, though, the situation for Atkinson was different. Available records do not indicate why Atkinson sat on the sidelines of hydroelectric development for so long. But given waterpower’s increasing efficiency and potency and the constant parade of potential competitors—not just from Warner and Smith but also from the Central Georgia Power Company’s massive Lloyd Shoals Dam near Macon, Georgia—Atkinson likely decided that his interests could no longer risk being pushed aside by the rising wave of hydraulic energy.<sup>63</sup> Just weeks after their initial meeting concerning Tallulah Falls, Atkinson and Smith announced that they would join forces and form a new utility, largely with capital from the London (via Toronto) and the Philadelphia-based electric utilities holding company, United Gas Improvement Company. The new company, with Atkinson as chairman and Smith as a director, merged all of the properties, as well as the names, of the original firms into a massive utility called the Georgia Railway and Power Company (GRPC).<sup>64</sup>

The competitive struggle for corporate supremacy over rivers and power in the northern half of Georgia thus concluded when Atkinson consolidated at least five electric utilities, five hydropower facilities, and ten prospective dam sites into his new firm, originally capitalized at

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<sup>62</sup> “Franchise Given Piedmont Power Co.,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 6, 1909.

<sup>63</sup> “Atlanta May Get New Power Company,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 29, 1909; “Dam for South’s Greatest Power Plant is Completed across Ocmulgee River,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 4, 1910.

<sup>64</sup> “Hydro-electric Development Projects to be Consolidated in New Giant Georgia Company,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 24, 1911; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 127-128.

\$27 million (approximately \$675 million in 2014 dollars).<sup>65</sup> The New South-style rhetoric surrounding the creation of the GRPC and the construction of the power-producing machinery at Tallulah Falls held that the GRPC and the “power generated from its works throughout the northern part of Georgia” would unquestionably “contribute to the development, growth and prosperity of this state and her citizens.”<sup>66</sup> To some extent this statement seems genuine. Many utilities in the early 1910s followed what would become known as the “grow-and-build” strategy: the construction of new and more efficient generating capacity ahead of consumer demand, which would stoke greater usage, justifying the construction of even newer and more powerful generating stations.<sup>67</sup> Especially in a regulated environment, this method made good economic sense, as utilities could (at least theoretically) pass their capital expenditures on to consumers in the form of state-sanctioned rate increases. But the company’s activity, at least in the short term, suggested to lots of Georgians that growing and building for the state’s good was not the foremost consideration. With the blessing of the Railroad Commission of Georgia, Atkinson and Smith had created a hulking corporation and would radically alter the Tallulah River primarily to preserve hegemonic control over and stave off competition over electrical markets in Atlanta as well as in its hinterland. Indeed, when the Tallulah Falls power plant began generating electricity in September 1913, the Georgia Railway and Power Company and the city of Atlanta had no need for its energy; the utility shipped every kilowatt of Tallulah Falls’ output to the Southern Power Company in North and South Carolina. Southern preservationists saw these developments as clear evidence of crass financial calculation and corporate gamesmanship

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<sup>65</sup> Moody’s, *Moody’s Manual of Railroads and Corporation Securities*, Vol. II, Part II (New York: Moody Manual Company, 1914), 2223.

<sup>66</sup> C. Elmer Smith, “The Georgia Power Company, and the Tallulah Falls Development,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 1, 1912.

<sup>67</sup> Richard F. Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation in the American Electric Utility Industry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

that molested Georgia's precious Tallulah Falls and fleeced working people. This thinking inspired a backlash among a set of Georgians who abhorred monopolistic capitalism and valued Tallulah Falls for far more than the electric energy it could generate.

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Shortly after Elmer Smith's Georgia Power Company began construction of the dam at Tallulah Falls in 1911, a northeastern Georgia native named Helen Dortch Longstreet led a crusade to stop the development at her state's most treasured landscape. The "Niagara of the South," she believed, stood as "one of the greatest scenic wonders of the world—an heirloom which has come down to us from immemorial ages."<sup>68</sup> Tallulah Falls was a marvel that had been "immortalized in song and story since the days of the earliest aborigine, long before the Anglo-Saxon set foot in the new world."<sup>69</sup> The men who would ruin the falls earned Longstreet's bitter denunciation as the "henchmen and hirelings of 'Big Business,'" and as "pirates and vandals who seek the destruction of Tallulah" purely for pecuniary gain.<sup>70</sup> "The waterpower people are just ordinary thieves," she wrote, who would steal Tallulah from the people and hoard her riches for themselves.<sup>71</sup> They were monopolists. For Longstreet, Tallulah Falls, whose "pure waters [would] pour treasure into the lap of Georgians and their children and their children's children," should belong to everyone. If Smith and Atkinson destroyed the falls, the area's function as a commons for tourism and as a symbol of southern heritage would face destruction as well.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Helen Dortch Longstreet, "Shall Tallulah Falls, Dixie's Wonderland, Be Sacrificed at the Alter of Big Business?" *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 4, 1912.

<sup>69</sup> Longstreet, "Majestic Tallulah, Most Priceless Natural Asset of the Western World, Thunders Appeal for Protection to a Proud People's Honor," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 18, 1912.

<sup>70</sup> Longstreet, "To the American People," no date. Helen Dortch Longstreet papers, MS 1341, Box 14, Folder 208, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia. (Hereafter HDL papers).

<sup>71</sup> Longstreet quoted in E. Merton Coulter, "Tallulah Falls, Georgia's Natural Wonder, From Creation to Destruction: Part II, Destruction," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 47 (Sept. 1963), 270.

<sup>72</sup> Longstreet, "Tallulah Falls: Switzerland of America," May 14, 1912. HDL papers, Box 14, Folder 208.

Though waged with an at-times overwrought sense of poetry and bombast against an extremely influential and wealthy utility, Longstreet's campaign is important to consider at some length. It illustrates that the New South program, particularly the corporate-directed manipulation of waterways purportedly for the region's economic benefit, faced serious obstacles; the construction of the "mighty outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge" went beyond the struggles of electrical entrepreneurs such as Henry Atkinson, Elmer Smith, and A.J. Warner. Longstreet's fight for Tallulah Falls also marks the emergence in the South of competing narratives of development and preservationism, revealing the critical place of natural resources in the regeneration of Dixie not just for utility leaders, but for ordinary southerners as well. The version of a New South Longstreet and her allies envisioned, though, differed markedly from the one that Atkinson and Smith endeavored to create. Whereas Atlanta's power company executives, at least from Longstreet's perspective, sought to modernize Dixie at any cost, Longstreet believed that the South in the twentieth century must resist monopoly capitalism and continue to honor the traditions—and the traditional landscapes—of the Old South.

From her earliest days, Helen Dortch was tutored in the old southern school of dogged resistance to imposed limitations, an education which served her well in her time as an activist for Tallulah Falls. Born in 1863 to a well-to-do couple in Carnesville, Georgia (about twenty-five miles south of Tallulah Falls) young Helen proved to be an inquisitive child and avid reader. Against nearly all expectations for a young southern woman in the late-nineteenth century, she graduated from Gainesville's Brenau College and soon after became editor of her hometown newspaper, earning a reputation as a "fearless writer." Her intrepid spirit led her in 1894 not only to become the first woman to hold statewide office in Georgia—assistant state librarian—but in

1896 to single-handedly force through the all-male Georgia General Assembly a bill that would allow a woman to become the state's chief librarian.<sup>73</sup>

Though seemingly contradictory for an independent woman, Helen was also well-tutored in and deeply devoted to the myth of the Lost Cause.<sup>74</sup> In fact, her love for the Old South and the Confederacy overwhelmed her professional ambitions, at least for a time. In 1897, she married a man about whom she had often read and for whom she had long pined, the seventy-six year-old ex-Confederate General James Longstreet, “ever the hero of my young dreams,” she later wrote. For Helen, her husband embodied the “ideals of chivalry and courage” that for her the Old South and Confederacy still represented. After Longstreet's death in 1904, Helen worked to rescue the memory of her late husband—who became a pariah in postwar South for his presumed foot dragging at the Battle of Gettysburg and for his association with the Republican Party—and to perpetuate the romantic myths of the Old South, a mission she continued in her time working for Tallulah Falls' salvation.<sup>75</sup>

To protect Tallulah Falls, Longstreet founded the Tallulah Falls Conservation Association (TFCA) in 1911 and served as its president. The organization vowed “to work together for civic health and civic righteousness; to preserve our heritage, the forests, and the natural beauties of the land,” and to “save from the destroying hand of commercialism the matchless grandeur of ‘The Niagara of the South.’”<sup>76</sup> Through the TFCA, Longstreet tried to

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<sup>73</sup> Andrew Beecher McCallister, “‘A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride’: Tourism, Industrialization, and Conservation at Tallulah Falls, Georgia, 1820-1915” (MA thesis, Univ. of Georgia, 2002), 59-61, quote from 59.

<sup>74</sup> Historian James Cobb defines the “Lost Cause” as an “ethos [that] not only defended secession and glorified the society that white southerners had gone to war to preserve, but actually transformed their military defeat into a tremendous moral triumph.” James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 62.

<sup>75</sup> McCallister, “‘A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride,’” 61. Also see Helen Dortch Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide: Gettysburg in the Light of Official Records* (Gainesville, GA: The Author, 1904); and Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 132-140, 220-223.

<sup>76</sup> Longstreet to Mrs. Turner, Jun. 12, 1912, Box 1, Folder 6, HDL papers.

rally Georgians to her cause, waging a war of words against an enemy that, she believed, put New South-style industrial development before both “heritage” and the purely aesthetic wealth of Georgia’s pristine nature.

To challenge the GRPC’s presumptive dominance over nature and power in north Georgia, Longstreet tried to recruit working-class Georgians to her cause. In December 1911, the *Atlantian*, an Atlanta-based labor monthly, agreed to reprint Longstreet’s statement “To the People of Georgia,” which decried Georgia Railway and Power’s stock and bond issues (potentially totaling \$57 million, or about \$1.4 billion in 2014 dollars) “as iniquitous a scheme as has ever been proposed in any American state.” It was simply a stock-watering ploy that would far over value the company, fleece the people through exorbitantly raised rates, and “put in power in north Georgia a monopoly which would control our rates for power, control our trolley lines, both urban and interurban, control our electric lighting system, control our gas plants and eventually control our waterworks.” To allow an artificially bloated GRPC to enjoy total sway over the state’s rivers would be tantamount to giving away the people’s birthright and to creating a monster. “Why,” she asked, “should we consent to create a Frankenstein to devour us?”<sup>77</sup>

If at times she warned of the monster that would monopolize and savage Georgia’s natural resources, Longstreet most often emphasized Tallulah Falls’ singular beauty. “Neither the Yosemite nor the Yellowstone can vie in weird loveliness with this picturesque gorge....The Grand Canyon of northern Arizona may be wider and deeper. But not a blade of grass, not a twig of green” could be found there. To see the Grand Canyon, she wrote, was to visit a “sepulchral of silence,” a bleak “scene of desolation” reminiscent of Dante’s *Inferno*. “But in gazing on Tallulah [one] dreams of Milton’s paradise.” Not only unique in the United States, Longstreet opined, Tallulah’s splendor was unrivaled in the world. Nothing across the globe, not the

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<sup>77</sup> Bernard Suttler, “The Water Power Trust,” *Atlantian*, Dec. 1911, 6-7.



Danube, the Nile, the Alps, the Apennines, or even the Himalayas, could compete.<sup>78</sup> The *Atlanta Georgian and News*, which supported Longstreet's efforts, similarly declared in 1911 that Tallulah Falls was "the grandest piece of natural scenery in the South," whose "natural grandeur...draws tourists from the European countries, who marvel at its beauty."<sup>79</sup>

Tallulah Falls did not stun only the privileged European traveler. For Longstreet, the falls' power and beauty overwhelmed the senses of even those familiar with the place. The cataracts in northeast Georgia awed the eye, to be sure. But the ear and perhaps the entirety of the body felt the shock of "organ thunders...[that] swell in endless anthems" of "Tallulah's God-given song."<sup>80</sup> Its sheer might "subdues the puny arrogance of man."<sup>81</sup> If some visitors to Tallulah trembled at its force, others found its potency arousing. A writer for the *Sunny South* recounted his "night at Tallulah" in which he "sat in the moonlight" yearning for the "love ditties...of some fair senorita," relishing "sweet idleness, sweet dream, sweet dreamland in which cooing lovers may whisper, eyes look into eyes and trembling hands to meet trembling hands. And it is not only happy hearts that are singing, but there is a thundering weird melody rising up from where the wrathful waters gurgle."<sup>82</sup> It was sentiment, an emotional experience—"the most powerful thing in the universe," a "nameless charm" that could not be reduced to dollars and cents, according to Longstreet—that made Tallulah Falls so valuable to the people of Georgia.<sup>83</sup>

This awe-inspiring space of natural beauty stood in contrast to all that was unnatural about the urbanizing-industrializing New South. It was not, however, without its own sort of

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<sup>78</sup> Longstreet, "Unmatched Tallulah, the Pride and Glory of a Free People Appeals for Protection to the War-Torn Heroes of the Sixties," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 3, 1912.

<sup>79</sup> "Save Tallulah Falls is Slogan Now," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Jun. 20, 1911.

<sup>80</sup> Longstreet, "Unmatched Tallulah, the Pride and Glory of a Free People Appeals for Protection to the War-Torn Heroes of the Sixties," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 3, 1912.

<sup>81</sup> Longstreet, "To the American People," no date, HDL papers, Box 14, Folder 208.

<sup>82</sup> Horatio Langford King, "A Day and Night at Tallulah," *Sunny South*, Jul. 20, 1901.

<sup>83</sup> Longstreet, "To the American People," no date, HDL papers, Box 14, Folder 208.

value. At the heart of Longstreet's thoughts on the magnificence and sublimity of Tallulah Falls was the conviction, shared with John Muir and other American preservationists, that such a landscape was one from which the people could derive non-monetary profit.<sup>84</sup> In response to the TFCA's call for essays on the "duty of the American nation to preserve Tallulah Falls from commercialism," one respondent wrote that,

Scenery is now an asset, and in many cases waterfalls or other delightful scenes will pay more if used for scenic purposes than for commercial use....The uncommon beauty of Tallulah, its scenic and historic surroundings, its climate and ease of access should, in the nature of things, make it a more paying investment, if exploited scenically, than for power....It touches with its natural charms the better part of life. It helps, as nothing else can, the general welfare. It pays dividends in humanity.<sup>85</sup>

Through contemplation, relaxation, and recreation, through making an "investment" in the "asset" that was Tallulah Falls, "dividends" would be paid out, making for morally rich individuals.

In his classic account of the development of the wilderness ideal in the United States, historian Roderick Nash argues that early-twentieth-century scenic preservationists extended a mid-nineteenth-century romantic philosophy to their time, opposing crass utilitarianism, praising the magnificence of unaltered nature, and pleading for the maintenance of virgin wilds. John Muir, the best-known and most admired American preservationist, once contended that wilderness must be sustained because "everyone needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike."<sup>86</sup> Clearly, Longstreet and her allies held to this national model of scenic preservationism; but to

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<sup>84</sup> In 1898, John Muir wrote that "mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." Muir quoted in Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 140.

<sup>85</sup> Longstreet, "Tallulah's Cause, Cause of American People," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun 14, 1912.

<sup>86</sup> Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 129; Muir quoted on 165.

rouse preservationist sentiment in Georgia, they added to that formula a dose of southern distinctiveness.

For those like Longstreet who shared in the long-held belief that the New South's gilded enticements threatened to jettison the Old South's values, there was a palpable fear that with the destruction of a cherished southern landmark, the timeless culture and uniqueness of the South would be sacrificed at the altar of mammon.<sup>87</sup> This concern was typical among those devoted to the Lost Cause. "The great problem of our future," remarked ex-Confederate general John Brown Gordon, "is not how to secure material prosperity...but how to hold to the characteristics of our old civilization."<sup>88</sup> Those characteristics, many believed, were tied to the natural environment.<sup>89</sup> Dixie's "spiritual grace," its "leisurely manner," and its predisposition "toward meditation and consideration," according to a *South Atlantic Quarterly* article, were rooted deep in the region's soil.<sup>90</sup> Historian general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Georgia native Mildred Rutherford, declared in 1912 that "nature has really seemed partial to the South," not only because of the region's rich endowment of raw materials but because of unique natural wonders such as Stone Mountain and Tallulah Falls. For Rutherford as for Longstreet, these ancient landmarks, if properly cared for, would help preserve the Old South and expose the destructive lie that was the New South.<sup>91</sup> But if Dixie's landscapes could be blighted by the

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<sup>87</sup> For discussions of the New South's critics, see Gaston, *New South Creed*, 153-186; and Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, Second Edition. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 106-108.

<sup>88</sup> John Brown Gordon quoted in Bartley, *Creation of Modern Georgia*, 106-107.

<sup>89</sup> The most well known proponent of this position was historian Ulrich B. Phillips. See [NOTE]

<sup>90</sup> Maristan Chapman, "The South's Spiritual Grace," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* XXI (October 1922), 295.

<sup>91</sup> Mildred L. Rutherford, "Thirteen Periods of United States History," Nov. 21, 1912, *Internet Archive*, <[https://archive.org/stream/addressdelivered00ruth/addressdelivered00ruth\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/addressdelivered00ruth/addressdelivered00ruth_djvu.txt)> (accessed July 14, 2015); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 61-62, 85-86.

“demon of filthy lucre” and the “desecrating touch of commercialism,” Longstreet feared, then so could the rest of southern civilization.<sup>92</sup>

That “desecrating touch” at times took an all too familiar and revolting form, linking the struggle at Tallulah with the horrors of Reconstruction and the supposed “reign of terror” that in part inspired the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906. As discussed in Chapter 1, opponents of the New South program, such as Tom Watson, tried to connect corporate power and Democratic political machines to the specter of “negro domination,” which white southerners believed resulted in heinous offenses, most notably the fantastical epidemic of black-on-white rape. One adherent to Longstreet’s cause, Alice Baldy of Griffin, Georgia, likened the Georgia Railway and Power Company’s managers to vile carpetbaggers and railed against their ruin, outrage, and forcible seizure of Tallulah Falls—thinly veiled references to Reconstruction and corporate-enabled rape that any southerner would have recognized. “The ruin of Tallulah,” she wrote in 1912, was the worst “outrage that can be conceived of. That a *foreign company* composed of the worst class of Northern men—the class that did the most mischief when the Federal army tried to ruin the South, *rapacious, greedy, money-worshipers*—should come in conjunction with *Canadians* and forcibly seize the loveliest jewel the State possesses...is the most *astonishing, most insulting act* that could have been offered the state.”<sup>93</sup> This tactic allowed Tallulah’s champions to seamlessly weave Reconstruction, race, and the corporate-inspired rape of southern womanhood into their argument, an approach that might stir the gallant men of Georgia to redemptive action.

Who better, then, to motivate Georgians to rescue Tallulah Falls and the South from the moneyed electrical monster than the chivalrous ghosts of the glorious Confederate past? “I was

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<sup>92</sup> Longstreet, “Peerless Tallulah—Immortalized in Song and Story Appeals to the Courage and Loyalty of Georgians,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 25, 1912; and Longstreet, “Tallulah Falls: Switzerland of America,” May 14, 1912, HDL papers, Box 14, Folder 208.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Coulter, “Tallulah Falls,” 267, emphasis in original.

sure,” Longstreet wrote when seeking donations for the TFCA, “that in your veins coursed the unafraid blood of the heroes who harrowed our soil from Virginia to Texas and that when the call was made to your loyalty of your country, the response would be the same as your heroic sires made in the fighting sixties.”<sup>94</sup> Longstreet beat the drum of righteous war in the hopes of drafting an army of southern men that would come to Tallulah’s defense.

Indeed Longstreet aimed not simply to influence public opinion but to summon the power of the state—by appealing to the governor, lawmakers, and the courts—to halt the construction of what would become the centerpiece of the “mighty outpost of progress.” In petitioning her state’s politicians, she used much the same appeal as the one she employed to cultivate donors. But in bonding Tallulah Falls to the Lost Cause, she also emphasized the state government’s responsibility to defend what should be a publically owned monument to Georgia’s heritage. Longstreet was “convinced that ‘big business’ deliberately planned to usurp the property of the state of Georgia at Tallulah.” Yet she did not dismay because she felt confident that “the fighting blood which coursed through the veins of the heroes who followed the greatest captain of the English-speaking races [General Robert E. Lee] over the battlefields of the Civil war still pulses in the hearts of Georgians, and is a guarantee that our people have the manhood to protect our property at Tallulah.”<sup>95</sup> The protest over Tallulah Falls served as a test case for state power as it related to business and private citizens: Would the state government allow monopolistic corporate entities to determine the course of the public good or would it place that responsibility on its own shoulders?

At the outset of her legal battle, Longstreet had reason to believe that Georgia’s solons might opt for the latter. Her first move was to convince Georgia Governor Hoke Smith and his

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<sup>94</sup> Longstreet to My Dear Co-Worker, no date, HDL papers, Box 1, Folder 10.

<sup>95</sup> “Georgians to Protect Old Tallulah Falls,” *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Dec. 22, 1911.

successor John Slaton (who served as interim governor when Smith appointed himself to a vacant US Senate seat in 1911) to order new surveys of the land surrounding Tallulah Falls. Longstreet believed that the original land survey at Tallulah Falls, completed in 1820, was incorrect.<sup>96</sup> For Longstreet, the property directly surrounding the falls, and, more precisely, the river itself, actually belonged to the state of Georgia, not to the private interests who sold it to the power companies, and should become part of a state or national park.<sup>97</sup> Governor Smith agreed to review the case. While his survey proved inconclusive, though, Slaton's survey found significant problems with the 1820 assessment. Shortly after Slaton's findings were published, however, new governor Joseph Mackey Brown (elected in the fall of 1912) declined to pursue the case. Longstreet then took her fight to the state legislature where she worked to pass a resolution directing Governor Brown to file a lawsuit that would enable the courts to decide who truly owned Tallulah Falls.<sup>98</sup>

Longstreet expressed great faith in the members of the General Assembly but, to encourage them to vote her way, nudged them with remarks about manhood and loyalty to old values over new ones. She trusted that each honorable man in the legislature would "lay down his life before he would betray Georgia for the color of Canadian gold," and that "there is not one man on the Rules Committee whose patriotism the yellow taint of Mammon can besmirch or whose lofty ideals the Klondykes or Golcondas can buy."<sup>99</sup> Her lobbying worked. After receiving the resolution from the state Senate, the House overwhelmingly agreed to the measure by a vote of 112 to 19 and ordered the state to file suit. The trial began in late May 1913 in the

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<sup>96</sup> "Tallulah Falls Case Put to Governor," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Aug. 15, 1911; "Tallulah Falls Fight Reaches Governor," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Sept. 29, 1911.

<sup>97</sup> In this effort, Longstreet revived the work of Georgia state senator Robert Hamby, who in 1905 tried to have the area designated for protection as a state park. See Coulter, "Tallulah Falls," 256-258; also see "Make National Park at Tallulah Falls," *Atlanta Georgian and News*, Jul. 28, 1910.

<sup>98</sup> McCallister, "'A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride,'" 68-80.

<sup>99</sup> Longstreet, "Members of Rules Committee will not Betray Georgia," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 29, 1912.

Superior Court of Rabun County (the county in which Tallulah Falls is located) but lasted for only two days. Persuaded by the company's position that riparian land ownership extended to the river bed—and, apparently, by the promise of jobs and progress that the dam would bring to their area—the jury found in favor of the Georgia Railway and Power Company.<sup>100</sup> Later that same year, the State Supreme Court affirmed the Rabun County jury's decision, finding the company's chain of title unmarred and the original surveys valid.<sup>101</sup> Of course, Longstreet denounced the decision; what was more, she doubted whether the state and particularly Attorney General Thomas Felder (who had advised Governor Brown against filing suit) had ever intended to pursue the case with adequate vigor. "I do not know," she wrote to Felder, "that you are yet honestly convinced that the waterpower people are just ordinary thieves; and that if I should do on a small scale (or any other citizen) what they have done in Rabun County, the laws of this state would put us in stripes."<sup>102</sup> In the end, she dismissed Felder as simply "an office boy to the Georgia Railway and Power Company."<sup>103</sup>

Despite Longstreet's best efforts, Georgia Railway and Power completed the Tallulah Falls dam and the first generator in September 1913; it installed four more generators by April 1914. Together, the five units totaled 60,000 kilowatts of generating capacity, all of which the company sent to J.B. Duke's Southern Power Company until the beginning of US involvement in World War I. At the time of its completion, the Tallulah Falls facility was reportedly the largest dam in the South and third largest in the United States. The dam stood over 100 feet high and stretched more than 400 feet across the opening of Tallulah gorge, impounding water in a reservoir that covered sixty-three acres of land. At a point just above the falls called Indian

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<sup>100</sup> Coulter, "Tallulah Falls," 268-269.

<sup>101</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 130-131.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Coulter, "Tallulah Falls," 271.

<sup>103</sup> McCallister, "'A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride,'" 81.

Arrow, the dam diverted the Tallulah's water into an underground 6,666-foot tunnel that had been cut through solid granite. From there, the water fell more than 600 feet and was channeled into one of five penstocks, each 1,200 feet long, and finally into one of five turbines the churned out electric power (figures 3.6 and 3.7). Tallulah Falls had become an "organic machine," to borrow from historian Richard White, and confirmed Georgia Railway and Power's position as the dominant utility in all of north Georgia.<sup>104</sup>

The violence done to Tallulah Falls seemed to form the core of the debate over modern development versus environmental-heritage preservation. The GRPC wanted to radically alter the falls for the benefit of the South's industrial future and the TFCA wanted to preserve a site that stood as a transcendent symbol of southern identity. But in reality, these seemingly hard and fast lines became quite blurred. Somewhat ironically, the GRPC claimed that its destruction at Tallulah Falls would actually be creative. The company's work there would maintain the area's natural beauty and create more recreation opportunities for Georgia's citizens. Georgia Railway and Power engineer F.P. Catchings assured Georgians that "every effort has been made to have the development in keeping with the scenery. The power house will be an ornate structure of brick and stone....One would hardly believe that a mighty industry is in progress at the time he will be gazing at the unaltered charm of the rapids."<sup>105</sup> Following a GRPC sponsored trip to Tallulah Falls in 1914, a corps of newspaper men found that Catchings had been true to his word but that he had not gone far enough—the area was even more beautiful now. They reported that

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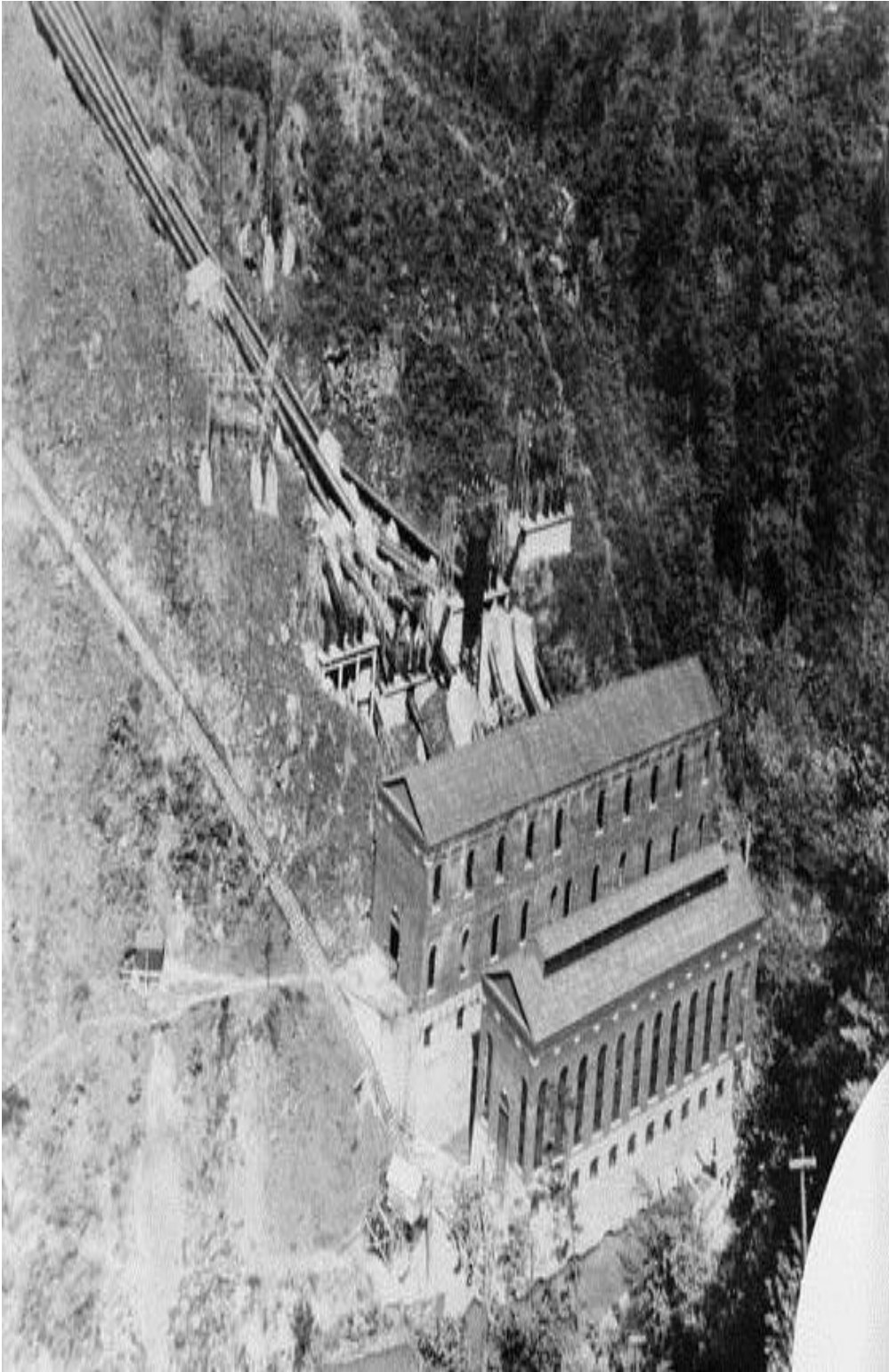
<sup>104</sup> Manganiello, "Dam Crazy," 105-107; "Gigantic Power Plant at Tallulah Falls to Develop about 100,000 Horse Power," *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 23, 1911; Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

<sup>105</sup> "Falls not Hurt by Power Plant," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 5, 1911.





*Figure 3.6 Tallulah Falls dam, c. 1920*



*Figure 3.7 Powerhouse at Tallulah Falls, c. 1912.*

“far from being robbed of its scenic beauty, by reason of the great power development, this delightful country is now more attractive than ever, and, in addition to its natural charms, it is enjoying many more comforts and an industrial prosperity, impossible under old conditions.”<sup>106</sup>

Longstreet’s yearning for the preservation of older conditions at Tallulah Falls also contained a fundamental paradox. The Tallulah for which she waxed so romantic was not, in fact, a place that had southerners had cherished and visited since time immemorial. Tallulah Falls became the “Niagara of the South” only in the 1880s as a result of New South modernization. When southerners first learned of Tallulah Falls, in 1819, it was not a sought out destination but part of Cherokee territory; the Cherokee regarded it as a place of death and took pains to avoid it.<sup>107</sup> Though it gained some acclaim in the antebellum years, through the late 1870s Tallulah Falls hosted relatively few visitors and could claim only one hotel. Its inhabitants included not much more than a few hermits and eccentrics, and the small bands of elite sojourners who braved an excursion there did so only “at great hardihood” and “at the risk of their lives.”<sup>108</sup>

A more widely accessibly tourist industry—an industry that Longstreet wanted to protect—began in earnest only after the Tallulah Falls Railroad arrived in 1882. Though originally brought to the area for logging interests, the fifty-seven-mile line gladly transported passengers to and from Tallulah, earning for the area its self-declared nickname, “the Niagara of the South.” Two decades later, the area could boast nearly twenty hotels with modern conveniences, including fine cuisine, indoor plumbing, and, perhaps ironically, the brilliant illumination of romance-inducing electric lights.<sup>109</sup> Despite its awe-inspiring beauty, Tallulah

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<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Coulter, “Tallulah Falls,” 262.

<sup>107</sup> McCallister, ““A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride,”” 8-17.

<sup>108</sup> Coulter, “Tallulah Falls, Georgia’s Natural Wonder, From Creation to Destruction: Part I, Creation,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 47 (Jun. 1963), 123-149, quotes on 149.

<sup>109</sup> Margaret Calhoun and Lynn Speno, *Tallulah Falls* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998); McCallister, ““A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride,”” 8-29.

Falls was not a transcendent and timeless emblem of southern distinctiveness. It was a creation of the modern age.

Tallulah Falls' deep interconnection to, and dependence upon, a rapidly modernizing world for its economic health was, at least in some measure, the source of its downfall. Rabun County's population quickly doubled after the arrival of the railroad and tourist industry, but began to shrink after 1900. The promise of a good wage, or, for farmers, cash for their butter and eggs, at a posh Tallulah Falls hotel inspired hope in local residents for a brighter economic future. But it soon proved to be a siren song. Rural Georgians struggling to make ends meet quickly soured on the seasonal limitations of a stagnating tourist industry. This seems to have been borne out by the Rabun County jury's decision to side with Georgia Railway and Power, and by the lack of formidable, locally-led movement to save the falls.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, locals apparently sold their land to the power company quite eagerly and remained almost universally silent on the issue; area residents who spoke out on the falls' fate usually supported the dam's completion.<sup>111</sup>

What seems to have won out in Tallulah Falls was hydropower developers' argument that choking off the river for electric power would bring the area ever more intimately into the New South sphere of purportedly endless growth and prosperity; that, indeed, Tallulah Falls should be ceded to corporate interests and become the keystone of the "mighty outpost of progress." The German industrialist Louis Magid crafted and published plans to use the falls' energy to convert the area into a vibrant silk producing colony of 100 mulberry tree farms and over 300 silk-

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<sup>110</sup> McCallister, "A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride," 19-29.

<sup>111</sup> C. Elmer Smith, "The Georgia Power Company and the Tallulah Falls Development," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 1, 1912; Andrew Jackson Ritchie, *Sketches of Rabun County History, 1819-1948* (Atlanta: Foote and Davis, Inc., 1948), 342; "Develop Water Powers of Georgia," *Clayton (GA) Tribune*, Mar. 19, 1915.

spinning jobs.<sup>112</sup> The GRPC, which purchased Magid's land at Tallulah Falls in 1912, likewise raised expectations when it pledged to "furnish light and electrical energy" not only to places such as Tallulah Falls, but to "all the larger cities in the Piedmont section" where "the amazing development in the use of electrical power in the industrial world..., in the household, and on the farm" would "aid in revolutionizing conditions." Factory workers, farmers, and housewives would directly benefit from the company's "control of the water powers of the South" which they "expected to hasten amazingly the onward march of this section."<sup>113</sup> Georgians of all stripes, and particularly those at Tallulah, seemed to agree that private capital should lead them in the "onward march" toward New South-style prosperity. In fact, in later years, Longstreet's effort to commend Tallulah Falls to Georgia's people earned her only sardonic dismissal. Georgia Railway and Power President Preston Arkwright scoffed at Longstreet's "foolish" attack on his company before a group of Rotarians in 1922. "Do you even remember the 'Tallulah Falls Conservation Association'?" he asked his audience. "Perhaps you have forgotten," he suggested, how the TFCA's frivolous lawsuit "dragged its weary way through the courts" without any legal merit. "Of course the suit failed," Arkwright concluded.<sup>114</sup> But if GRPC managers ever truly forgot about Longstreet's crusade, it took them a long time to do so. Despite the company's victory, the battle for Tallulah Falls demonstrated that even if the private realm had been tacitly entrusted as the agent for generating power and building a New South, the company's control over the state's rivers was far from a settled issue. To that question, the exigencies of world war would provide a fleeting answer.

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<sup>112</sup> McCallister, "A Source of Pleasure, Profit, and Pride," 38-42.

<sup>113</sup> "Hydro-electric Development Project to be Consolidated in New Giant Georgia Company," *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 21, 1911.

<sup>114</sup> Arkwright, "The Best Bet," Mar. 16, 1922, in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 215.

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From the summer of 1917 to the fall of 1918, much of the southeastern United States, and particularly the Blue Ridge where both the Tallulah and Chattahoochee Rivers originate, suffered through a relentless drought. For Georgia, it stood as the worst rainfall famine since the state began keeping records in 1893.<sup>115</sup> Drought conditions imperiled crop yields and potable water supplies for Dixie's people. But that was not all. Because the United States was at war with the Central Powers, drought endangered the war effort as well. Essentially from the beginning of the Great War, American manufacturers produced goods for Europe's warring nations, but after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917, industrial activity saw a dramatic expansion, which depended, more than anything else, on electric power.<sup>116</sup> Increased industrial demand during the war strained electrical systems beyond capacity across the United States, but drought in a region dominated by hydroelectricity threatened to become a national emergency.

Utilities sounded the proverbial alarm. The electric companies in both Atlanta and Macon (about eighty miles south of Atlanta) cringed at the prospect that "unless there is a heavy rain" very soon, "every big manufacturing plant...will be forced to close down, thereby throwing thousands of skilled mechanics and others out of employment."<sup>117</sup> The GRPC and the Central Georgia Power Company (the monopoly utility in Macon) encouraged "lightless-powerless" days in their cities because it was "imperative to keep the cotton mills and [other factories] operating at 100 per cent."<sup>118</sup> According to industrial booster J.A. Holloman, power shortages demonstrated that despite large utilities' seeming dominance over rivers, "the power situation within the state is far from being controlled by companies now in operation." The solution to

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<sup>115</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Annual Report 1918* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1919), 3, Eury Collection.

<sup>116</sup> Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 170-171.

<sup>117</sup> "Macon is in Same Fix over Electric Power Supply as Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 18, 1917.

<sup>118</sup> "Lightless-Powerless Day Observed in Macon," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 10, 1918.

drought and energy famine did not lie in a return to coal; the utilities in Atlanta and Macon lacked adequate coal-fired capacity and, in any case, coal was in short supply and had become far too expensive and vital to the war effort. Rather, the resolution to these problems lay in more river manipulation: “the state should co-operate with” power companies and the federal government for the development of new “hydro-electric plants that are of almost limitless value to the commercial and industrial interests of Georgia.”<sup>119</sup>

As the reaction to wartime emergency shows, southern industrial prosperity, and indeed the greater good, had become wedded to hydroelectricity. As a result of the war, the promise of the New South came to be even more intimately tied to environmental exploitation and power development. Historians have noted the ways World War I revolutionized and drastically enlarged the electric utility business, helping it become the most heavily capitalized industry in the United States. In particular they have pointed to the interconnections of previously isolated utilities and the construction of massive generating stations, both aided by an increasingly active federal government.<sup>120</sup> In the broader South, the exigencies of war confirmed and intensified the quest to run rampant over the state’s rivers, expanding pre-existing regional power sharing arrangements and, what was more, helping cement the place of private hydropower corporations as state-sanctioned custodians of the general welfare. In Georgia, this designation cleared the way for the completion of the “mighty outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge,” but also laid bare the vulnerabilities of a water-dependent energy system in a place that periodically experienced severe drought.

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<sup>119</sup> J.A. Holloman, “Development of Georgia’s Wasting Water Resources is One of the Crying Necessities of the Times,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 16, 1918.

<sup>120</sup> See Hughes, *Networks of Power*, 285-323; Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 166-185; and Jones, *Routes of Power*, 195-210.

Almost as soon as Congress declared war on Germany, political and business leaders in the South jumped at the chance to benefit from the United States' mobilization effort. Southern Congressional delegations proved quite adept in ensuring that federal largess, particularly in the form of shipbuilding complexes, cantonments, and training installations, made its way to Dixie. Of the thirty-one Army and National Guard bases the US War Department established in World War I, nineteen called the South home. Along with three specialist camps (for training engineers, medical personnel, and transport staff) and one flight school, three National Guard camps came to Georgia.<sup>121</sup> Atlanta's civic and business leaders worked to make sure at least one of these camps was located near their city. Their efforts bore fruit when the War Department chose Chamblee (about thirteen miles northeast of downtown Atlanta) as the home of Camp Gordon, named after former Confederate General and Georgia governor John Brown Gordon. The base became a veritable city. It included a hospital, a church, a theater, a bakery, a telephone exchange facility, and barracks to house more than 45,000 soldiers. Georgia Railway and Power seized the opportunity to aid the war effort. Not only did the company provide the "Military Metropolis" with electric lighting and power. It also added five miles of trolley track to its lines that linked Camp Gordon to downtown Atlanta, helping the company realize a more than 8 percent increase in fare-paying streetcar passengers in 1917.<sup>122</sup>

Georgia Railway and Power certainly welcomed the installation of military camps and the resultant growth in revenues. Yet the utility's primary aim, as it had been since the beginning of the twentieth century, was to court factories. That objective became all the more desirable

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<sup>121</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 54; Todd Womack, "World War I in Georgia," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Jul. 28, 2005, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/world-war-i-georgia> (accessed July 21, 2015).

<sup>122</sup> Craig Britt, "Military Metropolis of Amazing Magnitude Built at Camp Gordon as by Magic Overnight," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 19, 1917; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 154-155; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1917*, 3, Eury Collection.



considering the radically expanded industrial production brought on by the war. Just months before the United States' declaration of war, the company boasted hydropower contracts with 109 manufacturing plants—including fifteen cotton mills as well as packing houses, steel mills, print shops, laundries, cement works, and fertilizer factories—scattered across north Georgia. By May 1918, the number of factories the GRPC supplied with hydroelectricity had expanded by almost 50 percent to 160. Included in the new roster of hydro-electrified plants were eight power hungry cotton mills—which, for electric companies, made them highly sought after targets—many of which produced textiles and cotton linters (useful in the production of explosives) on government contracts.<sup>123</sup>

In Georgia, wartime conditions helped Georgia Railway and Power achieve its goal of becoming a power supplier for industry, but those same circumstances facilitated the energy crisis of 1917-1918 as well. At the dawn of the World War I era, most electrified factories powered their works through onsite coal-fired generators, but the onset of war helped change this arrangement. The US War Industries Board's demands for coal, and for the railroads that transported it, precipitated a coal shortage. Not only had coal become scarce, it had become prohibitively expensive. In 1915, a ton of coal in Atlanta cost \$2.56; a ton of coal inflated to \$5.01 in 1918 and \$11.80 in 1920. In order to continue producing lucrative military goods with electric energy, factories in north Georgia had little choice but to adopt central station hydropower.<sup>124</sup> Some half of the GRPC's new contracts were agreements with factories that had previously relied on their own coal-fired power plants; now these factories' energy needs could only be satisfied through hydroelectricity. By the end of 1917, Georgia Railway and Power

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<sup>123</sup> Henry M. Atkinson, "Georgia Streams are Turning Wheels of Commerce," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 18, 1917; "Why It's Your Problem," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 12, 1918; Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 60.

<sup>124</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 172. This trend reached across the nation. See White, *Organic Machine*, 50-51.

worked Bull Sluice at full capacity and drew large amounts of electricity from Tallulah Falls—more than half its total production—to power its increasingly busy operations in and around Atlanta. But more than half of Tallulah’s output (about 77 million kilowatt hours), and thus nearly three-tenths of the GRPC’s total production (about 258 million kilowatt hours), still flowed northeast to the Southern Power Company. New industrial contracts and wartime demand increased the GRPC’s output by nearly 10 percent in 1917 alone and by two and one-half times relative to 1913, an amount that pushed the company over capacity. Other utilities in the region experienced the same problems.<sup>125</sup> When drought descended on an already strained, hydropower-dependent southeast in mid 1917, electric utilities and the US government began to panic. GRPC president Preston Arkwright explained the gravity of the situation in no uncertain terms. Due to the “war crisis,” he reported, “there is an enormous existing shortage of k.w. [kilowatt] hours for industrial purposes.”<sup>126</sup>

To meet the challenges that drought and energy famine presented, the US War Industries Board and the US Army Corps of Engineers summoned southern power company executives to Washington, DC in February 1918 to discuss strategies for making adequate power available for wartime production. At the meeting, federal government representatives told southern utility executives what they already knew very well. The nation had an “urgent need...for large amounts of power” but, even though the federal government had purchased a hydropower site at Muscle Shoals, Alabama (which would remain incomplete well past 1918), the war effort was suffering from a “serious shortage of power.”<sup>127</sup> Federal representatives urged the major utilities

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<sup>125</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Annual Report 1917*, 3, Eury Collection; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 136.

<sup>126</sup> “Increased Rates Hearing Adjourns,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 14, 1918.

<sup>127</sup> “Minutes of the Meeting of Representatives of Power Companies in the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee Held at the Office of the Georgia Railway and Power Company, March 4, 1918,” 1, in *Memorandum of Co-Operative Efforts of Southern Utilities to Meet Requirements of War Industries Board*,

in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee to devise a plan to do their part to help supply sufficient energy—a stunning 800,000 kilowatts—to factories on government contracts and directly to federal enterprises manufacturing war materiel.<sup>128</sup>

After a subsequent meeting at Georgia Railway and Power's headquarters in March 1918, southern utility executives reported that the only way they could meet the government's requirements in the short term was to combine their companies into a coherent, region-wide power-sharing unit.<sup>129</sup> Power companies and engineers in other regions studied and proposed the same possibilities; though it was never implemented as planned, William Murray's "Super Power" program for the northeastern United States was the best known among them.<sup>130</sup> For utilities in the South, interconnection arrangements were nothing new. In addition to its agreement with the Southern Power Company in 1913-1914, Georgia Railway and Power coupled its high-tension transmission lines with the Tennessee Power Company near Chattanooga, with the Columbus Power Company in southwest Georgia, and with the Central Georgia Power Company in central Georgia. In periods of low demand, these companies sent the energy of the Tennessee, the lower Chattahoochee, and the Ocumlgee Rivers to Atlanta, and the GRPC reciprocated, so that each utility could use their hydropower facilities as efficiently as possible.<sup>131</sup> The scale and reach of World War I era interconnections, however, were far greater and far more urgently needed than what southern utilities achieved before the war.

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1918, Charles E. Waddell Papers, 1914-1934, MS # 78-2372, box 1, folder 2, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (hereafter Waddell Papers).

<sup>128</sup> "Report of the Power Companies in the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama," Mar. 13, 1918, 5-7, in *Memorandum of Co-Operative Efforts of Southern Utilities to Meet Requirements of War Industries Board, 1918*, Waddell Papers, box 1, folder 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> See Hughes, *Networks of Power*, 296-297; Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 181-182; and Jones, *Routes of Power*, 202-208.

<sup>131</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 143-145.

Armistice Day arrived before southern power companies could commence any real work on their interconnected transmission system. Yet electrical demand continued to increase across the South through 1919 and 1920. Thus in May 1920, Georgia Railway and Power and Alabama Power began work on a shared 110,000-volt line that they completed in 1921. Soon thereafter, while power companies across the United States dithered and mulled over super power plans, the major utilities across the southeast completed a comprehensive interconnection of their systems. By the end of 1921, seven electric companies across five states formed what came to be called the Southern Super Power Zone. The system's trunk line, which originally stretched more than 900 miles from Gadsden, Alabama to Raleigh, North Carolina, could instantly flash power from any given watershed to any point on an extensive web of transmission lines. By the mid 1920s, the network; shared over 3,000 miles of power lines; covered an area of more than 120,000 square miles with over six million residents; and included plants to bring Florida, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Louisiana into the fold. Observers predictably gushed over the South's accomplishment. Allen Perry, managing editor of the industry trade journal, *Electrical World*, praised the Southern Super Power Zone as "by far the most extensive interconnection in the world."<sup>132</sup> University of North Carolina hydraulic engineer Thorndike Saville described it as a "striking demonstration" of technological accomplishment that made possible the most efficient use of hydropower in the country.<sup>133</sup> William Patrick Lay, an Alabama Power Company founder who retired in 1912, agreed that the Southern Super Power Zone enabled utilities to wring ever increasing amounts of power out of the region's rivers. Without adding any new dams or generators, according to Lay, transmission connections in the South enabled power companies to

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<sup>132</sup> Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 59-60; Perry quoted in Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 177.

<sup>133</sup> Saville, "The Power Situation in the Southern Appalachian States," 73.

produce over 11 percent more hydroelectricity and use over 25 percent less coal every year (figure 3.8).<sup>134</sup>

Of course, spurred on by wartime emergency, utilities in Dixie did add considerable hydropower capacity to their portfolios. In north Georgia, wartime power shortages inspired the completion of the “outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge.” Shortly after finishing work on the Tallulah Falls project, the GRPC constructed a storage reservoir and diversion dam upstream from Tallulah. The new structure (Mathis Dam) impounded water in an 834-acre area, forming Lake Rabun, a reservoir that could hold 1.4 billion cubic feet of water.<sup>135</sup> Even these facilities proved inadequate in the face of wartime demand and rainfall shortages. In the course of the war, then, the GRPC proposed to add a sixth unit to Tallulah Falls, to build a new power dam on the Tugaloo River, and to construct a colossal reservoir about seventeen miles upstream from Tallulah Falls. The new storage facility, named Lake Burton, would flood almost 2,800 acres of land and, at capacity, would hold 5.28 billion cubic feet of water (or forty billion gallons, more than triple Atlanta’s yearly water consumption as of 1920). GRPC managers explicitly cast Burton as a guard for manufacturers from future drought-induced power shortages and as a tool to channel “practically every drop of water that falls on the Tallulah watershed” to Atlanta and the upper Piedmont for “industrial development.”<sup>136</sup>

But the company had a problem. It lacked the ability to fund these new developments, estimated to cost a total of \$5,000,000. The war had slowed flows of global capital, dramatically increased the costs of materials, and thus, reportedly, bloated the GRPC’s expenses beyond what its revenues could cover. What was more, according to Georgia Railway and Power, the company’s income stream had been suffering for several years, due largely to its streetcar

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<sup>134</sup> William Patrick Lay, *The Southern Super Power Zone* (Gadsden, AL, n.p., 1922), 11-13.

<sup>135</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 134-135.

<sup>136</sup> “New Dam to Protect Industries against Drought,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 23, 1920.

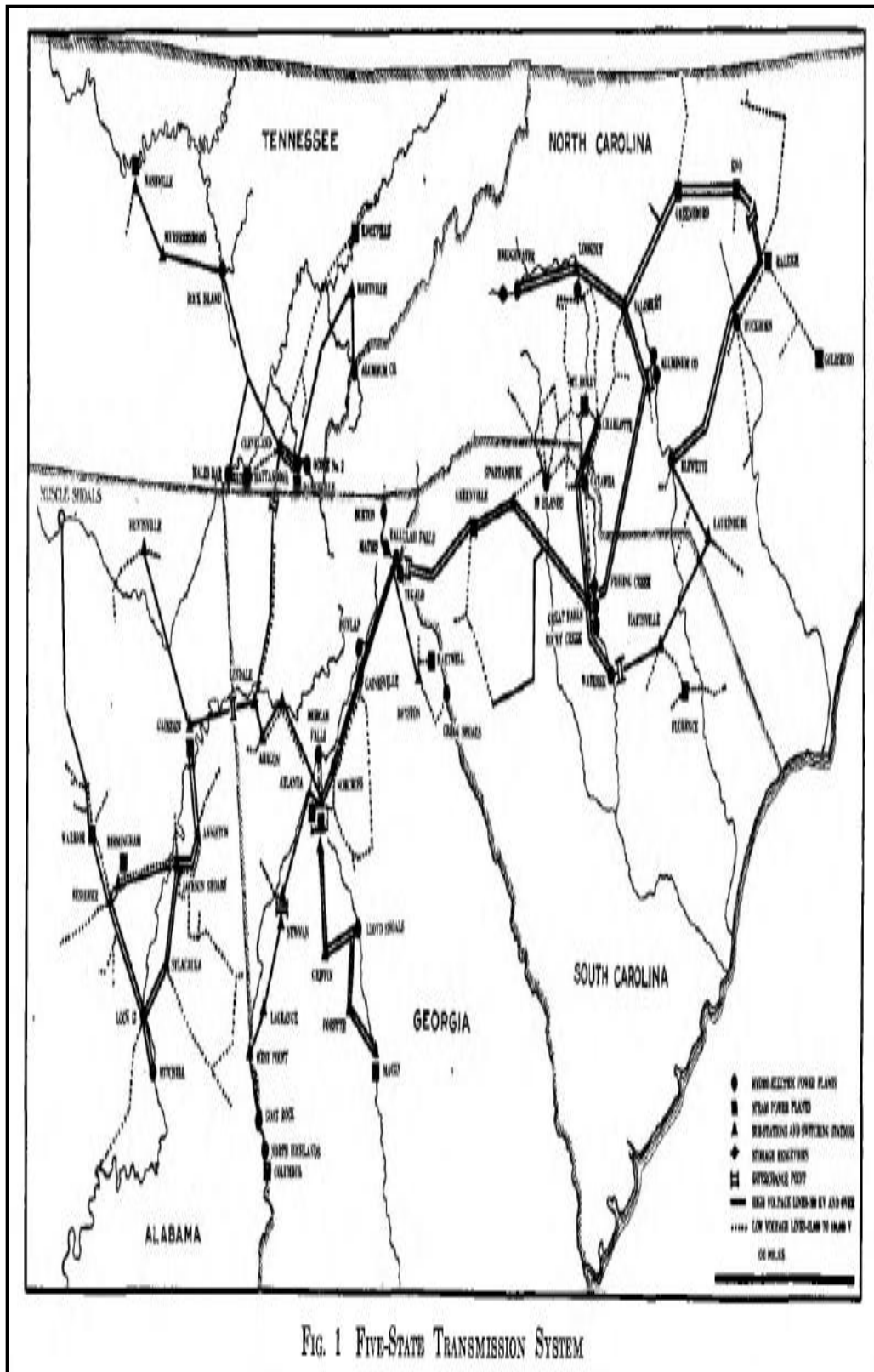


Figure 3.8 Southern Super Power Zone, 1922.

system. At the outset of World War I, the GRPC owned about 235 miles of streetcar track—more mileage per 1000 residents than any city, except Salt Lake City, in the United States. Yet the GRPC transported fewer passengers per mile (forty-seven) than any American city other than New Orleans. With streetcar fare still at five cents (the same rate since the late 1890s), the company claimed it had trouble earning enough revenue from passengers to meet the considerable sunk costs of its trolley system. Added to this income problem was another: the “jitney plague.” Jitneys were essentially unregulated taxicabs that replicated established streetcar routes and siphoned hundreds of passengers and hundreds of dollars in fares every day from the company. Not only was income from streetcar operations steadily falling because of high fixed costs and jitneys, but Georgia Railway and Power agreed to a 25 percent wage increase for its transit workers, though not to union recognition, following a prolonged and, at times, nasty Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees strike in 1916-1917.<sup>137</sup> To complete the “outpost of progress,” then, the cash-strapped company had to seek the approval of the Railroad Commission of Georgia (RCG) for significant increases in streetcar fare (20 percent) and in power and light rates (33 percent).

The GRPC’s petition ignited a fire storm in Atlanta. A “Citizens’ Committee,” created by the Atlanta City Council in 1918 to investigate the RCG case, joined with the Amalgamated workers and many other Atlantans to vigorously protest Georgia Railway and Power’s proposed rate increases. The Citizens’ Committee condemned the GRPC’s request as a dastardly ploy to foist on the citizens of Atlanta and north Georgia a \$1.8 million yearly tax that would fund the company’s ability to “take hold of all the water powers of any consequence in the whole northern

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<sup>137</sup> Carole E. Scott and Richard D. Guynn, “The Atlanta Streetcar Strikes,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 84 (Fall 2000), 439; Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 14-29; Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 152-153, 165; Julian C. Chambless, “A Question of Progress and Welfare: The Jitney Bus Phenomenon in Atlanta, 1915-1925,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 92 (Winter 2008): 486-506.

portion of the state.” What was worse, the committee charged, the company was anything but destitute; public documents reportedly revealed that the company had banked nearly \$3 million in profits since 1913.<sup>138</sup> According to the protestors, which included Henry Atkinson’s old adversary Joel Hurt, the rate increases, if approved, would amount to state-sanctioned extortion and they further held that the RCG had no moral or legal authority to aid the company in robbing the people in order to fatten the profit margin of an already profitable and monopolistic corporation.<sup>139</sup>

The extent of the RGC’s regulatory authority and reach remained an open question in 1918. In order to stifle competition, crush the municipal ownership movement, and ensure its place as a natural monopoly, the Georgia Railway and Power Company’s immediate predecessor crafted and lobbied for the legislation that subjected it to RCG control in 1907 (see Chapter 1). As noted above, despite the passage of the Candler Act of 1907, Atlanta’s government maintained the power to grant franchises to competing power and streetcar companies (such as A.J. Warner’s North Georgia Electric Company and Elmer Smith’s Georgia Power Company) within the city’s borders. The 1918 rate case, however, removed any lingering doubts about the supremacy of the RCG and of the Georgia Railway and Power Company. Following the case, the RCG’s authority blanketed the state and each city in it. With its newfound influence, Georgia’s regulatory body confirmed the GRPC not only as north Georgia’s primary agent for manipulating rivers and cultivating electric energy, but as the steward of the general welfare as well.

After studying and hearing testimony on the GRPC’s rate case for four months, the Railroad Commission of Georgia, in August 1918, granted the Georgia Railway and Power

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<sup>138</sup> “Claims Power Co. is Far from Ruin,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 21, 1918.

<sup>139</sup> “Increased Rates Hearing Adjourns,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 14, 1918



Company the increases it requested. In his explanation of the RCG's justification for allowing higher streetcar fare and light and power prices, Railroad Commission Chairman Murphy Candler, who sponsored the 1907 act subjecting electric companies to regulation, laid out the case for the energy corporation's standing as a proxy of state power and guardian of public prosperity. In addition to its vital and immediate role in powering the war effort, Candler remarked, the GRPC's facilities supplied energy to "practically all of north Georgia, including forty-six towns, besides a large number of mills, manufacturing plants and industries.... The important relation which the applicant sustains toward the industrial and commercial welfare of practically all of north Georgia is evident." Candler continued: "This commission is convinced that this section of Georgia is vitally concerned in the ability of applicant [GRPC] to meet its responsibilities as the trustee of [the state's] great industrial resources, and to this end it should receive at the hands of the public and governmental agencies fair and unprejudiced treatment." The GRPC, in other words, should enjoy free rein to extract energy from the state's mountainous rivers in order to power factories and streetcars in and around Atlanta. The state, moreover, essentially had a fiduciary duty to protect the company's ability to tap into waterpower by ensuring (at least in this particular instance, through increased rates and therefore greater solvency) that it enjoyed access to the necessary investment capital to do so. Wartime power famine and coal shortage, Candler concluded, "evidence the wisdom and necessity of a larger use of our valuable and readily available water power" and thus "some measure of considerate, if not liberal, treatment should be extended toward the venturesome capital" needed to sustain and extend "the water power developed by [the GRPC] and now dedicated to useful public service."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> "Gas and Light Increases Awarded," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 17, 1918; also see Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Annual Report 1918*, 5, Eury Collection.

The Railroad Commission of Georgia clearly supported the New South ideal of state-sanctioned monopoly capitalism rooted in the expropriation of rivers' energy as the best means to achieve widespread prosperity. Faith in that model was not limited to Murphy Candler and his RCG colleagues. The larger legal machinery of the state backed that position as well, and demonstrated the supremacy of that stance when Atlanta officials tried to resist the 1918 rate increase decision. The Candler Act of 1907 left unclear whether the Railroad Commission could adjust a municipality's streetcar fees at the behest of an electric company; city governments, it appeared, maintained that authority. Thus the RCG could only strongly suggest that Atlanta increase trolley fare by 20 percent in compliance with its 1918 decision. The Atlanta City Council, protecting its turf and refusing to force its constituents to subsidize the GRPC's hydroelectric construction program, rejected the proposal out of hand. Although Atlanta Mayor Asa Candler (the uncle of RCG Chair Murphy Candler and Coca-Cola magnate who resigned his position on Georgia Railway and Power's board after taking office) vetoed the council's decision, the city council passed another rejection of the RCG's overture almost immediately. When the city council refused to budge, Georgia Railway and Power filed for a writ of mandamus that would order the RCG to assume jurisdiction over Atlanta's electric railways. Though a lower court declined the request, the Georgia Supreme Court granted the writ, writing that "it was the duty of the Railroad Commission, upon the application of the Georgia Railway and Power Company, to fix and determine the rates of fare upon the lines of street railway in the City" in order to ensure that hydropower development, and thus adequate streetcar service, would continue.<sup>141</sup>

Though confirmed in the World War I years, the legally recognized primacy of energy corporations as stewards of the state's best interests stood on a firm foundation of judicial

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<sup>141</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 166-170, quote on 170.

precedent. A 1908 State Supreme Court decision found that A.J. Warner's hydroelectric company fulfilled a necessary public service. A 1913 case, involving Macon's Central Georgia Power Company, came to much the same conclusion. After receiving complaints that Lake Jackson, formed by Central Georgia Power's Lloyd Shoals Dam, had become a public nuisance as breeding ground for malaria-spreading mosquitoes, local authorities went to court to have the facilities condemned. The State Supreme Court rejected the suit, stating that "it seems manifest that [through Central Georgia Power's dam and reservoir] the public necessity and the public convenience and public welfare are to be subserved, and that for the accomplishment of these purposes it is necessary and proper for the state to make suitable provision, by the delegation of authority" to energy corporations whose "direct purposes [are] to call into use the great water powers of this state in order to accommodate the necessities of the public."<sup>142</sup>

Georgia's regulatory and legal apparatus proved crucial to the materiality of electricity and to the protection of corporations' standing as the primary agent for structuring flows of the hinterland's natural resources into sites of consumption. With its path cleared of any further legal or financial snags, the GRPC could finalize the construction of its "mighty outpost of progress in the heights of the Blue Ridge." By the end of 1919, Atkinson's utility installed the sixth generating unit at Tallulah Falls, giving that facility a total capacity of 72,000 kilowatts (108,000 horsepower), and completed Lake Burton. In addition to the three facilities already in operation (Burton, Rabun-Mathis, and Tallulah Falls), the company drafted plans to install three more reservoirs and dams on the Tallulah-Tugaloo watershed. The Nacoochee project would dam the area between Burton and Rabun on the Tallulah River. The Tugaloo and Yonah developments would impound the Tugaloo River (formed at the confluence of the Tallulah and Chattooga

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<sup>142</sup> *The Southeastern Reporter* (St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1913), 397; William D. Bryan, "Nature and the New South: Competing Visions of Resource Use in a Developing Region, 1865-1929," (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2013), 206-208.

Rivers), releasing its water finally into the Savannah River basin. When completed in 1926, the six reservoirs and dams stored a total of nearly seven and one-half billion cubic feet of water and covered nearly 5,000 acres of Blue Ridge land (figure 3.9). The power houses aggregated 284,500 horsepower (181,000 kilowatts) and, assuming all reservoirs were full, could generate over 530 million kilowatt hours per year, which the GRPC could instantly ship to locations across the region via the Southern Super Power system.<sup>143</sup>

The Georgia Railway and Power Company received unqualified praise for its transformation of an entire mountainous watershed into a drought-proof, energy-producing machine that would propel Georgia, and all of Dixie, to a new level of industrial prosperity. This accomplishment, according to engineer Thorndike Saville, stood as “the finest example of complete river development to be found in the eastern United States.”<sup>144</sup> Every raindrop that fell on northeast Georgia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, the company and its admirers insisted, stood ready at all times without fail to be translated “into kilowatt hours for industrial use” for the betterment of Georgia.<sup>145</sup> The energy of the state’s rivers cultivated in the GRPC’s facilities, wrote the *Atlanta Constitution*, had become “industry’s right hand bower” and had converted the South into “the great industrial frontier where opportunities are abundant for the profitable establishment, advancement, and growth of industry.” The development of the Tallulah-Tugaloo, the paper continued, “has played a major role in the growth and advancement of Georgia and has been a great factor in the industrial, educational, and social life of the state.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Georgia Railway and Power Company*, 38; Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Water Power Developments in North Georgia* (Atlanta, 1924), 14-15, Eury Collection.

<sup>144</sup> Saville, “The Power Situation in the Southern Appalachian States,” 69.

<sup>145</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Industrial Georgia*, 81.

<sup>146</sup> “Georgia’s Big Hydroelectric Developments Play Prominent Part in Progress of the State,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 1, 1927.

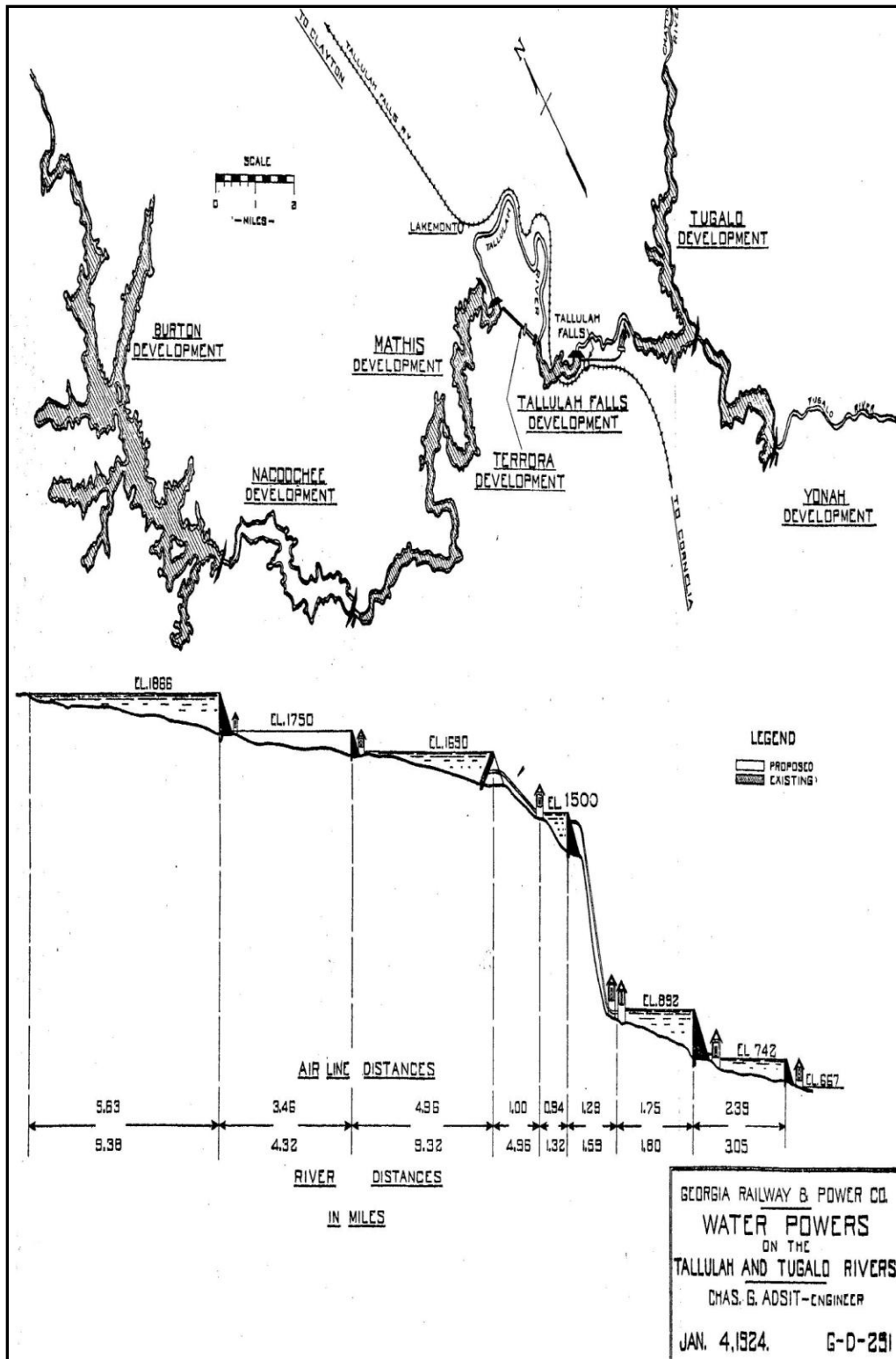


Figure 3.9 Mighty Outpost of Progress.

Yet just when it appeared that the GRPC had secured the means to ensure growth and advancement for the post-World War I South, drought struck once again and cast serious doubt on validity of the company's, and the state's, promises. Despite critical relief provided by the Southern Super Power system, hydroelectric companies across the region feared that the lack of rainfall in the summer and fall of 1921 would shutdown their operations.<sup>147</sup> From Henry Atkinson's perspective, "the whole section has been on the verge of catastrophe growing out of a continued drought which has threatened to break down the electric service not only in Georgia but throughout the entire piedmont country."<sup>148</sup> The solution to the most recent drought, all parties seemed to agree, was even more hydroelectric development. In addition to hooking the federal government's facilities at Muscle Shoals to the private super power system, utilities must quickly add "additional developments here [in Georgia] and elsewhere throughout the Blue Ridge watershed" in order "to forestall a possible repetition in the near future of the 1918 and 1921 periods of power famine."<sup>149</sup>

Though rainfall returned in late 1922 and the GRPC completed the Tugaloo project in 1923, severely arid conditions returned once again in 1925, prompting supplicants to call on the Almighty for relief. "In Greenville, S.C.," the *Atlanta Constitution* reported, "they are holding prayer services, praying for rain. In Georgia, too, it has been very dry."<sup>150</sup> The 1925 drought proved to be the worst on record to that point, sapping storage reservoirs and reducing the productive capacity of much of the southeast far more seriously than at any previous time. Georgia faced the worst of it. With only about one-sixth the amount of average rainfall levels

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<sup>147</sup> Charles G. Adsit, "Power Development in the Southeast," May 11, 1922, 344-345.

<sup>148</sup> "Power Company is Planning to Borrow over \$13,000,000 to Complete Enlargement Plan," *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 25, 1921.

<sup>149</sup> "More Electric Power," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 28, 1921.

<sup>150</sup> "Georgia Power Reservoirs Nearly Full Despite Drouth Conditions, Arkwright Says," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 11, 1926.

and a 60 percent reduction in electrical generation from the previous year, the 1925 drought brought on another power emergency. Utility executives and industrial leaders, as they had during the war, once again panicked. Georgia Railway and Power temporarily reduced its streetcar service by more than 10 percent and organized a mass meeting with city fathers and local captains of industry to devise a plan for avoiding a complete system shutdown.<sup>151</sup>

Company-issued public notices in the city's main daily, titled "Let's Avoid a Power Shortage," warned readers that the "rapid and continuous depletion" of the company's reservoirs had left the system with "only enough water [to] meet normal demands for a period of about four weeks."<sup>152</sup>

As they had in 1921, the regional interconnections of the Southern Super Power Zone came to the rescue. Power generated in Alabama and Tennessee helped utilities in Georgia and the Carolinas survive the rainfall and power shortage of 1925. The super power system's 1920s bailouts testified to its indispensability for energy supply and industrial prosperity in the region. But the persistence and increasing severity of drought pointed to something else as well. In the words of historian Christopher Manganiello, "the droughts of the 1920s not only highlighted the utility of interconnected grids; they also revealed a water supply problem."<sup>153</sup> The construction of the "mighty outpost of progress" and the Southern Super Power Zone bred region-wide dependence on and exposed the vulnerabilities of a state-protected monopoly that consistently failed to live up to its stated goals. Especially as electricity penetrated the realm of everyday life in the 1920s and 1930s, such failings prompted large numbers of citizens, activists, and even the federal government to seriously question the mightiness of the outpost of progress.

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<sup>151</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 211-212; Manganiello, "Dam Crazy," 119-122.

<sup>152</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company public announcement, "Let's Avoid a Power Shortage!" *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 23, 1925. Announcements with the same title and much the same tenor, but with slightly altered content, appeared in the *Atlanta Constitution* throughout August and September of 1925.

<sup>153</sup> Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 64.

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Hydropower development in the South experienced a great spasm of expansion from the turn of the century to the mid-1920s with revolutionary results. Appalachian bituminous coal, the New South's fuel source through the beginning of the twentieth century, proved to be unreliable. The region instead looked its rivers for power. Southerners saw their waterways as potential beasts of burden, encouraging the instrumentalization and taming of southern nature. Eager businessmen went to Georgia, the so-called "Empire State of the South," seeking to harness the latent "horsepower" in southern streams, and engaged in a frenzied, competitive pursuit to take the reins of the best possible places to install dams.

The fragmented hydroelectric landscape that resulted went through a period of consolidation that replicated, but dramatically expanded upon, that of the early years of the electrical age. The corporation that won the cutthroat contest for hydroelectric supremacy, the Georgia Railway and Power Company, emerged as a heavily capitalized enterprise that enjoyed monopoly control not only over the Atlanta electrical market but over all of north Georgia's rivers. This corporation rearranged nature in north Georgia, channeling hydraulic resources from the Blue Ridge to sites of consumption in the Piedmont. Based on radical river alterations, companies like the GRPC stimulated industrial expansion, forging a lasting connection between environmental destruction and economic growth. That linkage faced a serious challenge from Helen Dortch Longstreet's preservationist movement, raising questions about just how secure the New South's environmental change-economic prosperity link actually was.

Perhaps paradoxically, drought and power shortage during the World War I years ever more tightly bound watershed manipulation to New South progress. Faced with the prospect of energy shortfalls and industrial failure, the state of Georgia, along with the blessing of the federal



government, supported the expansion of the hydropower complex and designated the GRPC as a proxy of its power to ensure the greater good through harvesting natural resources. Despite governmental backing for the construction of the Southern Super Power Zone and the “mighty outpost of progress,” drought agonized Georgia and much of the South in the post World War I years. As the next chapter shows, power shortfalls, along with a widespread rejection of a monopoly system that denied cheap and increasingly vital electric energy for people’s daily lives, inspired vigorous local and national movements—particularly among farmers and their advocates—to compete with or even overtake private energy corporations. These conditions, however, did not prompt hydroelectric companies such as the GRPC to quickly abandon the water and seek shelter in Appalachian coal mines. Private southern utilities fought to preserve their monopoly over rivers and their place as the custodians of the public good in the 1920s and 1930s, and only contemplated a transition back to coal with the onset of World War II.

#### 4 CHAPTER 3: POWER FOR THE FARM

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed strident debates over the provision of the hydroelectricity generated in the “Mighty Outpost of Progress” to the masses—especially the rural masses—in Georgia and in the broader South. Speaking on behalf of those who supported a major governmental role in the provision of waterpower, Atlanta-based attorney and progressive activist Marion Jackson argued in a 1924 national forum on the topic of electric power that the people’s control over rivers would rouse the “idle slaves in the South” to a new state of industriousness. Jackson lamented that “power equal to the labor of 75,000,000 men—over five times the Negro population of the United States—is idle in the streams of the South, because undeveloped.” At the fingertips of ordinary southerners might have stood “millions upon millions of slaves...waiting only the command of man to work without ceasing in lifting the darkness and drudgery from the homes of men—slaves capable of working not one wonder in a single home, but a myriad of miracles, a myriad of times, in countless fields, factories, and homes, at the touch of a button.” Yet these potential slaves remained unchained, which for Jackson was the “sin and shame of our age” as their idleness kept innumerable southerners “of the purest strain...living under conditions approximating those of the Middle Ages.” Enforcing riverine laziness and southern poverty, the writer argued, was a corporate cartel that both manufactured and benefitted from energy scarcity. “There is no incentive to capital,” he wrote, “to take the hazard of developing water power and constructing transmission lines to carry power through” the thinly populated countryside. “So long as capital can skim the cream of the business in the Piedmont districts, and hoard, by holding them idle, the great bulk of the water powers of the South,” it would continue to reap a “golden harvest” while nearly all farmers and many city dwellers struggled through premodern conditions. For Jackson, the solution to the problems of

monopoly and poverty was simple: “these idle slaves should be put to work” by and for the common “people of the South.”<sup>1</sup>

Such calls for public efforts to seize rivers and electrically modernize rural areas of the South, which had been in circulation since the conclusion of the First World War, drew sharp resistance in the private utility industry. In a series of speeches in the early 1920s, Preston Arkwright, president of the Georgia Railway and Power Company (GRPC), exemplified private power’s argument. “Do you know,” Arkwright rhetorically asked at a 1921 gathering, “that the further development of the electrical industry in Georgia is menaced? It is proposed to socialize it; to turn it over to State and municipal ownership.” Like the misguided members of a backward religion, he continued, the people “conducting this propaganda would...convert the streams of Georgia into Holy Rivers, never to be profaned by development for commercial purposes, but to make of them breeding places for the propagation and dissemination of the diseases of municipal ownership, State socialism, [and] communism. The result will be the death of individual initiative, the suffocation of private enterprise, the blighting of the State, and the ultimate ruin of its people.”<sup>2</sup> “The best bet” to halt socialism and to further “the development of water powers in Georgia,” Arkwright claimed a year later, “is private enterprise.”<sup>3</sup> The maintenance of a *laissez-faire* system, in fact, would be the surest means to realize the hydroelectric slavery that impoverished white southerners, industrial workers and farmers alike, so desperately needed. As Arkwright intoned in 1925, hydroelectric servitude would be far superior to that in the Old South. This gang of faithful souls would work for very little recompense: “The slave and the convict, who get no wages at all, cost many times as much. Even the Chinese coolie draws a

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<sup>1</sup> Marion M. Jackson, “Idle Slaves in the South,” *Survey Graphic*, Mar. 21, 1924, 613-614, 656, 658.

<sup>2</sup> Preston S. Arkwright, “Holy Rivers,” May 9, 1921 in Preston S. Arkwright, *Addresses* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1926), 166, 169-170.

<sup>3</sup> “Municipal League Rapped by Arkwright,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 17, 1922.

princely salary in comparison.” River slaves would also honor their masters with unceasing hard work and no thoughts of betrayal: “They never sleep; never rest; never play. They are never sick; never tired; never drunk. They don’t grow weary or decrepit. They require no taskmaster, overseer, or boss....They have no kick on the food, tools, or quarters. They bear no grudge or ill-will, cherish no resentment, and don’t know the meaning of disloyalty.”<sup>4</sup>

Jackson’s and Arkwright’s positions reveal several key themes in the debates over electric power in the interwar years. The most prominent issue in these discussions was rural modernization and this question was inextricably intertwined with clashes over nature. After World War I, many actors saw rivers as commonly held properties that, if publically managed, would afford farmers opportunities for a more modern and more democratic rural existence. This was a new potent development. Whereas earlier public power crusades fought to take control over the provision and distribution of electricity for the benefit of localized urban populations, public power activists in the 1920s and 1930s envisioned a system that went well beyond the city. They increasingly centered their attention on the manifold social benefits that would attend broad-based rural electrification rooted in public ownership of energy-producing waterways. It is important to note that this movement did not result solely from vanguard-driven action. From the conclusion of World War I, many ordinary southerners expressed serious doubts about the ideology of progress that narrated the private utility industry’s first wave of dam building between the 1890s and the 1920s, and sought alternatives to private monopoly by partnering with an array of activists—local, state, and national—to demand rural modernization through public ownership over electrical networks and rivers. In many ways, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) sprang from these efforts. These

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<sup>4</sup> Arkwright, “Sons of Light,” Oct. 25, 1925 in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 348-349; also see Arkwright, “Threatened State Control of Water Powers,” Oct. 11, 1922 in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 273.

agencies were not simply impositions by a distant, omnipotent governing force that foisted sweeping changes on a beleaguered southern landscape and population. This is not to suggest that the New Deal proved insignificant to a severely depressed South. It hardly needs to be stated that the opposite was true. Yet rather than representing a clean, radical break with the past, the New Deal's achievements in the public power arena drew on strong continuities and the determined efforts of ordinary people deeply rooted in the late 1910s and 1920s

Another fundamental theme in the 1920s-1930s fights for power was race. It comes as no surprise that the racialized discourses of the early New South era also played a key role in the interwar years. Indeed, Jackson's 1924 manifesto struck a familiar chord. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, public power proponents in the South, particularly in and around Atlanta, had long woven matters of race and class into their attempts to wrest control of electricity from monopolistic hands and to shape the New South into a program that would better serve the needs of working whites. Indeed, Jackson's language dredged up enduringly raw memories of Reconstruction, memories which held that Yankee capitalists invaded a war-torn Dixie, relegated white workers and farmers to virtual peasantry, and set "idle Negroes" free to do their sinister deeds.<sup>5</sup>

The public power movement's push for rural electrification and continued use of racist imagery posed a significant threat to private power cartels. The foundations of their monopolies lay in control over the water. An angry white populace, concerned over the perception that their racial position faced continued degradation at the hands of a monopoly corporation, could turn matters to public power's favor. In response, private utilities in the South largely co-opted public

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<sup>5</sup> The paradoxical notion of the problems associated with the "idle Negro" (vagrancy, drunkenness, criminality, rapaciousness) both during and after Reconstruction was a common trope in the early-twentieth-century South. For a critique of this idea—which points out that, even as many southern whites complained of "idle Negroes," they were largely dependent on African American labor—see Ray Stannard Baker, "Following the Color Line," *American Magazine* 46 (May-Oct. 1907), 144-145

power's populist messages about race and the social benefits of rural modernization—another crucial element in the debates over electricity in the 1920s and 1930s. Men like Preston Arkwright argued that only the free enterprise system could regenerate Dixie, and combined this message with increasingly influential messages about the rising socialist menace.

In the interwar years, the quest for a public alternative to deliver power to the masses became inextricably bound to both rural electrification and the conquest of rivers not only at the state and local levels. Indeed, these debates operated at the national level and claims about support the fate of the benighted rural South stood at the forefront of these modernization efforts. The contest for control over water and rural modernization would have far-reaching consequences for public and private power, waterscapes, and electricity markets not just in the South in the 1920s and 1930s, but across the nation for decades to follow.

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Atlantans revived the movement for public ownership of the electric industry in a drought-addled and power-scarce World War I moment that prompted many Georgians to seriously question the GRPC's willingness and/or ability to provide at reasonable cost the energy that had become increasingly indispensable to daily life. The incident that sparked the movement's rebirth was the Railroad Commission of Georgia's (RCG) consideration of the GRPC's rate increase request in the summer of 1918—an explicit appeal for state-ordered funding for construction of more hydroelectric facilities on the Tallulah-Tugaloo River system (see Chapter 2). Reactions to the power company's petition came swiftly and angrily. Not only did the Atlanta City Council establish a Citizens' Committee to investigate the rate case; hundreds of union members as well as other ordinary Atlantans also protested the GRPC's plea for more of the people's money to fund a program that, many citizens believed, would not meet

their energy needs. The broadly shared ire over the issue of control over hydraulic resources and power networks reached such heated levels, in fact, that the RCG's electric power and streetcar rate case became a central question in the city's 1918 mayoral election.

Several mayoral candidates made the Georgia Railway and Power's appeal to the RCG significant planks in their platforms. L.N. Huff, an optometrist who would eventually finish fourth in the election, bashed Georgia Railway and Power for what he openly characterized as war profiteering. The power company's request for de facto public funds for its dam construction program, he charged early in July 1918, was nothing more than "a plain attempt, and a bold attempt, and a shameless attempt to grab off a share of war profits while the grabbing is good." To counter such malfeasance, Huff favored the opening of clear judicial channels through which ordinary citizens could challenge the actions of a regulatory body in thrall to a powerful energy corporation.<sup>6</sup> Former alderman and city councilman James Key, who would win the mayoral race, used less inflammatory language than Huff, but pressed for more radical action. A longtime advocate of citywide control over electricity, Key pledged that as mayor, he would call for the immediate municipalization of Atlanta's hydropower supply and electrical distribution systems. Key believed that the GRPC's pending rate increase request would essentially become a \$1.8 million yearly tax that would impoverish ordinary citizens and enrich an overvalued cartel that benefitted from energy scarcity. Another "riot of capitalization" agreed to by the RCG in 1918 would enable the GRPC to pluck even more precious dollars "from the pockets of the people," adding false value to the company's inadequate power portfolio and financial filler to its well-watered stock. "Municipal ownership," Key held, "is the ultimate solution to this question."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "City Government Plan is Attacked," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 7, 1918.

<sup>7</sup> "James L. Key Now in Mayor's Race," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 19, 1918.

Given the widespread anger over the GRPC's attempt to use state power to finance its construction program and fatten its bottom line, Key's position on citywide ownership of electric utilities might be characterized as little more than a cynical office-seeker's vote-grabbing ploy. Key's rhetoric following his victory in the July 1918 election, though, suggests that he was a true believer. On the very evening of his inauguration in early January 1919, the new mayor reiterated that his administration's top priority—alongside creating new jobs and building new transportation infrastructure for increased commercial and industrial activity in the postwar era—would be the municipalization of the city's electrical facilities and, significantly, the state's hydraulic resources. "Atlanta," Key stated, sat in an area "full of streams and latent water power....The picture I see is the development of all this power by some public instrumentality which will furnish the same to cities, communities and industries of the state at cost. This will mean not only the industrial and economic independence of our city and state, but the industrial and economic supremacy which their position entitles them to." Atlanta's citizens must have the right, Key demanded, to "say to the [power company] owners that during your years of prosperity you discounted the future and divided the profits among yourselves, and that now during your period of adversity you should not be permitted to place all of the load on the backs of the people"—at least not without a reasonable return on that investment. The mayor thus held that "since the public must in any event pay for [the electric utility's hydroelectric] properties, that when they shall have been paid for by the public, the public should own them."<sup>8</sup>

Key quickly converted his words into action. Working with City Attorney James Mayson, the state legislative delegation from Fulton County (the county in which most of Atlanta is located), and members of the Citizens' Council, the mayor's office drafted a bill in the spring of

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<sup>8</sup> "Key Urges Advisability of Municipal Ownership of Street Car System," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 7, 1919; also see, "New City Leaders in Charge Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 6, 1919.



1919 that authorized the City of Atlanta to purchase or condemn the properties of the Georgia Railway and Power Company. The proposed legislation, moreover, implied that Atlanta would gain the authority to condemn or acquire waterpower sites throughout the state for the capital city's benefit.<sup>9</sup>

The possibility that the City of Atlanta might overtake responsibility for hydropower development for the entire state, however, was one that even the apparent abundance of popular backing—along with a Citizens' Council campaign meant to rouse more grassroots support for the measure—could not overcome. Characterized by members of the Georgia House of Representatives as a “wild, visionary, and ridiculous” attempt to socialize the state's electric business and by the GRPC's Henry Atkinson as a ploy to seize “all the water powers in the state, which belong to the whole people of Georgia,” Key's proposed amendment to the 1919 Atlanta Omnibus Charter Bill (House Bill No. 227) foundered largely on two seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand, the “Key Bill” flew in the face of New South elites' commitment to the purportedly progressive tendencies of state-backed industrial capitalism's continued growth, an orientation historian George Tindall identified as “business progressivism.”<sup>10</sup> On the other, Key's legislation clashed with an increasingly rigid Georgia politics that pitted Atlanta—as a imposing symbol of New South ascendancy and an as agent of Yankee predations in Dixie—against the “provincial” interests of much of the rest of a still predominantly rural state.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a chorus of criticism against the “Key Bill” might best be summarized by the words of representative from Gainesville who raged that “when Atlanta [gets] the power she [needs] for

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<sup>9</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 202

<sup>10</sup> George Brown Tindall, “Business Progressivism: Southern Politics in the Twenties,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 62 (Winter 1963): 92-106.

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 202; “Municipal Ownership for Atlanta Defeated in House Committee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 24, 1919. On the urban-versus-rural politics of Progressive Era Georgia, see Steven Wayne Wrigley, “The Triumph of Provincialism: Public Life in Georgia, 1898-1917” (PhD diss., Northwestern Univ., 1986).

her own public utilities, she would not develop anymore and the rest of the state might go to hang. It has been charged,” the legislator continued, “that this proposition is Bolshevism. I say it is Bullshevism with Atlanta constituted the only bull in the state.”<sup>12</sup> Not only did the bill fail to survive the committee stage, but even the measure’s Fulton County sponsors declined to vote in favor of granting Atlanta’s people power over water and electrical markets.

As events in early postwar Atlanta demonstrated, public dominion over rivers had become central to the crusade for municipal ownership of electricity—and the potential implications of this movement were not lost on electric company managers or rural bosses. In fact, the attempt to seize water power for the capital’s benefit brought these unlikely forces together in a powerful, if temporary, coalition. But the manner in which the GRPC and countryside legislators articulated their shared position against the Key Bill—that it privileged Atlanta at the expense of the rest of the state’s progress—opened the way for another, more consequential path to public control over water and power. Opponents of the Key Bill unwittingly suggested—and proponents undoubtedly heard loud and clear—that if supervision over the state’s rivers belonged to the all of the state’s people, and not just to those in Atlanta, public ownership would stand a greater chance of finding success.

The organization that took this cue and led the charge for state-level custody over Georgia’s waterways was the Municipal League of Georgia, a group founded in 1918 that represented an array of interests in places both urban and rural across the state. The explicit, animating purpose behind the newly-chartered organization, which featured both James Key and Marion Jackson as officers, was to challenge RCG-imposed electrical rate hikes within the

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<sup>12</sup> “Municipal Ownership for Atlanta Defeated in House Committee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 24, 1919.

state's municipalities, whether in the GRPC's territory or not.<sup>13</sup> Yet the Municipal League's leaders quickly realized that its rather narrow mission of focusing on already well-electrified cities and towns did not go nearly far enough in garnering the levels of support required for success. In fact, the limits of this type of appeal became readily apparent in July 1919 when the League backed a piece of failed legislation that largely mimicked, but expanded upon, the Key Bill.<sup>14</sup> After that point, not only would the Municipal League's work include efforts to keep electric bills and streetcar fare affordable for urban dwellers, it would also address the absence of electric power in the vast majority of rural areas across the state.

Municipal League members identified the farm as an arena ripe for electrical modernization and farmers as a potentially foundational constituency. They did not stand alone. After the turn of the century, a number of Americans—farmers and city-based reformers as well as local and national actors—viewed the farm as a site of persistent pre-modernity and believed that the widespread adoption of an array of new technologies would rescue the countryside from the backwardness of the past.<sup>15</sup> The conveniences that would improve farm life most notably included the telephone, the radio, and the automobile; during and after World War I, the modernization of production and daily life on the American farm increasingly meant access to electricity.<sup>16</sup> Since, according to the Municipal League of Georgia, private utilities had seen to it that little more than one in one hundred Georgia farms enjoyed central-station electric service by 1920 (not much worse than the paltry 2 percent national average)—and had no serious plans to improve on that figure—only a movement for a statewide, publically owned hydroelectric

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<sup>13</sup> "Cities will Fight Increases in Rates," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 18, 1918; also see Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 201-202.

<sup>14</sup> "Public Utilities Bill is Defeated," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 30, 1919.

<sup>15</sup> One of the first and most influential statements on this topic was the *Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1909).

<sup>16</sup> Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the Country: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 131.

enterprise could meet this urgent need.<sup>17</sup> By mid-1919, the organization's leaders decisively shifted their focus away from urban settlements and RCG-imposed rate increases; indeed, they believed that the RCG and the power companies they supposedly regulated were in cahoots. Instead, the League now positioned rural electrification based on publically controlled hydroelectricity at the center of its platform, insisting that the renewal of the southern farm could only become a reality if the public realm held the reins of power and, by the same token, that public power would only come to life if it enjoyed the backing of the state's farmers. For many Georgia farmers as well as for industrial workers, "the only hope" for a modern existence resided in a collective effort to deny "big corporations" the continued ability to monopolize water and power "at the expense of the public."<sup>18</sup>

For the Municipal League of Georgia, the goal of complete rural electrification rooted in hydroelectricity could only be realized through an independent commission authorized to oversee dam construction, energy generation, and power distribution for the entire state. The model on which the League based its newly proposed state agency was the Hydro-Electric Commission of Ontario. Established in 1906 and affectionately called "the Hydro," the Ontario Commission began independent operation of dams on the Niagara and St. Lawrence Rivers in 1910 and transmitted power to locally owned utilities, both urban and rural, at cost. To help small towns and farming districts take advantage of its cheap electricity, the Hydro offered low-interest loans for the construction of local distribution systems and the purchase of electric

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<sup>17</sup> Kline, *Consumers in the Country*, 87, 99-102; Hank McQuade, *Light up Our Land: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation: The First Fifty Years* (Atlanta: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, 1990), 23. With isolated generating plants included, American farm electrification in 1920 reached as high as 7.5 percent. See Phillip J. Fungiello, *Toward a National Power Policy: The New Deal and the Electric Utility Industry, 1933-1941* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 124.

<sup>18</sup> "The Only Hope," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 7, 1920.

appliances.<sup>19</sup> By 1920, the Hydro had installed several more dams equipped with over 300,000 horsepower in generating capacity. As a result of the Hydro's at-cost operations, nearly 30 percent of Ontario's farms had electricity and average consumers used more kilowatt hours at lower cost than did their American counterparts.<sup>20</sup> "Georgia has the power," read a March 1920 Municipal League advertisement, to replicate Ontario's successful cultivation of more than 750,000 horsepower of hydraulic energy. Yet "up to July 1919, only 230,000 horsepower had been developed [in Georgia], leaving 1,870,000 horsepower going to waste." "Why this difference?" the ad asked. Because "the people control the waterpowers of Ontario" while Georgia languished in the monopolistic clutches of "three private corporations, controlled in other states."<sup>21</sup> The Municipal League's proposed Georgia Hydroelectric Commission would follow the Hydro's lead, quickly harnessing as much as possible of the nearly two million horsepower still idling in Georgia's rivers and imploring the state to act on behalf of the people and not on that of an energy cartel.

The League's adherents believed that Georgia's version of the Hydro would immediately reap benefits for farm families. A south Georgia farmer opined that a public hydropower system would mean a less arduous daily life especially for the farm's mistress—the "drudge horse"—who on a daily basis "washes the clothes, scrubs the floors, cleans the lamps, cuts the wood, churns, draws water out of a forty-foot well, and does various other chores, all with her hands and human, physical strength." To realize a better life for the "drudge horse," the correspondent continued, farmers must have "hydro-electric power in such plenty and so cheap that poor folks as well as rich corporations can have it for all their needs. So that the average farmer can have it

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30, 33-34.

<sup>20</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> Municipal League of Georgia, "We Should Get Together," *Thomasville (GA) Daily Times-Enterprise*, Mar. 25, 1920.

to light and heat his house, cook his food and run his machinery.”<sup>22</sup> Yet everyday improvements for individual consumers constituted only one of the Hydro’s potential benefits. Municipal League members pitched Georgia’s version of the Hydro as a mechanism that would mean “power for the masses,” and would include a range of progressive social benefits. It would transfer the purported advantages of urban-industrial life to the countryside, immeasurably adding “to the sum total of rural life happiness.” “What water power means to industry,” stated a Municipal League officer in December 1919, “can be made to mean equally as much to the improvement of rural conditions and the welfare and happiness of the masses if...applied to the essential activities that now constitute what is commonly termed the drudgery of rural life.”<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding individual Municipal Leaguers’ invocation of “the masses,” the organization’s official pitch avoided references to collectivism and to characterizations of the proposed Georgia Hydroelectric Commission as a foreign import. Instead, the League explicitly cast its program as a way to recover “Home Rule,” a bald attempt to equate postwar circumstances with those of the Reconstruction era and to encourage ordinary southerners to “redeem” their homeland by kicking carpetbag-toting Yankee capitalists out of Dixie.<sup>24</sup> With this strategy, the Municipal League of Georgia resuscitated the spirits of Helen Dortch Longstreet’s and Tom Watson’s efforts against the GRPC, and fleshed out its argument in a 1920-21 public relations campaign. The “State Should Act,” as the campaign was known, transmitted the message in Atlanta and in an array of small town newspapers across Georgia that the modernized farm would result only from a broad-based movement for the recovery of ordinary southerners’ control over water and power. Similar to Esau’s bartering away his birthright for a mess of

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<sup>22</sup> John W. Greer, “Waterpower Development Would Open the Way to Lifting of Drudgery from Farm Life,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 27, 1919.

<sup>23</sup> “Power for the Masses,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 27, 1919.

<sup>24</sup> See Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 53-54.

pottage, “the bitter mistake” of entrusting hydroelectric “power in our State only to individuals and corporations” alien to the South, stated a 1920 Municipal League advertisement in an *Americus*, Georgia paper, had left “farms, villages, and the homes of the many cold, dreary, powerless and in gloom.” Yet, as with Esau and his brother Jacob, redemption was now available. The Almighty did not forget the “dark homes and the toilers of both city and farm...when the Sun was set ablaze by Him to give light by day, and to draw water from the seas to send it in our streams and rivers, roaring down our mountain sides and valleys, alive with limitless power, to lift the darkness of the night and to help bear the burdens of all the world—our water power.”<sup>25</sup> All that was required for the people to reclaim their inheritance was to seize their rivers’ energy with the “vote to put your state on an equal footing with the corporations” that sent their profits to financial centers far from Georgia’s farms.<sup>26</sup>

To bring Georgia’s Hydro to life, the Municipal League drafted two amendments for the state’s constitution; if passed by the General Assembly, these proposed amendments would go to Georgia voters for their approval. The first proposed amendment would enable all Georgia towns and counties to incur debt through the issuance bonds at a maximum of 14 percent of assessed property tax values so they could finance the construction of local transmission and distribution lines, or even purchase existing facilities. The second, and perhaps more consequential amendment, would instruct the Georgia General Assembly to create an independent hydroelectric commission that would be empowered to issue bonds and would exercise complete control over all waterpower developments—including previously completed dams and reservoirs—across the state.<sup>27</sup> The potential impact of this amendment, however, went far

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<sup>25</sup> Municipal League of Georgia, “Did God Forget?” *Americus (GA) Times-Recorder*, Jul. 16, 1920.

<sup>26</sup> Municipal League of Georgia, “Macon, Savannah, Rome, Augusta, Atlanta, Columbus,” *Americus (GA) Times-Recorder*, Jul. 23, 1920.

<sup>27</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 202-203.

beyond just control over dams. The measure called for wide-ranging transformations in watersheds across the state in a scheme that presaged what would become known as “regional planning.” Instead of building dams and reservoirs meant to provide only hydropower (single-purpose dams), the Municipal League’s proposed legislation called for developing multiple-purpose facilities that would result in “First: Cheap hydro-power for use in city, town and country; Second: The reclamation of the flooded lands of Georgia; Third: The elimination of the mosquito and malaria in this state; and Fourth: The extension of navigation on the navigable streams of Georgia.”<sup>28</sup> This sort of bold, comprehensive development strategy based in public conquest of the state’s rivers played on the visions of plenty, or “fables of abundance,” that had circulated throughout the United States since at least the late-nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Hydropower would “light the home and cook the food of every family.” It would also “pump the water, run the dairy, thresh the grain, and gin the cotton” of every farm, and “drive the wheels of every machine and factory.” It would equitably distribute the benefits of Georgia’s natural bounty to all its citizens, boost the living standards of all Georgians, and thus enable the state to leap forward into the future not on the basis of cartel capitalism, but on the basis of democratic control over water and power.<sup>30</sup>

The Municipal League claimed these changes to the Georgia Constitution had become necessary because “cheap and abundant power is absolutely essential for the prosperity, happiness and progress of every municipality and county of the state of Georgia, to which God has given more than 2,000,000 horsepower of power, now, today, running to waste undeveloped

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<sup>28</sup> “Water Waste,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 3, 1920. For a discussion of regional planning thought in the 1920s, see Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 21-36.

<sup>29</sup> Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Municipal League of Georgia, “We Should Get Together,” *Thomasville (GA) Daily Times-Enterprise*, Mar. 25, 1920.



in the streams of Georgia.” Without these amendments, Municipal League leaders argued, underserved sections of their state would be denied “the right of home rule” and thus the “legal power to act for themselves in the matter of developing and operating their public utilities.” What was more, if the League’s measures failed, more than 2 million Georgians would be unable to enjoy in their residences, farms, and businesses the energy so vital to life in the modern world because they would continue to suffocate in the grip of “foreign” corporations that enjoyed state-sanctioned monopoly status.<sup>31</sup>

The League’s statewide, regional development strategy seemed as if it might bear some fruit. Following spirited debate in early July 1920, the Georgia House Committee on Constitutional Amendments recommended the League’s amendments to the full House by a ten-to-seven vote. Those in favor of the amendments argued that their far-reaching changes would end corporate enforced scarcity and would bring cheap hydropower and a host of other social benefits to millions of rural Georgians for the first time.<sup>32</sup> Yet the League’s detractors—both in the legislature and power company board rooms—worried not only that the amendments would destroy the state’s credit rating, but that they would invite socialism to Georgia, ending capital flows to and harming future industrial growth in the Empire State of the South. Buried in other House committees, the Municipal League’s amendments never made it to the floor of the Georgia House, or Senate, in 1920.<sup>33</sup> As opposition to public power grew more determined, the League met with the same fate across much of the 1920s and finally faded into obscurity by the end of the decade.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “Civic Home Rule Urged by League,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 18, 1923.

<sup>32</sup> “Municipal League Bills Win Favor by a 10 to 7 Vote,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 22, 1920.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 203-204; H.M. Atkinson, “Public Ownership Measures Would Wreck State’s Credit, Declares H.M. Atkinson,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 27, 1920.

<sup>34</sup> “Foes in Senate of Water Power Bill Win Fight,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 21, 1922; “Water Power Bills Lose in Committee,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 25, 1924.

The crusade for a statewide hydropower commission, and for regional planning based in water conservation, appeared to be a non-starter in Georgia. Yet to the public power crowd's delight, and to the power companies' chagrin, the movement for popular ownership and widespread distribution of hydraulic resources was far from dead. The post-World War I attempt to establish a hydroelectric commission in Georgia proceeded alongside a broader national movement for public control over water and power, which, like the campaign in Georgia, increasingly focused on the equitable distribution of natural resources, the end of corporate monopoly, and the importance of rural electrification. The intellectual foundations of the national drive for public power in the 1920s emanated from a loose-knit group of progressive lawyers, engineers, scholars, and policy makers who believed that regional development rooted in water conservation and abundant hydroelectricity would modernize rural districts and end poverty on the farm. Also referred to as the "New Conservation"—"new" because it emphasized not only the Progressives' principle of efficiency but also insisted on equity—this mode of thinking held that the equitable allocation of nature's bounty would transform American society, reversing the regrettable long-term trend that saw both the steady depopulation of farms and concentration of people and power in urban-industrial centers. In the words of historian, sociologist, and leading New Conservationist Lewis Mumford, "regional planning" would initiate "the reinvigoration and rehabilitation of whole regions so that the products of culture and civilization, instead of being confined to a prosperous minority in the congested centers, shall be available to everyone at every point in a region."<sup>35</sup>

The best-known attempt at rural rehabilitation and large-scale regional development in the 1920s—though it followed the first proposal for the Georgia Hydroelectric Commission by several years—came in Pennsylvania under the auspices of a program dubbed "Giant Power," an

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<sup>35</sup> Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 21-36, Mumford quote from 31.

obvious riff on and alternative to Murray's Super Power scheme (see Chapter 2). Conceived in 1923 by Pennsylvania Governor and long-time conservation champion Gifford Pinchot and progressive engineer and public-power advocate Morris Llewellyn Cooke, Giant Power aimed at improving all facets of rural life through a scattered network of coal-mine-based (or, "mine-mouth") generating stations and a fully integrated high-voltage transmission web that could flash affordable electric power to even the remotest corners of the state.<sup>36</sup> "Next to a supply of natural resources sufficient to feed, clothe, and shelter our people," Pinchot told the Pennsylvania legislature in 1925, the issue of cheap electricity "is the greatest of the economic questions which face the human race."<sup>37</sup> And when Giant Power came to life, Pinchot wrote in the *Survey Graphic*, "we can expect...the most substantial aid in raising the standard of living, in eliminating the physical drudgery of life, and in winning the age-long struggle against poverty." These benefits would be available to all consumers, Pinchot insisted, but "our first concern will be with the small user—particularly with the farmer."<sup>38</sup>

Although Pinchot, Cooke, and the Giant Power Board recognized that the bituminous coal fields in the western half of their state would form the foundation of Giant Power and the rural renaissance, their ambitions were not limited to Pennsylvania—or to coal. Rather, Pinchot and Cooke saw Giant Power as a blueprint for a series of state-level projects based in federally controlled waterpower. Indeed, these progressives, like those in Georgia, drew inspiration for their plan from the Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission, believing, in Cooke's words, that an improved United States "is going to grow up out of a revived agriculture and a re-inspiration in small town life and the utilization of these in placing the governments of our individual states on

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 296-313.

<sup>37</sup> Giant Power Survey Board, *Report of the Giant Power Survey Board to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, (Harrisburg: Telegraph Printing Co., 1925), xiii.

<sup>38</sup> Gifford Pinchot, "Giant Power," *Survey Graphic*, Mar. 1, 1924, 561.

a plane of effective social purpose.”<sup>39</sup> The Pennsylvanians’ utopian vision, however, failed to materialize. Members of the Pennsylvania legislature seemed convinced by arguments—some of which were made by Ivy League engineering professors on the National Electric Light Association’s (NELA) payroll—that the Giant Power Board had concocted a “most dangerous plan” that would lead Pennsylvania and the rest of the United States down the path to government ownership of the entire electric industry, state socialism, and even full-fledged communism. What was more, the president of the Pennsylvania Rural Electrification Association argued, no truly popular call for programs such as Giant Power existed because “rural electrification is making real progress at the present time.”<sup>40</sup>

While potential state-level hydroelectric development agencies were emerging and—with very little legislative success—challenging corporate monopoly control over water and power in the early 1920s, a truly region-transforming possibility materialized on the southern reaches of the Tennessee River at a site called Muscle Shoals, intriguing public- and private-power forces alike. When it appeared that the United States would be pulled into the Great War—if only as a producer of munitions and other war materiel—President Woodrow Wilson signed the National Defense Act of 1916 and called for the establishment of nitrate production factories near Muscle Shoals. Munitions manufacturing required large amounts of nitrates, and nitrate production required large amounts of electricity, thus Wilson’s directive included orders for the construction of a large dam on the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Hostilities ended before contractors could complete the nitrate facilities—and the dam (eventually named Wilson Dam) was not completed until 1925—rendering the war-specific plans for Muscle Shoals obsolete. The

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<sup>39</sup> Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 27-30, Cooke quote from 28.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 29-30, quotes from 30; also see Hughes, *Networks of Power*, 302-308.

federal government now owned a hydropower site in north Alabama that it seemed unsure how to use.<sup>41</sup>

In the half decade immediately following the Armistice, a number of parties, including private utility executives, public power advocates, and individual entrepreneurs, competed in a frenzied contest to secure and develop the site at Muscle Shoals. Though dam construction continued through 1920, no viable plans for disposal of the site had yet emerged. In 1921, however, the Harding administration and a Republican dominated Congress, weary of channeling tax dollars into what they considered a pork-barrel project, made clear that they favored private ownership at Muscle Shoals.<sup>42</sup> In light of the government's position, a headline-grabbing offer for the site came in June 1921 from automobile manufacturing mogul Henry Ford. In the Tennessee River Valley, Ford saw a place where the "opportunities are almost limitless" not just for new assembly plants but for the comprehensive development of the entire region.<sup>43</sup> Many ordinary southerners, in Alabama as well as in Tennessee and Georgia, heartily endorsed the Ford proposal as a "most commendable" plan that would mean "infinite labor...and infinite benefit to the American people."<sup>44</sup> Other camps expressed far less enthusiasm for Ford's proposal.

The unlikely collection of forces that stood against Henry Ford's Muscle Shoals bid—southern factory owners, southern power company managers, national public-power liberals, Southern Democrats, and Progressive Republicans—shared a common concern. They all feared that Ford's monopolistic enterprise would exercise unregulated control over one of the most

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<sup>41</sup> See Preston J. Hubbard, "The Muscle Shoals Controversy, 1920-1932," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 18 (Sept. 1959), 195-196; and Matthew L. Downs, *Transforming the South: Federal Development in the Tennessee Valley, 1915-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 14-17.

<sup>42</sup> Downs, *Transforming the South*, 23-24.

<sup>43</sup> "Ford to take Edison to See Muscle Shoals," *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1921; Hughes, *Networks of Power*, 293-295.

<sup>44</sup> "Henry Ford and Muscle Shoals," *The Atlantian*, Apr. 1922; Downs, *Transforming the South*, 26-29.

coveted hydropower sites in the United States and thereafter would come to dominate the region, crowding out all competition. The interests opposing Ford might have worked only to obstruct his efforts in the Tennessee River Valley, restoring the southern power situation—in which private power companies unquestionably dominated—to its default setting. Instead, their shared resistance tilted the issue in favor of public power at Muscle Shoals.<sup>45</sup>

Private electric utilities in the South argued, quite ironically, that Ford's plan would violate the regulatory intentions of the Water Power Act of 1920, which held that private power companies were public service entities with the obligation to furnish their territories with affordable electricity under public oversight. They furthermore claimed that, because the Tennessee was a navigable river and thus subject to the authority of the Federal Power Commission (the regulatory agency created by the 1920 Water Power Act), any power produced at Muscle Shoals must be equitably distributed across the entire Tennessee Valley region.

These positions were all that Nebraska Senator George Norris, a public power champion and New Conservationist, needed to steer the Muscle Shoals debate to his favor. Leading the charge in Congress against Henry Ford, who, faced with resistance from both Progressive Republicans and Southern Democrats finally withdrew his Muscle Shoals offer in 1924, Norris then extended private power's argument to its logical conclusions: If the hydroelectric business were truly a public service, then should the public not exercise complete control over the provision of waterpower? And if equitable distribution of the river's energy to the entire Tennessee Valley were an essential part of serving the greater public good, then should the federal government not control that process? Wouldn't the federal government's direct involvement in the hydroelectric business be the best possible means not only to furnish farmers

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<sup>45</sup> Hubbard, "Muscle Shoals," 198-200.

and other powerless southerners with the benefits of waterpower but also to regulate the private power business?

Joined in the US Senate by fellow Progressive Republicans such as Wisconsin's Robert LaFollette and by Southern Democrats such as Tennessee's Kenneth McKellar, Norris answered these questions by submitting bills to Congress across the 1920s stipulating that the US government must own Muscle Shoals, generate and distribute its energy, and serve as a "yardstick" against which to measure the effectiveness and fairness of the private utility industry. And Norris's vision stretched far beyond north Alabama. Like the Municipal League of Georgia and the Giant Power Board of Pennsylvania, Norris drew inspiration from Ontario Hydro. He foresaw that a high-voltage transmission system would extend more than 300 miles from Muscle Shoals in all directions. This web of power lines would fuel regional development in the South and would empower countless farms and enter urban markets—including Birmingham, Chattanooga, and Atlanta—at cost.<sup>46</sup> "If we should properly develop this project," Norris declared in 1926, "we would tap the lightning that man has called electricity and convert its destructive and ruthless forces into a friendly power that would turn countless wheels of toil all through the South and bring happiness and comfort to thousands of humble homes."<sup>47</sup>

With the ascendance of the Muscle Shoals debate, the relatively limited and isolated state-level fights over who should control water and power had become truly nationwide in scope. This development was cause for worry for utilities across the nation, but especially for those in Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia, as the focus of this newly national power struggle now centered squarely on the Deep South. The masses of southerners who wanted cheap hydroelectricity on their farms or in their homes could for the first time look past

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 17-18; Hubbard, "Muscle Shoals," 199-211; Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 33-35.

<sup>47</sup> Norris quoted in Downs, *Transforming the South*, 49.

monopoly capitalism as the agent for Dixie's regeneration, and could see in federal government action and the region's rivers a viable alternative for a brighter future.

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The state- and national-level fights for public power faced an onslaught of words and actions from the forces of private power, both of which were well in evidence across the 1920s. It is thus necessary to now retrace the 1920s in order to examine private power's attempts to wrest from public power the rhetoric of rural southern modernization. At the annual meeting of the National Electric Light Association (NELA) in June 1927, the organization's eloquent vice president, Preston Arkwright, delivered an address that reverberated throughout the electric utility industry. Arkwright told the convention gathered in Atlantic City that his firm, like all American electric utilities, was not a corporate plunderer bent on ruining the South's rivers and robbing her people. Rather, the Georgia Power Company, which succeeded the Georgia Railway and Power Company and gained control over more than two-thirds of its home state after several acquisitions and mergers in 1926, was "a citizen wherever we serve." Georgia Power, he said, went into rural areas and small towns as a humble public servant, entering new markets with "a declaration that we have selected that particular place in which to become a citizen, not just for an hour, not just a day, but always." The effects of Georgia Power's citizenship, Arkwright claimed, far exceeded the comforts and conveniences of "lighting, heating, and power." His company's alterations of Georgia's rivers brought regional development and broadly shared prosperity, affording ordinary southerners a wide range of benefits. Hydropower, he asserted, "is increasing production, raising wages, and elevating standards of living. It is enabling men to substitute brains for brawn."<sup>48</sup> Georgia Power's 1927 annual report bolstered its president's point

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<sup>48</sup> Arkwright quoted in Dub Taft and Sam Heys, *Big Bets: Decisions and Leaders that Shaped Southern Company* (Atlanta: Southern Company, 2011), 63-64; also see Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 229-231.



(figure 4.1). In a graphic titled “Power Produces Wealth,” the utility demonstrated how just \$250,000 invested in hydroelectric facilities opened new capital streams for the state, employed hundreds of workers in factories, created millions of dollars of new purchasing power, and improved daily life in the sparsely settled countryside.<sup>49</sup>

Arkwright’s colleagues at the 1927 NELA convention delivered similar messages about the manifold social benefits of corporate activity. According to American Telephone and Telegraph executive David F. Houston, a native North Carolinian who had served as Woodrow Wilson’s Agriculture Secretary, private enterprise had not only spread material prosperity but it had made life under industrial capitalism more democratic. The wave of corporate consolidations at the turn of the century, Houston stated, had wrenched American capital from the grips of a few elite families and had redirected that wealth to working men, women, and children in the form of utility stocks and bonds. As a result, “corporations [had become] the real allies of the masses” as well as the “channel through which the small investor has been furnished an easier opportunity to become a capitalist”—a point afforded greater purchase in a time still menaced by lingering

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<sup>49</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1927*, (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1928), 21.

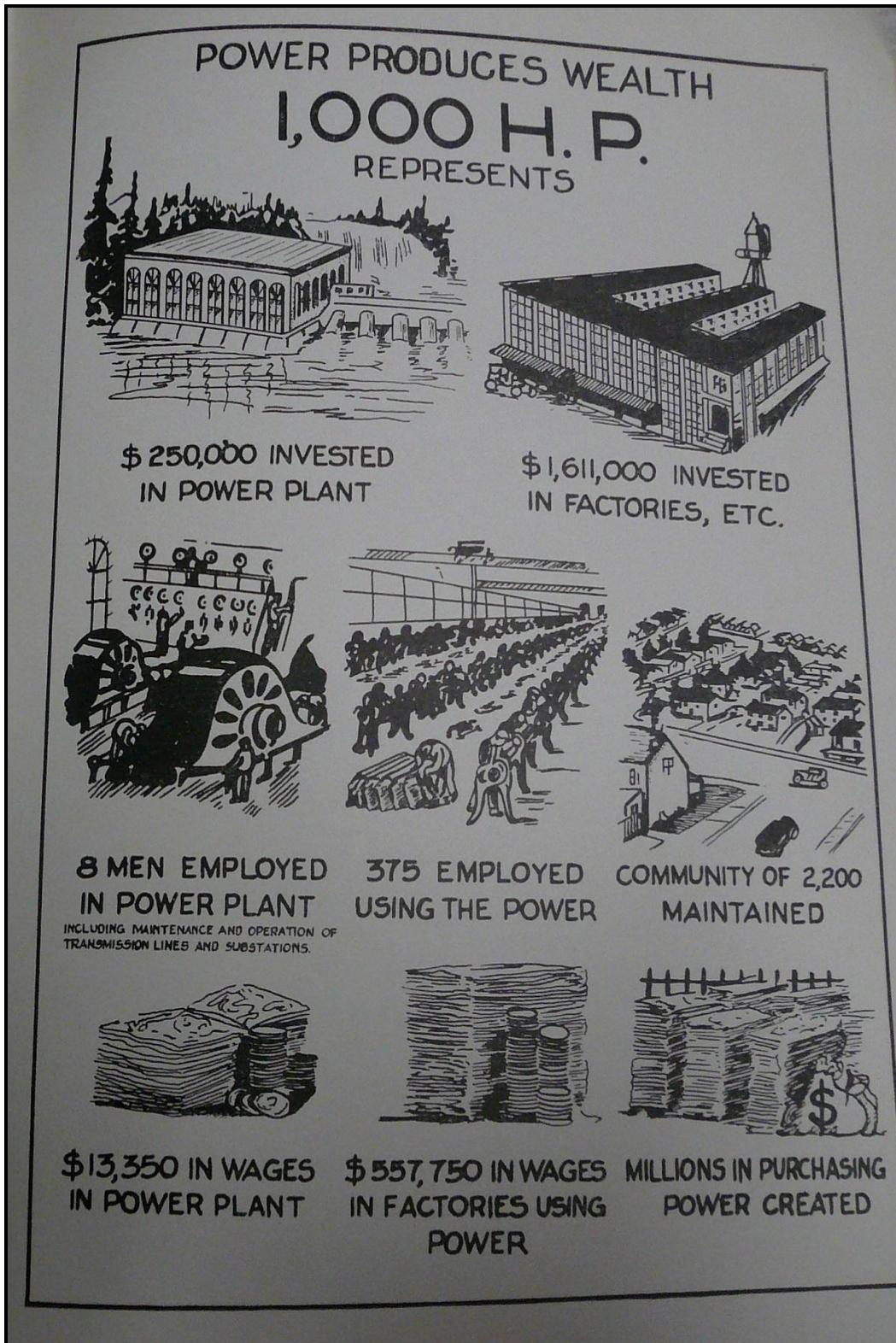


Figure 4.1 Georgia Power Company, Annual Report, 1927.

memories of the red scare.<sup>50</sup> Other speakers noted that farm modernization rates had likewise witnessed dramatic increases due to private utility programs. According to NELA's Rural Electric Service Committee chair, power companies had electrified nearly 230,000 American farms in 1926 alone and had doubled the total number of electrified farms in the preceding three years.<sup>51</sup>

Yet despite their professed confidence in corporate-led social advancement, NELA's leaders feared that all of private business's progress in bringing power to the masses faced serious peril. They worried that "demagoguery and political selfishness" had fueled "a formidable effort...to put the Federal government in the power business." Other NELA presenters shared that same concern, claiming that "the interfering hand of the politician in the development of water power" would lead inexorably to "socialism." No proletarian revolt, however, would be required for the realization of American authoritarianism; in the United States this menace would arrive "not by revolution, as in Russia, but through the insidious invasion of the Government in business."<sup>52</sup> In a speaking tour of the northeast following his NELA address, Arkwright, too, confessed to the fear that public power advocates had "proposed to socialize [the utility business], to turn it over to state and federal government ownership, to remove from the electrical industry all individual initiative and enterprise." Capitulation in this fight would be a fatal mistake, he warned, because the engine driving recent American prosperity—electric power—"has not been brought about by governments, or states, or municipalities, or socialists, or communists, or collectivists," but by "business enterprise." Only

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<sup>50</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 8-9

<sup>51</sup> "Finds Big Business No Longer Feared," *New York Times*, Jun. 9, 1927

<sup>52</sup> "Finds Big Business No Longer Feared," *New York Times*, Jun. 9, 1927.

by ensuring that the private realm continued to lead in developing this indispensable energy source, Arkwright concluded, would progress march steadily forward.<sup>53</sup>

From a certain perspective, the private utility industry in the post-World War I decade seemed to be tilting at windmills. After all, 1920s America roared with industrial production, consumer plenty, laissez-faire economics, and, of course, jazz. The postwar South in particular embraced an “Atlanta Spirit” that promised widespread prosperity based on ever increasing business opportunities. As much as any other sector, the electric industry had reason to celebrate the progress of the 1920s. Over the course of the decade, American utilities expanded their properties by almost 60 percent and southern utilities grew at nearly three times the national average.<sup>54</sup> And while the private utility industry continued to increase in size and strength, public power shrank. The Municipal League of Georgia and Pennsylvania’s Giant Power had failed to produce results and the wave of municipal electric utility success that washed over the nation in the early years of the twentieth century had significantly receded by the beginning of the 1920s and continued to steadily wane across the rest of the decade. At the outset of the 1930s, only 5 percent of American electric power originated in publically owned plants, less than half of 1912 figures.<sup>55</sup>

Arkwright’s and his NELA cohorts’ words and actions in the 1920s, however, suggested that the postwar surge in public power activism posed a real threat to private power’s hegemony; the utility industry knew quite well that it was not jousting with an imaginary opponent. Indeed, the scale of private power’s achievements—made possible largely through state backing and access to the vast pools of capital that funded construction of large hydropower networks and the

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<sup>53</sup> “Arkwright Hits US Ownership,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 10, 1927.

<sup>54</sup> George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 74, 99-100.

<sup>55</sup> David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990), 179-180.

consolidation of utilities into massive corporations—pointed out how much the industry stood to lose if public power triumphed at places such as Muscle Shoals.<sup>56</sup> As private power leaders clearly divined, the movement for publically controlled electricity would not fade gently in the face of corporate ascendance, a reality that appeared all the more likely given the outbreak of varying forms of radicalism following the Great War.<sup>57</sup> Thus in order to protect its foothold in the water and in electrical markets, the private utility industry vigorously countered its foe on multiple fronts, in arenas both local and national. It did so by highlighting the advantages of corporate citizenship for ensuring Americans' welfare and for delivering power to the rural masses, co-opting ideas about race, and heightening anxieties about socialism.

Among the most critical of battlefields in the post-World War I fight for water and power was the farm. Whereas public power activists identified rural electrification as a crucial part of their postwar agenda, the private power industry had long seen the American farm, in terms of profits, as a losing investment and, in terms of politics, as a source of trouble. In any case, because calls for electrical modernity on the farm rang out louder and more frequently after the turn of the century, NELA began to investigate possibilities for rural electrification in the early 1910s. NELA's motivation likely emerged, at least in part, in response to President Theodore Roosevelt's 1909 Country Life Commission report. In its statement, Roosevelt's commission found that electrification, along with telephone lines and modern roads, would mean vast improvements for the countless American farms that fell well below basic urban living standards. Although the president's commission explicitly disavowed direct public assistance in the realization of rural electrification, it did advise farmers in ways that the private utility industry

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<sup>56</sup> See Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped A Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 55.

<sup>57</sup> See Michael Kazin, *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan* (New York: Anchor Books, 2007), 267-268.

perceived as threatening. The report pointed out that it was “the obvious duty of the Government to call the attention of farmers to the growing monopolization of water power” by a handful of private utilities. Farmers had ample justification to fear not only “that the concentration already accomplished is but the forerunner of a far greater degree of monopoly of water power,” but that without grassroots action, “there will probably be developed a monopoly greater than any the world has yet seen.” In order for farmers to benefit from the constantly increasing amounts of hydroelectricity “for cheap transportation, for lighting their homes, and for innumerable...daily tasks on the farm,” the report implied, the waterpower cartels would have to be broken up. The means through which farmers could achieve this sort of trust-busting, the report stated, would be to “organize themselves for mutual advantage and for the protection of their own particular interests” in cooperative organizations.<sup>58</sup> Although the idea of the cooperative (or, more colloquially, the “co-op”) suggested European social democracy, for private utilities it smacked even more worryingly of the Populist insurgency, now spurred on by a federal government that encouraged ordinary people to organize collectivist institutions that would strike at the heart of American free enterprise.

Even though the foundations of a cooperative-based, hydro-powered rural electrification program had been laid in the years before the Great War, neither NELA nor public power advocates took any meaningful action on farm modernization until after the Armistice. Yet as increasing numbers farmers in the post-World War I years formed co-ops and demanded electric service, and more and more public power reformers worked to get electricity to them, utility industry leaders revisited the matter. In a postwar moment rife with public power activism, electric company executives fully realized that if private power refused to supply farmers with

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<sup>58</sup> *Report of the Country Life Commission*, 4-5, 33.

electricity, farmers would find a way to “provide it for themselves.”<sup>59</sup> To meet this rising challenge, NELA commissioned a group, called the Committee on the Relation of Electricity to Agriculture (CREA), at its annual meeting in 1923. Working in concert with the US Department of Agriculture, universities, state-level farm bureaus, and local utilities, NELA charged CREA with two explicit tasks: to conduct experiments on the issue of farm electrification and to electrify one million American farms by 1935. A third goal, both more implicit and urgent than the first two, was to stem the tide of public power’s assault on private power’s dominance over water and power.<sup>60</sup>

In keeping with its stated mission, CREA operated rural electrification “laboratories” in more than twenty states and conducted several high-profile experiments in the mid 1920s. The most well-publicized test case, whose mission was to “determine the optimum economic uses of electricity in agriculture and to study the value of electricity in improved living conditions on the farm,” took place in a dairy and poultry farming area near Red Wing, Minnesota.<sup>61</sup> Although the utility industry loudly proclaimed Red Wing a success —thus burnishing claims about its willingness to promote and provide rural electricity—it knew that circumstances heavily favored CREA. Not only could Red Wing’s farmers rely on relatively steady cash flows from their dairy operations, but conditions in general proved ideal for the experiment as dairy farming adapted quite readily to electrical mechanization. What was more, local power companies and electric equipment manufacturers funded the entire project. Thus in order to tout its accomplishments

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<sup>59</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Paul W. Hirt, *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s-1970s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 251.

<sup>61</sup> E.A. Stewart, J.M. Larson, and J. Romness, *The Red Wing Project on Utilization of Electricity in Agriculture* (n.p.: University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, 1927), 1, in Louisan E. Mamer Rural Electrification Administration Papers, 1927-2002, MSS# 862, box 17, folder 2, Archives Center, National Museum of American History (hereafter Mamer REA Papers).

with a greater measure of credibility, CREA needed to conduct its experiment in less favorable surroundings.<sup>62</sup>

NELA's rural electrification committee found more challenging environs in the Deep South. In 1924, in cooperation with the Alabama Power Company, the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University), and the Alabama Farm Bureau, CREA began a three-year experiment in eastern Alabama that concentrated primarily on desolate, monocrop farms. In terms of farm output, CREA's research met only with disappointment. Cotton and grain cultivation, not to mention a rigid adherence to traditional modes and relations of production that shunned mechanization, proved unable to adjust easily to electrical modernization.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Alabama's "dirt farmers," growing steadily poorer after World War I, rarely had access to cash and simply could not afford to pay Alabama Power's rates.<sup>64</sup>

Nevertheless, throughout the 1920s utilities in the South cast free enterprise as the only mechanism through which widespread rural electrification, and all of its attendant social benefits, would become a reality. To that end—even as CREA operated no laboratories in Georgia—Atkinson's and Arkwright's utility initiated a CREA-style version of corporate-led farm modernization in the mid 1920s and, in 1927, created a Rural Lines Division with the hope that "these rural lines will not only prove self-sustaining, but gratifying from both a social and economic standpoint."<sup>65</sup> For Henry Atkinson, this sort of program augured what free enterprise would soon grant to all farmers. "The time is not far off," he predicted, "when practically every community, large and small, and nearly every square mile of the area of the state will have cheap

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<sup>62</sup> Audra J. Wolfe, "'How Not to Electrocute the Farmer': Assessing Attitudes Towards Electrification on American Farms, 1920-1940," *Agricultural History* 74 (Spring 2000), 518-520; Nye, *Electrifying America*, 297; Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 3-7; "Electric Farming on the Increase," *Literary Digest*, Jan. 30, 1926, 19.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 9-10.

<sup>64</sup> Matthew L. Downs, *Transforming the South: Federal Development in the Tennessee Valley, 1915-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2014), 17-21.

<sup>65</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1928* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1929), 14.



power available.” When that power arrived, he continued, it would provide a jolt to economic activity through “larger home markets for the products of the farm, increased opportunity for employment, opportunity for more diversified farming, [and] increased profits for the farm itself”; it would also boost social progress through “better farm living conditions.”<sup>66</sup> These sorts of experiments, CREA proudly announced, stood as evidence that the farmer now “had an even chance with his city brother in the comforts of life.”<sup>67</sup>

Indeed, many of the farmers (but by no means all) exposed to the private utility industry’s experimentation in the Deep South agreed that, even if electric power made little difference to farm production, electricity and electric appliances dramatically improved everyday life in the rural home.<sup>68</sup> Women seemed overjoyed that electric power eradicated some of their most arduous daily chores, such as pumping, carrying, and heating water, and eased the monumental weekly task of tending to the laundry. Electric refrigeration likewise improved the physical realities of farm life, preserving food for much longer than traditional methods thus promoting better nutrition and health. Electricity upgraded home life in less tangible, but nonetheless important, ways as well. Farm families with electricity spent more evening hours on leisure activities, often reading by the warm glow of incandescent lights or listening to radio programs.<sup>69</sup>

Despite some promising results and prophecies about imminent improvements in daily life on the farm, the potential benefits of electric power lay far in the future for most southern farmers as firms like Georgia Power did not seek broad-based electrification for all rural districts in its territory. Rather, the utility’s farm power division clearly drew on CREA’s findings in Red Wing, Minnesota and eastern Alabama and focused on the types of farms that could at the very

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<sup>66</sup> “Progressive Program Adopted by Georgia Association,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 17, 1928.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Significant numbers of farmers regarded electricity with indifference, fear, and even disdain. See Wolfe, “How Not to Electrocute the Farmer,” 515-529; and Kline, *Consumers in the County*, 99-112.

<sup>69</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 7-12.

least cover the cost of line construction. For the Rural Lines Division to realize a return on the company's investment, it had to supply "electricity to those communities where conditions warranted the necessary line extensions." The Rural Lines Division, in other words, would avoid the most downtrodden cotton growing areas of the state; the power line construction program targeted only those farms that had shifted to "dairying, stock raising and diversified crop production."<sup>70</sup> By any standard, Georgia Power's rural electrification program, like NELA's, produced meager results. Although by 1935 the company had built some 1,000 miles of rural lines, less than 3 percent of Georgia's farms enjoyed electric power at that point.<sup>71</sup> This pattern was not limited to the South. By the end of the 1920s, it had become clear that CREA's true goal was not to electrify the countryside. Instead, as critics at the time recognized, CREA's objective was to demonstrate that the free-enterprise system could develop a useful and self-liquidating farm electrification program, and that farmers—if only they would patiently work with private industry—would benefit mightily from the corporate version of rural electrification. Put another way, CREA aimed to thwart an increasingly credible movement that sought to create a competing, publically owned power system that would generate hydroelectricity and deliver it to rural districts.<sup>72</sup> As it turned out, then, CREA had it right all along: if farmers were to enjoy the benefits of electricity, they would have to provide it for themselves.

Because public power activism threatened utilities' waterpower cartel status, farmers' self-help efforts drew the private utility industry's scorn. As discussed above, power company spokesmen often denounced the post-World War I upswell in calls for public hydropower-based rural electrification as socialism. And yet, even as they agreed that codification of the Municipal

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<sup>70</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 297.

<sup>71</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1936* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1937), 5.

<sup>72</sup> Ronald R. Kline, *Consumers in the County: Technology and Social Change in Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 136-137; D. Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for REA* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 5.

League's plans would invite state overreach and the end of free market capitalism, actors in far-flung corners of the state who aligned with the GRPC's position took the point even further. In its denunciation of the Municipal League's activities, a newspaper from Bainbridge, in southwest Georgia, fretted that if the League met with success, "socialism or Bolshevism" would soon "graft itself onto the democratic people of Georgia." The argument, however, did not cease there. The paper highlighted not just "socialism and Bolshevism" but the alien origins of these ideologies, and seemed to worry in equal measure that Municipal League leaders fell under the direct influence of radicals from Chicago, a "hotbed of socialism."<sup>73</sup> The *Carroll Free Press*, a newspaper from the west Georgia town of Carrollton, likewise suspected that the Municipal League, a "schemer whose smooth words and half truths might cajole the public into lending the public credit to disastrous ventures," emanated from a source foreign to Dixie. Certainly, the possibility that public power interlopers might seize the wealth of the hinterland "to provide electric lights [only] in the brilliant homes of the dwellers in large cities" served for many Georgians as reason enough to take a dim view of the Municipal League's Canadian-inspired designs. But that its activities might lead to "disastrous ventures" with the state treasury held deeper, more troubling meaning; public power reeked of a "tragic era" when the North's aggressors occupied the South, empowered ex-slaves, and disfranchised legions of poor whites. According to the paper, the Municipal League's proposed seizure of the state's rivers and power markets would be a scam far more menacing than anything "carpet-baggers" and "negro legislatures" put over on the "property owner, the wage earner and farmer...in Reconstruction Days."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "Is Socialism or Bolshevism Seeking to Graft itself onto the Democratic People of Georgia?" *Bainbridge (GA) Post-Search Light*, Oct. 2, 1919.

<sup>74</sup> "State Treasury Raid to Aid City People," *Carroll (GA) Free Press*, Dec. 23, 1920.

The invocation of socialism and Reconstruction—both of which resonated across the white South as outsiders’ power-grabbing ploys that sought to force African Americans into equal standing with, if not dominance over, whites—yet again insinuated race and class into public debates on electric energy.<sup>75</sup> Yet whereas anti-monopolists in Dixie had captured and deployed race for their cause in the first two decades of the century, now private utilities and their cohorts seized upon race as a way to burnish their claims about the superiority of free enterprise. At times, utility spokesmen appealed to the most objectionable racist sentiments in denouncing the public power movement and its purported complicity in the debasement of white southerners. “Naturally,” Arkwright granted in 1924, “I was infuriated” at Mayor James Key’s attempt to use state authority to potentially condemn the GRPC and establish public ownership over rivers and utilities. “The only people ostracized politically in this section of the country,” he spat, “are niggers. Being in the public service business may make us servants of the public, but it ought not to make us slaves.”<sup>76</sup>

Yet rather than recruiting racial animosity solely as a means to cast public power as a foreign invasion that would essentially strip whites of their whiteness and reduce them to slaves, Arkwright, the GRPC, and other southern utilities also presented an alluring alternative to this bleak vision for Dixie’s future. Co-opting a part of public power’s repertoire for their own purposes, private power companies suggested that ordinary white southerners rally around free enterprise as a mechanism that would enslave the region’s rivers. The primary purpose of the GRPC’s facilities on the Tallulah-Tugaloo, Arkwright admitted, was to capture “the rain drops falling on the mountains” and to hold the resultant rivers “prisoner behind the great dam at

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<sup>75</sup> See Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 30-32; and Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2008), 81-83.

<sup>76</sup> Arkwright, “Public Activities of Public Utility Men,” Apr. 23, 1924, in *Addresses*, 31.

Burton” so that “their energy may be...controlled.”<sup>77</sup> Just as the slave regime had for slave owners, Arkwright intimated, these hydroelectric properties would relieve southerners of the many burdens of work, “lifting the yoke” from whites’ shoulders, placing “at their finger tips the force of the mountain torrents.”<sup>78</sup>

This newest incarnation of the peculiar institution, however, would not simply bring back to life the mythical Old South where a few self-styled squires lorded graciously over Dixieland. Instead, private enterprise’s hydroelectric complex would be a radical leveling force; it would, companies like the GRPC suggested, create a neo-antebellum utopia that would improve on the fragile “*herrenvolk*” democracy that elite whites had worked to nurture in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup> The hydro-electrified twentieth century, in short, would make all white southerners slave masters. In a live address on Atlanta’s WSB radio station in 1925, Arkwright told listeners that his company’s hydroelectric system did not labor solely for financiers, cotton mill owners, and power company executives. The Tallulah-Tugaloo toiled for even the humblest, most work-weary white southerners as well. These chattels, Arkwright claimed, cheerfully took on their “shoulders the burden of labor. They are freeing men and women from drudgery. Every day they are mitigating more and more the sentence pronounced on man for Adam’s disobedience. They are wiping away the sweat from men’s faces. They are converting laborers into directors of labor [and] work for the rich and poor with the same willingness....The quality of their work is the same to all, without reference to financial, social or political position. They are the servants of the servant as well as of the master.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Arkwright, “The Great Workman,” May 16, 1920, in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 142.

<sup>78</sup> Arkwright, “Lifting the Yoke,” Jun. 20, 1924, in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 279-280.

<sup>79</sup> See Kenneth P. Vickery, “‘Herrenvolk’ Democracy and Egalitarianism in South Africa and the US South,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16 (Jun. 1974): 309-328; and Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 1-5.

<sup>80</sup> Arkwright, “Sons of Light,” Oct. 25, 1925 in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 348-349.

Arkwright's allusions to electric energy as a device that could reanimate at least some version of slavery may on the surface seem to be little more than boilerplate industrial age ballyhoo with a southern twang. To be sure, the concept of the "energy slave," which made its debut in the western world as early as the 1880s, flowed freely throughout both the United States and Europe in the early-twentieth century.<sup>81</sup> Even the General Electric Company saw fit to trade on this metaphor. In 1920s advertisement simply titled "Slaves," General Electric, borrowing from Oscar Wilde's 1891 meditation on the necessity of "mechanical slavery [to] the future of the world," displayed a hard-at-work black man and claimed that "electric light, heat and transportation...are America's slaves."<sup>82</sup>

Notwithstanding the national, and even global, resonance of the "energy slave" metaphor, the promise of slavery's return held special meaning in the 1920s South. Especially given the rapidity of change during and after World War I, many southern whites seemed more than ever to yearn for the days of moonlight and magnolias that supposedly preceded Reconstruction and its tumultuous aftermath.<sup>83</sup> The years following the Great War, according to one historian, saw white southerners united as never before around shared "laudation of the antebellum order [when] it became permissible, even credible, to have owned land and slaves." It was a time, in other words, when "everyone in the white South somehow retroactively acquired slaves and

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<sup>81</sup> See Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 86; and Andrew Nikifarouk, *The Energy of Slaves: Oil and the New Servitude* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2012).

<sup>82</sup> General Electric Company, "Slaves," *Survey Graphic*, (Dec. 1, 1926), 256; Oscar Wilde quote, adapted from the General Electric advertisement, originally in Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," 1891.

<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the clearest statement of this position is Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977/ orig. 1930).

plantations.”<sup>84</sup> The GRPC clearly plugged into this trend, though not to subordinate black southerners or unite and elevate white southerners. To the contrary, references to racial and class matters in the 1920s functioned as an implicit recognition that white southerners were far from united under the banner of cartel capitalism. Antebellum-tinged visions of a white democratic future based on a highly electrified life were part of private utilities’ attempts to control the masses of whites who were openly rebelling against corporate monopoly and the New South order.

Private utilities’ efforts to tamp down discontent among ordinary southerners went beyond the large-scale matters of racial hierarchy and social organization. Southern energy firms extended their appeal to people’s private affairs, casting hydroelectric servitude as a force that would afford the masses cleaner, more comfortable, more convenient lives. Of course, Arkwright granted in a 1924 public address, the “wonder worker” played an indispensable role in the public spaces of modern life. “We see into the night with the electric light. We take on a giant’s strength with the electric motor.... We travel beneath the ground in speeding trains. We see the world in moving pictures.... We fling our voices over thousands of miles by telephone and radio.”<sup>85</sup> But most significantly, the private hydropower system would improve day-to-day living standards. “It is as if,” he proposed, “there stand behind the wall servants on tiptoe to spring forth at your summons, waiting to do your bidding.” Hydroelectricity, he continued, worked as “a silent and unobtrusive servant in the home, always ready, without rest, vacation, sick leave or sleep, eager for its task, tireless, day and night, Sundays, holidays, every hour of every day of every year. It will banish drudgery and bring convenience and comfort and ease and cheer and joy to human beings.” It would be easy to attribute such idealized sentiments to naked salesmanship meant to

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<sup>84</sup> Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 480-481.

<sup>85</sup> Preston Arkwright, “Some of the Marvel of Electricity,” *Manufacturers Record*, Dec. 4, 1924, 88.

fill middle-class homes with electric irons, fans, and coffee percolators; to be sure, more household electrical consumption equaled more revenue for the company. Yet Arkwright took things beyond appliance sales, explicitly linking hydroelectric servitude and improved daily living conditions to his utility's struggles with public power. Ordinary southerners, he added in his closing remarks, could ensure that the further development of their electrical work force would "not [be] restricted or impeded by unjust laws or unfair public sentiment" if they would only resist the "deadening hand of government ownership."<sup>86</sup>

Georgia Railway and Power certainly did not act alone in attempting to anthropomorphize and enslave electricity in order to soften white southerners' attitudes toward the private realm in the 1920s. Indeed, the reincarnation of the slave/servant as racialized consumer item to aid white workers in daily life appeared all across the South, and the nation, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. As historian Grace Hale notes, such techniques "merged the service of the product with the service of the black figure promoting it... African Americans, whether symbolically or materially, worked for the white folks." The use of such icons was crucial to a coherent sense of whiteness, as "being white, being a consumer, being a modern American, meant having some kind of black help."<sup>87</sup> Among the many southern utilities that cast electric energy as an embodied, human form eager to please the master and ease the everyday burdens of home life was the Appalachian Power Company, which served parts of North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Appalachian Power played on the "Sambo" and "pickaninny" stereotypes in its 1920s advertisements with a character called

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<sup>86</sup> Arkwright, "The Wonder-Worker," in Arkwright, *Addresses*, 300-301.

<sup>87</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, "'For Colored' and 'For White': Segregating Consumption in the South," in Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds. *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 166-169, quote from 168-169. Similar themes are also developed in M. M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); and Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 34-57.



“Elec,” a faithful soul dressed as a bellhop, keen “to serve you” and to help protect the home from the perils of darkness.<sup>88</sup>

The Alabama Power Company, Georgia Railway and Power’s Birmingham-based sister utility, was the southern utility that most effectively put this imagery to use with its enduringly popular figure named Reddy Kilowatt. Though he ultimately appeared as a cute and almost cuddly cartoon with clownishly large feet, a body made of lightning bolts, and a light bulb nose, early drafts of Reddy Kilowatt retained many of the attributes that characterized electric power as a racialized servant. According to Reddy Kilowatt creator Ashton Collins, Alabama Power’s merchandising and commercial manager from 1925 to 1932, Reddy—a homophonic play on the idea that electricity was always ready to serve—was born in 1926 while “I was racking my brain for a way to sell more electricity to household users. I decided to play up the angle of electricity being the world’s cheapest servant.” Among the ideas Collins spent time “toying around with” were, rather tellingly, electricity as a “Negro bellhop” or a “colored servant.”<sup>89</sup> In the end, though, he believed that if his new character would have appeal for consumers beyond the South, he would have to avoid any such explicit references to African American servitude because they were “too racial or too sectional, not universal like electricity.”<sup>90</sup> After reportedly admiring a thunder storm, Collins settled on his new “spokeservant” as electric energy embodied, nature captured in human form, ready to serve in any home.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Appalachian Power Company, “An Alert Policeman,” in Public Utilities Advertising Association, *Five Hundred Representative Public Utility Advertisements, 1928 Edition* (n.p.: Public Utilities Advertising Association, 1928), 34.

<sup>89</sup> Carter Henderson, “Reddy Kilowatt Leaps into Various New Jobs for Private Utilities,” *Wall Street Journal*, Jun. 15, 1956, box 1, folder 11, Reddy Kilowatt Records, 1929-1999, AC0913, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Washington, DC (hereafter RkW Records); and untitled document, c. 1936, 2, box 1, folder 10, RkW Records.

<sup>90</sup> “Reddy is Ready,” *Investor’s Reader*, Sept. 17, 1947, box 1, folder 11, RkW Records.

<sup>91</sup> Hale, “‘For Colored’ and ‘For White,’” 168.

Alabama Power cast Reddy Kilowatt as a dedicated worker who had brought “the efficiency, easy, safety and convenience” of hydropower into “stores, farms and factories all over this area and the nation.” Reddy’s true calling, however, was to function as “the help,” a drudge who would make domestic labor, especially for women, almost pleasurable.<sup>92</sup> “Reddy Kilowatt, your Electric Servant,” one Alabama Power spokesman crowed, “has made [a tremendous difference] in living over the past fifty years. There’s no more slaving over a hot stove or breaking your back washing and ironing. Today, the housewife merely plugs in an appliance or flips a switch and Reddy goes to work for her....Cheerful, hard-working, friendly Reddy pokes his bright nose and his capable hands into most of the homes of this area to brighten the lives and lighten the work of thousands.”<sup>93</sup>

Beyond making housework a delight, Reddy had another, more significant job to do. As Preston Arkwright admitted in 1925, Ashton Collins granted that though his most visible work was to sell ever more electricity, Reddy Kilowatt functioned as an evangelist for private enterprise by directing people’s attention away from larger issues. In response to an inquiry as to Reddy’s almost immediate popularity among utilities in the 1920s, an electric industry newsletter speculated that even if many people were content not to analyze the situation too closely, “there are cynics who say [Reddy Kilowatt’s effectiveness] is proof that an established dictum must be revised—that advertising, formerly written for a twelve-year-old mind, should now be directed to a six-year-old mentality.” Collins replied that the answer could not be found solely in simple (or insultingly simplistic) sales techniques. Reddy’s success, he countered, clearly spoke to an issue

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<sup>92</sup> Many scholars have noted the ways that companies selling consumer goods—including appliance, gas, and electric companies—crafted a gender approach in the 1920s and after to appeal to especially to middle-class women. See for example, Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), esp. 89-99; and Mark H. Rose, *Cities of Light and Heat: Domesticating Gas and Electricity in Urban America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), esp. 171-188.

<sup>93</sup> “Reddy Kilowatt, Your Electric Servant,” c. 1926, 1, 4, box 1, folder 3, RkW Records.

weighing on the minds of southern utility managers. Reddy Kilowatt, according to Collins, must be understood as a way to encourage consumers to “escape to fantasy”—indeed as a means of distraction from—the “economic and political upheavals” of the mid 1920s. “The most important consideration to the companies using Reddy Kilowatt service is that they have found a way to dramatize and humanize their relations with the controller of their destinies, the Public.”<sup>94</sup>

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The debates over public power raged on as the 1920s ended and the 1930s began. The chapter now turns from the 1920s to the 1930s to explore the seeming triumph of public power and private power’s response. From a certain perspective, it seemed like the public opinion that Ashton Collins cited could hardly have mattered less to power companies’ operations as the 1930s approached. In the decade following the conclusion of World War I, the American electric utility industry experienced stunning rates of growth. Between 1920 and 1929, power companies’ kilowatt-hour sales expanded by more than two-fold while the United States’ population grew by slightly more than 10 percent. Alongside modest increases in domestic and commercial electrical usage, utilities benefitted most from lucrative contracts with factories, which in the mid-1920s overtook a streetcar sector reeling from the onslaught of the automobile, as the most voracious American electrical consumers. This explosion in power production was made possible to a large extent through consolidation into gargantuan holding companies, organizations loaded with the seemingly unlimited financial resources to make constant expansion possible.<sup>95</sup> Atkinson and Arkwright’s Atlanta-based utility not only fit this model, but far exceeded it. Whereas the company generated and sold some 294 million kilowatt hours in

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<sup>94</sup> “Reddy Kilowatt—Goodwill Ambassador-at-Large for 156 Electric Companies,” *Edison Electric Institute Bulletin*, Nov. 1940, 506, box 1, folder 10, RkW records.

<sup>95</sup> Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 186-187.

1920, it produced over 1 billion kilowatt hours in 1930.<sup>96</sup> Much of the capital required for Georgia Railway and Power's growth came from its association with the Alabama based Southeastern Power and Light holding company, which acquired the GRPC in 1926, a move that in turn precipitated a round of consolidation in Georgia and the creation of the truly state-dominating Georgia Power Company.<sup>97</sup> As historian Paul Hirt rightly points out, "this decade was indeed the 'roaring twenties' for the electrical industry."

And yet southern electric companies like Alabama Power and Georgia Railway and Power fully recognized that, despite almost unceasing increases in size and wealth as well as help from characters like Reddy Kilowatt, their destinies may well have lain in the masses' hands: the decade was a roaring one for public power advocates as well. Even as proposed alternatives to private power monopoly, such as Giant Power and the Georgia Hydroelectric Commission, faded into obscurity after the mid-1920s, advocates for popular ownership continued to press their case into the early 1930s. In 1927, shortly after the formation of the Georgia Power Company, a large coalition of citizens from around the state, including white union members and African American activists, objected not only to what they saw as inevitable increases in streetcar fare and power rates. They also the voiced displeasure that while "the power company owned the city, [it] now seeks to own the state of Georgia."<sup>98</sup> Attempting to capitalize on this wave of popular discontent, James Key returned to politics after spending most of the 1920s in private legal practice. In 1930, he ran for another term as mayor of Atlanta on a platform that included municipal ownership of electric properties. Following his victory, Key

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<sup>96</sup> Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Annual Report, 1920* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1921), 6, Georgia Railway and Power Company: Georgia Railway and Power Company Notebook, W.L. Eury Appalachian Collection, Belk Library Special Collections, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina; Georgia Railway and Power Company, *Annual Report, 1930* (Atlanta: Georgia Railway and Power Company, 1931), 6.

<sup>97</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 213-216.

<sup>98</sup> "Hearing of Car Fare Testimony will End Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 19, 1927.

tried to revive the spirit of his earlier efforts by sending a bill to the Georgia General Assembly that would grant Atlanta both independent borough status and the “authority to condemn gas and electric properties throughout the state in an effort to establish municipal ownership here.”<sup>99</sup>

Though his newest proposal gained some support in the legislature, Key and his supporters had to live with disappointment once again. The 1931 version of the Key Bill died in committee.

Public power’s reach in the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, extended well past Georgia. National figures continued to cry foul over what they believed were power industry abuses. In public speaking engagements, books, magazines, and newspapers, activists denounced the concentration of hydropower control in the hands of an increasingly few holding companies. As New York based labor activist H.S. Raushenbusch pointed out in 1929, just seventeen holding companies controlled nearly 86 percent of power generation in the United States.<sup>100</sup> This situation, he wrote in the previous year, has “brought a very real threat of new dynastic control over us through the economic and political mastery exercised by the feudalism of superpower.” “A rather complete system of public control” over the power business at the federal level, Raushenbusch argued, had now become necessary.<sup>101</sup>

Though few openly agreed with Raushenbusch’s call for complete public control over the utility industry, many actors nevertheless pushed for more federal involvement. Still chief among them was Senator George Norris. Norris revived his Muscle Shoals fight in the Senate in 1928, only to meet with the obstruction of President Herbert Hoover. Perhaps even more significantly, Norris and his colleagues prodded the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate the utility industry for its public relations practices, a probe that exposed widespread propaganda efforts and forced the power issue to the front and center of national elections in 1928, 1930, and

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<sup>99</sup> “Charter Changes Ask Sweeping Power for City,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 7, 1931.

<sup>100</sup> H.S. Raushenbusch, “The Centralization of Power Control,” *The Nation*, Sept. 18, 1929, 297.

<sup>101</sup> H.S. Raushenbusch and Harry W. Laidler, *Power Control* (New York: The New Republic, 1928), 287

1932.<sup>102</sup> What the FTC uncovered after a multi-year inquiry, in the words of New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt during his 1932 campaign for the presidency, was “a systematic, subtle, deliberate, and unprincipled campaign of misinformation” to propagandize the public as to the virtues of private power. This effort “permeated the schools, the editorial columns of newspapers, the activities of political parties, the universities and the printed literature of our bookstores.”<sup>103</sup> Making matters worse for the utility industry, many people laid blame for the 1929 stock market crash, and needless to say the resulting depression, at the feet of the byzantine, interlocking utility holding company network. Several of the largest such firms lost as much as 98 percent of their severely bloated equities values, a catastrophe, according to economist John Kenneth Galbraith, which stood as one of the five primary causes of the crash.<sup>104</sup> For candidate Roosevelt in 1932, though, words, investigations, and assignment of culpability had proven insufficient to correct the problems with the electric industry. There must be action. The public’s right, he said, to own their rivers and manage their power systems must be more than the “yardstick” for which Senator Norris had long advocated. Public power, Roosevelt said in a 1932 campaign speech, should be “a ‘birch rod’ in the cupboard to be taken out and used only when the ‘child’ gets beyond the point where a mere scolding does no good.”<sup>105</sup> If the 1920s had been a roaring time for electric utilities and their holding companies, the 1930s promised

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<sup>102</sup> Hubbard, “Muscle Shoals,” 205-206. For a thorough discussion of the Federal Trade Commission’s investigation into holding companies’ and electric utilities’ public relations practices, see Carl Dean Thompson, *Confessions of Power Trust: A Summary of the Testimony Given in the Hearings of the Federal Trade Commission on Utility Corporations Pursuant to Resolution no.83 of the United States Senate Approved February 15, 1928* (New York: EP Dutton & Co., 1932).

<sup>103</sup> Roosevelt quoted in Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 227.

<sup>104</sup> One of the largest holding companies, the Electric Bond and Share Company, which owned significant shares of the Southeastern Power and Light Company, experienced one of the most extreme, though not wholly unrepresentative, cases of bubble-bursting during and after the 1929 crash. From the summer of 1928 to the fall of 1929, Electric Bond and Share stock prices rose from \$90 per share to \$187 per share. By the nadir of the depression in July 1932, Electric Bond and Share’s stock traded for \$3 per share. Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 216-217.

<sup>105</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Campaign Address in Portland, Oregon on Public Utilities and Development of Hydro-Power,” Sept. 21, 1932, Gerhardt Peters and John T. Wolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=88390>>, accessed Apr. 9, 2016.

very different outcomes. In spite of the glitzy image of labor-saving consumer goods, the help of Reddy Kilowatt, and even the promise of a neo-antebellum utopia, the southern masses would no longer be distracted in their quest for power. In 1932, Roosevelt won crushing majorities across the South, and indeed across the nation, based in no small measure on his promise to use his birch rod to beat private energy monopolies back from their hold over the Dixie's rivers and address the Great Depression.

Those who would realize the most benefit from the spanking Roosevelt meant to deal to the hydropower cartels were the masses, both rural and urban; and the people would be vital to maintaining a new disciplinary regime, one that would not end with corporal punishment. Roosevelt promised voters that, once he took power, their vigilance would ensure “that this ‘lusty younger child’ of the United States [would] be kept very closely under the watchful eye of its parent, the people of the United States.” Such a tightly controlled environment had become necessary, he stated, because “electricity is no longer a luxury. It is a definite necessity. It lights our homes, our places of work and our streets. It turns the wheels of most of our transportation and our factories. In our homes it serves not only for light, but it can become the willing servant of the family in countless ways. It can relieve the drudgery of the housewife and lift the great burden off the shoulders of the hardworking farmer.” But this situation for many people was not yet a reality, he admitted, as “we are most certainly backward in the use of electricity in our American homes and on our farms.” It was for this reason that he frequently spoke of a “new deal,” one that could “be applied very definitely to the relationship between the electric utilities on the one side, and the consumer and investor on the other.” It was a deal that would ensure that “the water power [would] belong to all the people,” and that “the title to this power must rest

forever in the people.”<sup>106</sup> Though he delivered this speech to an audience in the Pacific Northwest, Roosevelt had more immediate aims for water power cultivation in another region. Soon after beginning his first term in the spring of 1933, the new president and his Republican ally Senator Norris looked make a long-held dream a reality: They would transform the South by creating a Tennessee Valley Authority based at Muscle Shoals, Alabama.<sup>107</sup>

Public power took a dramatic turn with the depression and the New Deal’s success revealed that in the 1930s there was far more sympathy for public solutions. Roosevelt’s pledge to put the water under the people’s authority seemed to satisfy the demands of the southern masses who had long tried to use state power to place power-producing rivers and electrical networks under public control. To be sure, with the implementation of the TVA and the larger New Deal in the South, massive changes in the region were certain to soon follow. In addition to answering the regional planners’ calls for water conservation, soil restoration, reforestation, flood control, and industrial diversification, the TVA set important precedents for rural electrification through cooperative associations. Yet for the area outside of the Tennessee River valley—essentially all of Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, as well as the majority of Alabama and Mississippi—the TVA model offered only the potential to bring power to the masses (figure 4.3). Many rural southerners, and indeed many farmers across the nation, would have to continue to work, in an adaptation of a compelling term, to make their own new deal.<sup>108</sup> Ordinary rural southerners were not grateful supplicants who would wait patiently for

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> See Preston J. Hubbard, *Origins of the TVA: The Muscle Shoals Controversy, 1920-1932* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961); Thomas K. McCraw, *TVA and the Power Fight, 1933-1939* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1971); North Callahan, *TVA: Bridge over Troubled Waters* (South Brunswick, NJ: AS Barnes, 1980); Philip Selznick, *TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study of Politics and Organization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); Michael McDonald and John Muldowny, *TVA and the Dispossessed: The Resettlement of Population in the Norris Dam Area* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982)

<sup>108</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990).



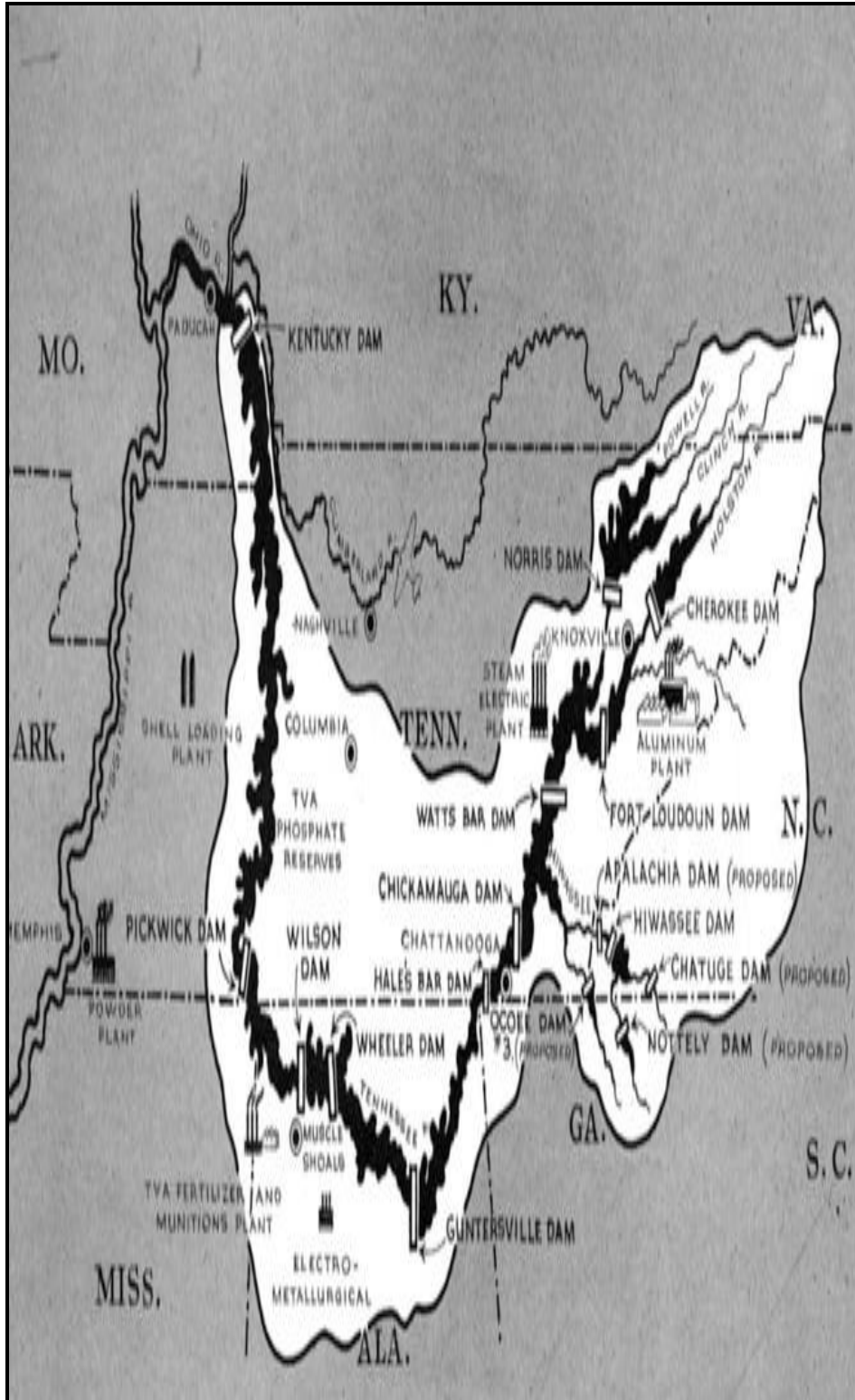


Figure 4.2 Map of the Tennessee Valley Authority, ca. 1939.

saviors from Washington to offer them enviro-technological salvation. Under the New Deal, they would not become “the passive objects of state power.” Rather, southerners acted quite a lot like their counterparts in and around the Rocky Mountains who “eagerly called the federal government’s attention to their areas, voluntarily applied for federal loans for rural electrification, and counteracted local opposition to the New Deal.”<sup>109</sup> Devastated by the depression, southern farmers had to persist in their fight to build rural electrification networks and to rearrange the flow of hydraulic resources in order to bring power to the masses and regenerate Dixie in a way that would serve their needs.

To be sure, the TVA model gave many southerners good reason to anticipate the arrival of a broad-based rural electrification program. The architects of the Tennessee Valley Authority explicitly included rural electrification, and farm modernization more generally, in the agency’s structure. In fact, the TVA Act of 1933 not only reinforced the “preference” principle—a standard, dating to the Reclamation Act of 1906, which held that public establishments must have first priority in the disposal of government generated hydroelectricity—but took it a step further by including in the list of preferred institutions “cooperative organizations of citizens or farmers, not organized or doing business for profit, but primarily for the purpose of supplying electricity to its own citizens or members.” Beyond simply allowing potential cooperatives the first right of refusal for TVA’s waterpower, the TVA act explicitly sought “to promote and encourage the fullest possible use of electric light and power on farms within reasonable distance of any of its transmission lines” and granted the new agency the “power to construct

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<sup>109</sup> Brian Q. Cannon, “Power Relations: Western Rural Cooperatives and the New Deal,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 31 (Summer 2000), 135.

transmission lines to farms and small villages that are not otherwise supplied with electricity at reasonable rates.”<sup>110</sup>

The people of Corinth, Alcorn County, Mississippi (in the extreme northeastern corner of the state) were the first to jump at the TVA’s rural electrification possibilities. Prior to the advent of the TVA, only about 100 homes and shops in Corinth (a town with over 6,200 residents) drew electric power from a small coal-fired generating plant owned and operated by the Mississippi Power Company, a subsidiary of Commonwealth & Southern (C&S), the New York based holding company that had acquired the Southeastern Power and Light Company and all its subsidiaries in May 1929. Fewer than one in 100 farms in Alcorn County had electricity in 1933; in fact, only about 1.5 percent of all farms in Mississippi had been electrified by the end of 1934. Many Corinthians were ready for times to change. In light of the recently passed TVA act, local furniture store owner Will McPeters welcomed several county leaders and David Lilienthal, one of the TVA’s three original directors, into a back room in his shop in January 1934 where the great “Corinth Experiment” began. Flush with a \$154,000 loan from the TVA, McPeters, a local banker named Ben Liddon, and a farmer named Delphus Crow led the way in forming the Alcorn County Electric Cooperative. By June 1934, Alcorn County Electric had bought out Mississippi Power (with the blessing of C&S’s CEO, Wendell Willkie), electrified several farms, and begun drawing hydroelectricity from TVA transmission lines. The Corinth Experiment was an unmitigated success. Even in a severely depressed section of the severely depressed South, Mississippi’s first federally sponsored rural cooperative earned enough gross revenue in its first six months to project that it could fully repay the TVA in only one-third the projected length of

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<sup>110</sup> Tennessee Valley Authority Act, 73<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., HR 5081, May 18, 1933. For a discussion of the development of the preference principle, see US General Accounting Office, *Federal Power: The Evolution of Preference in Marketing Federal Power* (Washington, DC: US General Accounting Office, 2000), 5-7, <<http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/653502.pdf>> (accessed Apr. 10, 2016).

the original loan.<sup>111</sup> Thereafter, Alcorn County served as a blueprint for the rest of the Tennessee Valley. In the three years following the foundation of the Alcorn co-op, the TVA worked with local people to establish eighteen other cooperatives in its territory and electrified farms at a rate twice greater than the national average.<sup>112</sup>

Alcorn's congressional representative, the white supremacist demagogue and public power enthusiast John Rankin, gushed in 1934 that "the greatest development yet undertaken by the TVA"—the legislation for which he co-sponsored in the House—"is that of rural electrification. We expect to light every home in that section of the country and to give farmers electric lights and power."<sup>113</sup> Farmers in other areas in the South, however, would not receive electric lights and power so quickly; the Corinth Experiment was not easily transportable beyond the confines of the Tennessee Valley. Locked into a limited territory and facing bitter opposition, the TVA could only go so far in helping farmers and other rural residents across Dixie gain access to the power flowing through their rivers.

The obstacles standing in the way of a region-wide rural electrification program rooted in public hydropower did not result strictly from geographical limitations or technological shortcomings; the TVA's designers estimated that power lines could stretch more than 200 miles from the powerhouse at Muscle Shoals. Rather, the TVA's limitations sprang largely from corporate and political opposition. Private utilities, anti-New Dealers, and other defenders of free enterprise worked tirelessly in the 1930s to obstruct the TVA in particular and public power in general. Much of the resistance to the expansion of government power networks was, as it had long been, discursive. Not surprisingly, New Deal and public power detractors in Congress

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<sup>111</sup> Alcorn County Electric Power Association, "History," < <http://www.ace-power.com/about/history/>>, accessed Apr. 9, 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 100.

<sup>113</sup> Rankin quoted in Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 39.

savaged the TVA as a scheme “patterned clearly after one of the Soviet dreams” and as “an attempt to graft onto the American system the Russian idea.”<sup>114</sup> In tones much more muted, though certainly in agreement with the sentiments expressed in Congress, Preston Arkwright warned his fellow Georgians that the TVA had forced America to “a crossroads. As a nation, we are [now] half individualist and half collectivist. Either the government must withdraw from business, or it must take over all business. The two systems cannot continue side by side. The people must choose which they want.”<sup>115</sup>

For the most part, however, southern utility officials for much of the 1930s avoided the type of language that explicitly equated the TVA with the red menace. Instead, in their efforts to convince the people to make the right choice, and to protect their hydroelectric properties and electrical markets, power company managers denounced the TVA as a federal invasion of their region. In response to a north Georgia cooperative’s attempt to purchase power from the TVA, Georgia Power claimed that “the Tennessee Valley Authority invaded this State for the purpose of competing with the Georgia Power Company...in eight Northwest Georgia Counties.”<sup>116</sup> Here was an opportunity for the Atlanta-based utility to once again drag race—and, along with it, socialism—into the public power issue by likening the New Deal’s incursion into the Tennessee Valley (and possibly beyond) to the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Perhaps as much as any previous period, it seemed an opportune time to do so. Substantial minorities of southerners—business leaders not least among them—worried right from the beginning that the New Deal would upend the region’s racial order and, along with it, its “racialized capitalism.” The spokesman for this faction was the “Wild Man from Sugar

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<sup>114</sup> Both quotes—from Rep. Joe Martin (R-MA) and Rep. Charles Eaton (R-NJ)—originally in Richard Rudolph and Scott Ridley, *Power Struggle: The Hundred-Year War over Electricity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 72.

<sup>115</sup> Arkwright quoted in Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 132.

<sup>116</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1936* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1937), 6-7; also see “Invasion of State by TVA Attacked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1936.

Creek,” Georgia governor Eugene Talmadge, who through much of the 1930s crusaded against “Negroes, the New Deal, . . . and Karl Marx” with campaign coffers that businessmen had discretely stuffed. The Wild Man raged that this inevitable, topsy-turvy racial situation, which would invite the dreaded thought of “social equality” to Dixie, would emanate directly from the White House. Not only did the president welcome African Americans into administration as advisers and into his social circle as friends, but the First Lady, Talmadge reported, at least once went to “some nigger meeting, with two escorts, niggers, on each arm.” “Cotton Ed” Smith, a US Senator from South Carolina, and his proxies filed their agreement with Talmadge’s viewpoint when they accused New Dealers of being members of the “Roosevelt-Nigger Democratic Party” and warned that federal programs would soon lead to the day when “negroes will be allowed to propose wedlock to white girls.”<sup>117</sup>

Preston Arkwright signaled his explicit agreement with this sentiment in a 1937 speech in Augusta, Georgia. The TVA, Arkwright warned his audience, would replicate the ravages visited on Dixie in the 1860s and 1870s. Just as General William T. Sherman began his infamous “March to the Sea” near Chattanooga in the Tennessee River Valley, Arkwright intoned, so would the TVA cut through the heart of Georgia, overtaking power-producing rivers and electrical markets in the entire state. Following this new Yankee invasion, the supposed horrors of Reconstruction would once again plague the South and the daily lives of its residents with racial equality. After the TVA had overtaken Georgia, Arkwright reported, it would dole out patronage jobs to African American men and create a situation in which “Negro meter-readers will visit the homes of farmers who have to leave their wives and children while they go to

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<sup>117</sup> Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 7-20, quotes from 13-14, 18. Historian T. Robert Hart has also found that resistance to the New Deal’s regional planning efforts in South Carolina drew on race and the Lost Cause. See Hart, “The Lowcountry Landscape: Politics, Preservation, and the Santee-Cooper Project,” *Environmental History* 18 (January 2013): 127-156.

plow.”<sup>118</sup> With his invocation of the TVA as a federal “menace” that would implicitly invite black men to assault white women, Arkwright tapped into Talmadge’s anti-New Deal narrative, helping to forge a lasting connection between “race-baiting populists and right-wing industrialists.”<sup>119</sup>

This coalition remained relatively weak—at least until the modern Civil Rights era—and the overwhelming majority of southern voters continued to support Roosevelt and his New Deal throughout the 1930s. Yet even if they could not persuade the southern masses that federal power programs would disturb Dixie’s dearly held racial hierarchy and free enterprise system, utilities tried other means to thwart the TVA’s expansion. At times, the resistance took an ugly, nearly violent turn. Based on Alcorn’s successful rural cooperative experiment with TVA power, local people in northwest Georgia’s Catoosa County formed a co-op in 1935 with the goal of building a transmission and distribution network that would interconnect with and draw power from the TVA. In a legal battle between the TVA and the Tennessee Electric Power Company (a C&S subsidiary), both local witnesses and TVA officials testified that the “Georgia Power Company deliberately sabotaged this effort.” At first, representatives of Georgia Power reportedly “swarmed through the region making false and misleading statements about the nature of the cooperative undertaking and tried to frighten the farmers from joining” the Catoosa co-op. Later, just as the cooperative began stringing electricity wires across the county, Georgia Power crews quickly installed “spite lines” in areas locals had targeted for their first transmission facilities. Because Georgia law and TVA policy prohibited the construction of duplicate power

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<sup>118</sup> “Arkwright Uses Race Issue,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Jun. 3, 1937.

<sup>119</sup> “Arkwright Uses Race Issue,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Jun. 3, 1937; Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 19. The cultivation of the links between race-baiting populists and anti-New Deal industrialists in the South from the 1930s to the 1950s is discussed at length in Katherine Rye Jewell, “As Dead as Dixie: The Southern States Industrial Council and the End of the New South, 1933-1954” (PhD diss., Boston Univ., 2010).

lines in a given area, the company's "spite lines" prevented the co-ops, at least temporarily, from completing their work.

Presumably, many of Catoosa County's residents strongly opposed such treachery and filed complaints through the proper legal channels; at least one woman, though, decided to take matters into her own hands. Upon seeing a Georgia Power crew preparing to build a "spite line" on her property, a Mrs. A.M. Tate loaded her rifle. After approaching the workers and issuing a stern warning, "she waved her gun and a lineman scurried down the trunk" of the tree in which he had been working. "Another who had been standing at the foot of the big hickory hopped over a fence [and ran] out of the yard." People in Tennessee reported similar confrontations.<sup>120</sup> Eventually, three cooperatives in northwest Georgia would become TVA customers, but the message was clear: determined as rural people were to benefit from public power, the TVA's expansion would not come easily.

Accusations of socialism and underhanded tactics failed to shoo rural southerners away from the promises inherent in the New Deal's signature public power accomplishment. Negotiations over the physical extent of the TVA's operations, though, proved rather effective at keeping southern farmers in the dark, at least in the short term. Less than one month after Roosevelt signed the TVA bill into law, C&S's chief executive Wendell Willkie arranged to meet with Arthur E. Morgan, the president's first appointee to the three-person directorate of the TVA. As a devoted regional planner and educator, Morgan was most interested in holistically reconstructing the Tennessee Valley; he considered power production a decidedly secondary by-product of water conservation. As such, Willkie had a counterpart with whom he could bargain and the two quickly agreed that competing power networks were wasteful and, thus, that the

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<sup>120</sup> "Willkie and the TVA" *The New Republic*, Sept. 2, 1940, 323.



TVA's hydropower should be limited to a single area whose farms and towns would most directly benefit from electricity.

Morgan's colleague David Lilienthal, however, insisted that the TVA's operating area should face no such restrictions. For Lilienthal, not only should northeastern Mississippi, northwest Alabama, and the area around the agency's first original dam at Cove Creek (renamed Norris Dam in 1934 in honor of Senator George Norris) in northeastern Tennessee fall within the bounds of the TVA. But essentially all of Tennessee as well as at least one major city, such as Atlanta, Birmingham, or Memphis, should become part of the TVA's territory.<sup>121</sup> Lilienthal's metropolitan designs were far from fanciful entries on a public power wish list. Atlanta Mayor James Key and the Atlanta City Council jointly approved a measure that would link Norris Dam directly to their city so that "consumers could obtain electric service at a much lower figure than under the present system of private distribution."<sup>122</sup> Dozens of other southern towns and cities of varying size made similar applications. If such proposals became reality, a network of TVA power lines would radiate across the region from federal dams, creating a competing system of public generation, public transmission, and public distribution of public power.

Fortunately for private power, Willkie held a high card in this game. At the time, C&S's subsidiaries purchased essentially all of the TVA's hydroelectric energy and were thus its only customers of note. Absent the quickly realized revenues needed to recover the enormous sums of capital the federal government had invested in its new regional planning agency, the TVA might perish in its infancy. By February 1934, then, Willkie and Lilienthal inked a new contract. C&S would sell its admittedly meager northeastern Mississippi, northwestern Alabama, and northeastern Tennessee properties (none of which included a significant southern metropolis) to

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<sup>121</sup> See Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 108-130; and Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 98.

<sup>122</sup> "Council Moves to Get TVA Power for City," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 7, 1934.

the TVA. For its part, the TVA would continue to sell wholesale power to C&S and would attempt no territorial expansions before the completion of Norris Dam. Despite this rapprochement, the often rancorous negotiations between the two parties continued throughout the decade. Aside from the TVA's purchase of all of the Tennessee Electric Power Company's properties for nearly \$80 million in 1939, the TVA would never significantly breach the borders agreed to in the February 1934 pact.<sup>123</sup> At least in terms of territory, the TVA's ability to bring rural electrification to farmers across the broader South faced serious limits.

President Roosevelt originally showed little interest in a rural electrification program outside of the TVA's limited territory. Despite private power's fears of an inexorable federal invasion, and public power's hopes for more extensive government power networks, the New Deal would not, it seemed, spread quickly across and modernize rural areas in Dixie. It took the unceasing efforts of a broad coalition of Americans to form an agency dedicated to that task. As much as any other individual, Pennsylvania's Morris Cooke proved vital to the process. Since his days on the Giant Power board, Cooke had believed that widespread rural electrification was a vital part of the recovery of country life. With the onset of the New Deal and the establishment of the TVA, he believed that a rural electrification program would not be far behind. Cooke met with and sent letters and reports to everyone of consequence in Washington between 1933 and 1935 in his attempt to establish an independent rural electrification bureau but for a time experienced only frustration. Snubbed at every turn for more than a year, Cooke, while serving as chair of the Mississippi Valley Committee in 1934, finally grabbed Roosevelt's and Interior secretary Harold Ickes's attention with a report encased in a red-and-black striped cover. Cooke's "zebra report" caught the president's eye because—in addition to its flashy binding—it made the case for the desperately needed and revolutionary changes that rural electrification

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<sup>123</sup> Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 119-130.

would bring to farmers' lives. Of course, Cooke did not work alone. Members of the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Grange had resolved at their annual meetings in 1934 to press for federal action on rural electrification, and the president of the Farm Bureau personally appealed to the president to take action. Finally, convinced by Cooke's persistence and pressured by "the growing militance of the rural population for assistance in their efforts to modernize home life," Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7037 in May 1935, establishing the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) with a \$100,000,000 budget and Morris Cooke as the agency's first administrator.<sup>124</sup>

Joyous as many people doubtless were, the creation of the REA as a temporary, emergency measure did not settle the question of rural electrification; very few farms benefitted from the program in the REA's first year. This poor showing only prompted more questions. In particular, how would the agency organize its operations? How would the REA go about actually delivering power to rural districts? For Cooke, who was no public power radical in the Raushenbusch mold, the obvious first answer was to cooperate with and offer loans to private power companies, which already had the infrastructure in place to begin building transmission lines and distribution systems in rural districts. Yet only three months after the REA's establishment, Congress passed the Public Utilities Holding Company Act of 1935 (PUHCA). Also known as the Wheeler-Rayburn Act, the PUHCA ordered holding companies to demonstrate compelling economical and geographical reasoning behind their ownership structures or face being broken apart.<sup>125</sup> Wendell Wilkie emerged as perhaps the most forceful and eloquent opponent of the PUHCA—and gained national acclaim as a defender of free enterprise—arguing that the law amounted to a back-door method for New Dealers to reach their

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<sup>124</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 25-31; Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 35-46, quote from 46.

<sup>125</sup> Hirt, *Wired Northwest*, 245-247.

goal of “government ownership,” a veritable death sentence for the private utility industry.<sup>126</sup> Any hopes for an agreement between public and private power on implementing the REA’s mission, then, quickly proved to be fleeting. Compromise was no longer possible.

Cooke thus realized that the only means to achieve broad-based rural electrification was the cooperative association. Though Cooke, like many technocrats, initially placed little faith in the inexperienced and impoverished farmers who would establish and operate the nation’s REA co-ops, the triumph of the Corinthian Experiment along with encouragement from individual farmers and the American Farm Bureau persuaded him that the cooperative idea could work. Cooke’s confidence in co-ops only increased when Senator Norris advised him that the REA would meet with success if it became a permanent agency with a steady budget as well as a staff of engineers, county agents, and other personnel to support local people.<sup>127</sup> The REA finally became a permanent agency in July 1936, but the problems associated with its establishment were woven into the REA’s very fabric. There would be no overarching organizations—public or private—rolling through the countryside granting rural people a modern, electrified life. Rural people would have to do that on their own. In the words of an REA official working in Georgia in 1936, “as for the government’s part...it serves merely as a medium and is willing to lend money to the cooperative group to do the work.”<sup>128</sup>

Undeterred, rural people in the South quickly began forming electric cooperatives, and their stories speak both to the difficulties of making the REA work and to rural people’s eagerness for electrification. “We had been in a state of starvation, oh from about 19 and 30 [1930] until 1935,” recalled Valene Bennett, a small businessman from the south Georgia town of Alma. “So, we figured getting electricity on the farm would sure help us recover from the

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<sup>126</sup> Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 138-141.

<sup>127</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 57.

<sup>128</sup> “Georgia Areas Push Rural Power Lines,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 26, 1936.

Depression.” After the creation of the REA, Bennett drove to countless villages and farms in nine Georgia counties in order to create what would become the Satilla Electric Membership Corporation in southeastern Georgia. “Our job of signing up farmers,” according to Bennett, “wasn’t easy.” The trouble, though, sprang not from a lack of interest; to the contrary, many farmers showed enthusiasm for electricity. The problem was that few south Georgians could spare the required registration fee. When approached about signing up for service, people would often “shuffle around and all [in embarrassment]—you know, some of them didn’t have \$5 to their name.” Yet many quickly accepted Bennett’s offer to lend them the money that would enable them to enroll. “I loaned a lot of fellas” the cash, he laughed. Regardless of the financial obstacles, people across rural Georgia, it became clear, believed that living an electrified life would be worth the effort.

Like Bennett, other Georgians found that lots of rural people were eager for the electricity that the private monopoly corporation would not provide. Ellen Whitlow of Hartwell, along with several other residents from the northeastern section of the state, “went around myself and encouraged people...to sign up. I sure didn’t have to talk it up much because for years the people there had been trying to get Georgia Power to bring electricity down there. At one time some had actually signed up for electricity, and then Georgia Power didn’t accept them.” As a result, she remembered, “we had no problems getting everyone interested” in joining the Hart County Electric Membership Corporation.<sup>129</sup>

By the end of 1939, rural Georgians had formed thirty-five electric membership corporations, and had chartered forty-two by 1948. One of the most consequential cooperative organizations to form in Georgia after the foundation of a permanent REA was the Planters Electric Membership Corporation (Planters EMC). Originally called the New Deal Power

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<sup>129</sup> Bennett and Whitlow quoted in McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 43, 45.

Association when it was incorporated in August 1936, Planters established its headquarters in Millen, Georgia (about fifty miles south of Augusta) and conducted operations in seven counties located in the Savannah River basin.<sup>130</sup> Planters EMC's most prominent leaders, "rural pioneers with vision, [who] planted the first seeds of a new crop in the Savannah River area of southeast Georgia," were Walter Harrison and Porter Carswell.<sup>131</sup> Both Harrison and Carswell had long been involved in state and local electric power issues and recounted memories similar to those of Bennett and Whitlow. But their positions in Planters EMC (both men served as president and vice president and in other capacities) would push them and Georgia's cooperatives into the middle of national-level fight over who—the public or the private realm—would exercise control over the South's rivers.

The founders of Planters were particularly critical of Georgia Power's inability and/or unwillingness to electrify the countryside. Along with many other rural Georgians, they helped articulate this critique with the foundation of the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (GEMC) in 1937.<sup>132</sup> The GEMC was a statewide organization that represented the interests and coordinated the efforts of Georgia's electric cooperatives, but its central purpose was to ensure a steady supply of "electric energy to persons in rural areas who are not receiving electric service." The problem was not simply one of extending transmission systems and wiring homes. Well into the 1930s, despite the foundation of the REA, the rise of the co-op, and the pledges of private utilities to deliver wholesale power to the country, many rural people experienced difficulties in drawing adequate amounts of power. The GEMC's leaders believed that if their project were to

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<sup>130</sup> "The Story of Rural Electrification in Our Area," [1955?], box 57, folder "Planters EMC, History," The Papers of Walter Wade Harrison, 1900-1985, Special Collections, Zach S. Henderson Library, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA (hereafter Harrison Papers).

<sup>131</sup> Planters Electric Membership Corporation, "1951: Presenting 15 Years of Progress," 2, box 58, folder "Planters EMC, Presenting 15 Years of Progress," Harrison Papers.

<sup>132</sup> Originally, the GEMC was chartered as the Georgia Rural Power Reserve EMC, which, though formed in 1937, was not granted incorporation until 1940. In 1944, the organization changed its name to the GEMC. For simplicity's sake, in the text I will refer to the organization only as the GEMC. See McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 65-69, 91.

survive, Georgia's co-ops urgently needed to arrange to provide themselves "with some type of adequate protection against possible power failures, or interruptions of service, from their present sources." That goal could only be accomplished if they wholly separated themselves from the private power system. Senator Norris nurtured hope for that possibility when he argued that the REA, through its co-ops, should become a kind of TVA for the entire United States, "a general system for the electrification of rural communities which would take into consideration the supplying of electricity to as many homes as possible."<sup>133</sup> Norris specified no particular sources for the nation's rural electrical supply, but developments on the Savannah River gave Georgia co-ops cause for optimism. A little TVA of their own—the realization of rural modernization rooted in public ownership of a power producing river—seemed to be in reach.

In 1935, Congress published a report, conducted by the US Army Corps of Engineers, on the Savannah River. Though the Corps' report claimed that the installation of multiple-purpose dams and reservoirs at eighteen different sites on the Savannah would bring improvements to the area, it recommended no immediate action and no hydroelectric developments. Many local actors saw things differently. Led by the secretary of Augusta's Chamber of Commerce, Lester Moody, a coalition of Georgians prodded the president and Congress to reconsider the matter. The people of both Georgia and South Carolina, Moody claimed, urgently needed the power. In particular, according to Moody, the construction of a federal reservoir and dam at a site called Clarks Hill (about twenty miles north of Augusta) "would bring to the people of Eastern Georgia and Western Carolina enormous benefits."<sup>134</sup> Following a new study of the possibilities for Clarks Hill in 1936, which Moody interpreted as favorable, groups of Georgians, including Senators

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<sup>133</sup> Norris quoted in Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 57.

<sup>134</sup> L.S. Moody, "Statement of L.S. Moody, Secretary, Chamber of Commerce, Augusta Georgia before Civil Functions Appropriations Sub Committee, House of Representatives of the United States," Jun. 11, 1947, 4, box 61, folder "Clarks Hill Dam Documents, 1935-1978," Harrison Papers.

Richard Russell and Walter George, several congressmen, business leaders, and co-op members, pressed Congress for action. In addition to being a site, in Moody's estimation, that could "generate more power than any other hydro-electric development east of the Mississippi River except Niagara Falls," Clarks Hill would afford much of the southeast all of the benefits that the TVA had granted to the Tennessee Valley.<sup>135</sup> In the words of Percy Thomas, southeastern regional director for the Federal Power Commission, Clarks Hill "is a sound multiple-purpose project (navigation, flood control, power development, sanitation, and recreation)" that would extend well beyond the Savannah River basin. It would sell government generated power to preference customers and dramatically improve ordinary people's lives in Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.<sup>136</sup> Georgians hungry for a source of power they could call their own finally saw possibilities for public control over the water as well as a means to furnish rural people with cheap and abundant power from Clarks Hill.

For its part, Georgia Power—which until 1932 held a federal license to develop Clarks Hill and still owned thousands of acres at the site—offered no overt resistance to the public power plan for the Savannah River. In fact, Moody reported that Preston Arkwright personally offered "his co-operation and added that his company would be interested in purchasing [any excess] power" from Clarks Hill.<sup>137</sup> And why not cede the development of southern waterscapes to the federal government? The Great Depression had prevented Georgia Power from constructing any new power dams, Clarks Hill included, in the 1930s. What was more, no comprehensive federal transmission system program (and thus no TVA-style federal invasion) was in the works for the South; southern power lines remained firmly in private utilities'

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<sup>135</sup> "Almost \$3,000,000 will be Requested for Power Project," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 4, 1937.

<sup>136</sup> "Clarks Hill Dam is Held Feasible," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 25, 1937.

<sup>137</sup> Moody, "Statement before Civil Functions Appropriations Sub Committee," 4, box 61, folder "Clarks Hill Dam Documents, 1935-1978," Harrison Papers.



hands.<sup>138</sup> In any case, in the short term it mattered little: Congressional reluctance to create any new valley authorities and the onset of World War II prevented the beginning of any federal reservoir and dam construction on the Savannah River until the late 1940s.<sup>139</sup>

Yet while Arkwright professed a willingness to partner with public power on the Savannah, Georgia Power's actions suggested that the company desired to steer matters in another direction. Cooptation of federal resources, rather than cooperation with Georgia's farmers, seemed to be the goal. From the beginnings of REA activity in Georgia, Arkwright parted company with many of his private power cohorts by readily agreeing to deal with rural co-ops in need of electric energy.<sup>140</sup> Here was a new market—always welcomed, especially in a decade of economic disaster—his company could capture with essentially no investment; the financial risk fell to cooperatives and the REA. Georgia Power readily exploited this opportunity: by the conclusion of 1938, Georgia Power provided about 93 percent of the wholesale electricity to REA co-ops in its home state.<sup>141</sup> A steadily expanding set of customers drawing energy from Georgia Power along with a US Army Corps of Engineers facility at Clarks Hill feeding Georgia Power's private transmission system would amount to a federal subsidy that promised only to become more generous in the future. Private power had shifted its strategy from appropriation of the public power message to one that now included appropriation of public power resources.

Certainly, cooptation and subsidies would help thicken the bottom line. But this was about matters far more significant than increased profits. Georgia Power's motivation, shared with private utilities in the region and across the nation, was, at least in large part, to prevent the REA and its co-ops from becoming an independent, competing public power network, a network

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<sup>138</sup> Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 80-81.

<sup>139</sup> For a more in depth discussion of the developments at Clarks Hill in the late 1930s, see Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 77-84.

<sup>140</sup> Wright, *History of Georgia Power*, 294-295; Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 117-119.

<sup>141</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1938* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1939), 6.

that would finally make real the long-pursued dream of farm modernization based in hydroelectricity. The trend was already underway in other parts of the South. By 1934, the legislatures of both North Carolina and South Carolina had already proposed rural electrification plans based on the Ontario Hydro model, and activists were pursuing REA-TVA inspired projects for the Red River in Texas and the White River in Arkansas.<sup>142</sup> With the aid of state power, public ownership activists across Dixie seemed to be winning the war for control over rivers. A holding company executive admitted as much when he warned his fellow utility executives at a meeting of the Edison Electric Institute (which replaced NELA, on the same day it folded in 1932, as the electric industry's leading trade association) that they must not permit "government 'yardsticks' to be established in every section of the country."<sup>143</sup> If Georgia Power could stop the establishment of more TVA-style yardsticks, if it could compartmentalize Clarks Hill and other Corps projects soon to be in the federal dam-building pipeline by interposing itself between public dams and public power co-ops, it might be able to drain the New Deal's infrastructures of any real public component and maintain the private realm's nearly exclusive right to deliver power to the southern masses and to southern farmers.

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In July 1940, Wendell Willkie tendered his resignation to Commonwealth and Southern's board of directors. Instead of continuing on as the holding company's CEO, he would be the Republican candidate for president and challenge Franklin D. Roosevelt for the highest office in the nation. The presidential election of 1940 would bring the public-private power debate to the highest levels of American life, serving as a fitting conclusion to the previous two decades of struggles for control over water, power, and rural modernization in the South.

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<sup>142</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 45, 99-100.

<sup>143</sup> Brown, *Electricity for Rural America*, 49.

Hints began to swirl as early as January 1938 that Willkie, who had garnered a national reputation as a silver-tongued orator and sharp-witted debater, would be a Republican candidate who could successfully unseat FDR. And in the summer of 1940, Republican hierarchs chose the CEO of an electric utilities holding company—not John Dewey, Herbert Hoover, Robert Taft, or any other party standard bearer—to do so. In his hometown of Elwood, Indiana in August 1940, Willkie delivered his informal acceptance speech for the Republican nomination and outlined the political philosophy that he—a self-described former “liberal Democrat”—would preach throughout his campaign. That philosophy, he informed the enormous crowd, was rooted in the belief that he must strive for the “preservation of American democracy” and resist the threats posed by the “tyrannies” and “totalitarian powers” devastating Europe and East Asia. Much of Willkie’s talk focused on the Nazis’ aggressions in Europe, but he found a way to link Hitler’s war with developments on the American home front. The reason the Germans had “crushed France like an eggshell” in both world wars was that, despite abundant natural resources and battle-tested courage, French leaders had forsaken freedom and democracy in favor of “unfruitful political adventures and flimsy economic theories.” The same fate, Willkie averred, would befall the United States if the New Deal were allowed to continue: “this course will lead us to economic disintegration and dictatorship.” For his part, Willkie chose to “stand for the restoration of...private enterprise in America.”<sup>144</sup>

Of course, the election was not simply a referendum on the TVA. Yet in late 1940, America stood at a crossroads and faced a crucial choice: Would the public ownership system that had emerged in the South continue to power the nation’s quest for prosperity and freedom or would free enterprise reign once again? Like Preston Arkwright several years before him,

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<sup>144</sup> “‘We’ll Stop Hitler the American Way,’ Says Willkie Text,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 18, 1940; Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 146-148.

Willkie's proposition covered over the more complex, deeper history that underlay the public-private dispute of the late 1930s and early 1940s. New Deal programs like the TVA and REA were not simply "political adventures and flimsy economic theories" shoved down a hapless populace's throat. As the foregoing shows, ordinary southerners and their more prominent allies had clamored for more than two decades in order to deliver power to the farm and create a version of the New South that served their needs. They did so in the face of dogged resistance from the private utility industry—an industry that clawed to preserve its state-backed monopoly status and, eventually, worked to covert the public power edifice into a federal subsidy pipeline.

Willkie enjoyed slightly more electoral success than his Republican predecessors in 1932 and 1936, but Roosevelt won the 1940 election in an unmitigated landslide. Neither the clear election results nor the United States' entry into World War II one year later, however, brought the public-private fight over southern rivers and power to conclusion. Although Georgia Power's executives initiated plans as early as 1938 to transition away from a waterscape increasingly controlled by the federal government—and back toward a generation network driven by coal—the mounting strength and ambitions of a hydro-based public power coalition during the war years and after prompted reconsideration. As the next chapter demonstrates, the ongoing rift between those who favored public dams and those who supported private power stretched well into the 1950s with critical implications for the way power and modernization would be provided for the masses, rural or otherwise.

## 5 CHAPTER 4: PUBLIC DAMS, PRIVATE POWER

In June 1953, John R. Chambless, a representative of the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (GEMC), condemned the recently announced plans of the Georgia Power Company in a letter to officials at the US Department of the Interior (DOI). According to Chambless, Georgia Power had proposed a plutocratic scheme for seizing and reselling every kilowatt of the energy generated at the US Army Corps of Engineers' newly completed Clarks Hill dam on the Savannah River. Chambless believed that if the DOI sided with Georgia Power, the company's executives, "in their selfishness and greed, would...monopolize the Great Hydro Projects developed and built with public funds." For the GEMC's forty rural electric cooperatives, Clarks Hill's hydropower "should belong to the people and not a select few"; the dam's energy must remain part of the ongoing legacy of the New Deal's manipulation and management of southern waterscapes in the service of equitably distributing natural wealth and cheap electric power to all, but most especially to the GEMC's rural electric cooperatives.<sup>1</sup>

Georgia Power executives, who sought ownership of Clarks Hill's output ostensibly to diversify their electrical portfolio, fretted over the implications of the site's future as well. While Georgia Power's flamboyant president, Harllee Branch, could flippantly reject Chambless's exclusive claims to Clarks Hill as spurious at best, he worried at the same time that the GEMC's plans portended much graver consequences for the postwar South. Branch charged that Chambless's plan for funneling federal energy directly to rural electric cooperatives formed part of a larger conspiracy to create a competing public power network. In an early adoption of what would gain broad Cold War-era purchase as the "domino theory," Branch claimed that the

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<sup>1</sup> J.R. Chambless, "Statement Concerning Disposition of Clark Hill Power," Jun. 18, 1953, 1, emphasis in original, box 76, folder "Georgia Electric Membership Corp.," James C. Davis Papers, MSS# 507, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA (hereafter JCD Papers). Also see Chambless, "Objections of the Georgia Co-Operatives to the Interior Department's Tri-contract," n.d., box 204, folder "Clark Hill Dam," JCD Papers.

GEMC's scheme contributed to an insidious "socialistic endeavor...of long standing" that went well "beyond anything the New Dealers and Fair Dealers ever conjured up" and ultimately threatened "nationalization of...the electric power industry."<sup>2</sup> If the GEMC prevailed at Clarks Hill, Branch feared, the result would be not only a long "step toward the creation of a federal power empire," but a step toward the destruction of American free enterprise as well.<sup>3</sup>

Both Chambless and Branch saw the Clarks Hill contest as an extraordinarily high-stakes affair, signifying much more than a struggle for the rights to a new dam's electric power. Their disagreement to some extent revived the New South debate: would urban-industrial concerns and state-sanctioned corporate monopoly capitalism dominate southern nature and power or would agrarian and working-class interests determine that control over southern rivers rested in the ostensibly more democratic public realm? Within the long New Deal era, however, these New South-style questions had national import. For the GEMC, Georgia Power, and their counterparts across the nation, the fate of the postwar United States hung in the balance in the Clarks Hill fight.

Clarks Hill, along with southern electrical and water history in general, has drawn scant scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup> Yet the decade-long political brawl there demonstrates that the private-public struggle that proved so fundamental to the long New South persisted into the post-World War II era US South. Like the better-known struggle for Hells Canyon, which "transcends

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<sup>2</sup> Harllee Branch to Oscar Chapman, Jan. 10, 1953, JCD Papers, box 76, folder "Georgia Power Company 1953."; "Branch Charges 'Pure Hokum' in GEMC Row," *Atlanta Journal*, Dec. 16, 1954; Gene Smith, "'Socialism' Trend in Power Scorned," *New York Times*, Mar. 13, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> "'Power Empire' Charged in Clark Hill Case," *Atlanta Journal*, Jan. 7, 1953.

<sup>4</sup> The literature on post-World War II clashes over federal dam construction has focused almost exclusively on the US West. See for example Mark W. T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Karl Boyd Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams: The Hells Canyon High Dam Controversy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006); and Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 158-171. One notable exception is Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 92-115. Also see Phyllis Komarek De Luna, *Public versus Private Power during the Truman Administration: A Study of Fair Deal Liberalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 99-101.

hydroelectric history” and offers larger lessons “about the meaning of citizenship in a democracy and the place of nature in our national culture,” the fight over this obscure place on the Savannah River assumed a central position in regional and national questions of nature, energy, the fate of the New Deal, and the type of society Americans desired for the postwar era.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the struggle between the GEMC and Georgia Power became a test case for the continuation of water-based public power across the South. There were critical differences, however, between the outcomes of the battle for Hells Canyon and the one for Clarks Hill. Whereas the US Army Corps of Engineers completed Clarks Hill dam (1952), Hells Canyon never made it past the planning stage; apparently, people in the Northwest favored private dams over public power. And what southerners eventually got as a result of the Clarks Hill affair, and consequently across the region, was the reverse of the outcome at Hells Canyon: public dams but private power.

That privately controlled power, though, would not be hydroelectricity for long. Unlike the Northwest, which has remained a waterpower-dominated region, the fallout at Clarks Hill accelerated an energy transition in Dixie. After a failed attempt in the mid 1940s to convince the federal government to allow the company to add Clarks Hill to its portfolio, Georgia Power changed its strategy and acquiesced to the Army Engineers’ ownership of and plans for the site. By the early 1950s, despite Harllee Branch’s stated position, the Georgia Power Company’s goal at Clarks Hill was not to gain direct access to a new source of hydroelectricity in the interest of maintaining a balanced energy mix. The company aimed instead to rely on a rediscovered dependence on Appalachian bituminous coal, along with its exclusive ownership of the Georgia’s transmission system, to absorb public waterpower into its system. In the course of the Clarks Hill fight, Georgia Power “unplugged New Deal hydropower” in the South, but connected the machinery of New Deal hydropower to its coal-based network, signaling far more than the

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<sup>5</sup> Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams*, 20-21

adoption of a purportedly superior fuel source.<sup>6</sup> It marked the beginning of the end for public power. Despite the existence of a few government-owned coal-fired generating stations, public power had always been anchored in the water. Soaking public waterpower into the private utility system would essentially transform the output of public dams into private power. The conversion of public hydroelectricity into private coal-based energy effectively diluted a New Deal-inspired vision of a socially leveling public-power complex. Moreover, it reaffirmed a southern political economy based in state-sanctioned, federally-subsidized private monopoly control over capital, nature, and power. The crucible of Clarks Hill helped forge the Sunbelt South.

This chapter offers an account of the battle for Clarks Hill from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s. It begins, however, with a discussion of the confluence of forces—drought and war—that finally began to push the Georgia Power Company, and other southern utilities, back toward coal in the early 1940s. The chapter then turns to the Clarks Hill fight, which began in the context of an early postwar moment tormented by fears of electrical shortage, coal scarcity, the Great Depression’s return, and the supposed rise of “socialism-communism” in the United States and abroad.<sup>7</sup> Threats to a reliable supply of electricity—and of an aggressive federal power program that aimed to compete with the private realm for supremacy over the region’s rivers—for both industrial production and the now-critical realm of everyday domestic life inspired Georgia Power to once again consider water as a source of energy. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the negotiated settlement between the GEMC and Georgia Power at Clarks Hill. It recounts the way Georgia Power, followed by private utilities across the entire South,

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Electric industry public relations departments deployed the somewhat clunky term “socialism-communism” in the early post-World War II years to identify New Deal-inspired public works initiatives as socialism and to conflate such developments with the USSR’s worldwide communist conspiracy. See Reddy Kilowatt Service, *Target '52 – '53: Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter VII*, (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1951), 14, box 25, folder 7, Reddy Kilowatt Records, 1929-1999, Archives Center, National Museum of American History (hereafter RkW Records).



finally forsook waterpower and brandished coal and its transmission-network monopoly as political weapons both to halt the extension of what it perceived as a pernicious ideology anchored in the region's rivers and to cement the private realm's status as the guardian of American free enterprise and widespread prosperity.

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Although the droughts of the 1920s and the rise of a water-based federal power network did not compel private southern utilities to abandon rivers by the late 1930s, the return of drought and the onset of the Second World War did. Conditions in the early 1940s radically altered circumstances for hydropower-dependent southern utilities, threatening to halt electrical generation and industrial production for the war effort. The wartime transition to coal represented a major shift for a region built largely on hydroelectricity. The promise of the New South, it seemed during the World War II years, would once again rest on a foundation of Appalachian coal.

Doing their part to contribute to the "Arsenal of Democracy," southern utilities produced and distributed record amounts of electricity—and spearheaded efforts to lure defense factories to Dixie—to stoke industrial production for the war in Europe in 1940 and 1941.<sup>8</sup> That demand alone strained southern hydroelectric systems. A severe shortage of rain beginning in late 1939 and continuing through late 1941—an arid moment that would prove worse than even the record-setting 1925 drought—nearly crippled their productive capacities. By the spring of 1941, rainfall in upper Piedmont and Blue Ridge Georgia reached a ten-inch deficit. Georgia Power officials

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<sup>8</sup> The Georgia Power Company, for example, sold a total of over 2.1 billion kWh in 1941—an 18.5 percent increase over 1940, which was also a record year. Industrial consumption accounted for the largest proportion of sales (1.28 billion kWh, or 60.9 percent) and was the category with largest sales increase (24.4 percent). See Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1941* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1942), 1, 4. The Georgia State Committee for Industrial Mobilization, which formed in 1940 in response to the outbreak of WWII in Europe, was chaired by Charles A. Collier, Georgia Power Company vice president in charge of sales. Divisional vice president of the Georgia Power Company for Rome, Georgia, J. J. McDonough, served on the committee's board of directors. See "Georgia Group for Mobilizing Industry Ready," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 28, 1940.

estimated that, as a result of the low precipitation and high wartime production, their water storage network as a whole suffered from a 75 percent shortfall and levels in their largest reservoir, Lake Burton, plunged to a stunning sixty feet (about 92 percent) below maximum capacity.<sup>9</sup>

Power company managers had serious doubts about the ability of their water-dependent production system to continue furnishing energy for the Allied war effort or even for everyday life. Beginning in May 1941, Georgia Power joined with utilities across the South and, out of “patriotic necessity,” collaborated with the TVA to “appeal to the public to join immediately in a voluntary campaign of economy in the use of electricity.”<sup>10</sup> Despite such efforts, reservoirs still held far too little water by autumn’s beginning. Headlines in the fall of 1941 warned of a coming “BLACKOUT” and grave language informed readers that “Power Shortage in Southeast [is] Critical.” For the US government, calls for voluntary power conservation proved inadequate. Thus in October 1941, as Georgia Power reservoirs plummeted to only 15 percent of maximum capacity, the US Office of Production Management (OPM) issued mandatory curtailment orders that prohibited all non-defense related industrial and commercial electrical consumption and required all users (except homeowners) to reduce their power usage by 30 percent. A November 1941 Georgia Power Company public announcement put the matter plainly when it claimed that “unless the withdrawal of water from the reservoirs is stopped, the whole power supply of this area will be endangered....The situation is worse than it was at any time” in the state’s history.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Manganiello, “Dam Crazy,” 177-178, 181-183; and Georgia Power Company public announcement, “Power Curtailment Must Work NOW,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Jun. 18, 1941.

<sup>10</sup> Georgia Power Company, “An Appeal to All Users of Electric Light, Heat and Power,” *Atlanta Daily World*, May 28, 1941.

<sup>11</sup> Georgia Power Company, “US Government Orders Immediate BLACKOUT,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Nov. 6, 1941.

Heavy showers fell on the Blue Ridge Mountains in the last two months of 1941, restoring Georgia Power's reservoirs to adequate levels of storage. As a result, the OPM lifted its mandatory power conservation measures in January 1942.<sup>12</sup> But the damage to hydroelectricity's reputation had been done. Even with a sophisticated regional system of interconnected transmission lines that could ship energy to the most parched corner of Dixie, southern utilities could no longer rely upon water to serve as the South's primary fuel source—at least through the remainder of the war. Coal-fired electricity came to the rescue. Whereas hydropower accounted for the vast majority of Georgia Power's electrical output in 1939, the balance of power abruptly shifted to coal-based electricity by the end of 1941.

The hasty construction of a new 60,000-kilowatt unit at Plant Atkinson and the completion of a new 40,000-kilowatt generating station near Macon, named Plant Arkwright, made the wartime transition to coal-based production possible. Water's unreliability formed the basis of the company's publically stated justification for rushing these power stations into service and for clamoring to add even more units to both plants by mid-1943. Speaking about the addition to Plant Atkinson and the new plant named in his honor, Georgia Power president Preston Arkwright claimed that his utility must now turn toward the construction of coal-fired generating stations "because it is essential that...such a plant be able to run day and night every day. A fuel-plant can do that, whereas a hydro-electric plant is dependent on rainfall, and in periods of dry weather can operate at only a fraction of its full capacity."<sup>13</sup> A June 1941 newspaper article shared that same perspective, reporting that the new coal-fired generating station near Macon started producing energy one month ahead of schedule so that it could help

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<sup>12</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1941*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> "Giant Addition Is Planned for Plant Atkinson," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun 1, 1940.

“relieve the drouth [drought] crisis” and prevent “further depletion of the company’s storage reservoirs, already drawn down to dangerous levels because of the shortage of rainfall.”<sup>14</sup>

The realization that coal must now reign as the king of the South and that water must abdicate its long-held throne enjoyed widely held agreement. A December 1941 editorial—published just two weeks after Japanese forces bombed Pearl Harbor and only six weeks after the OPM issued its power-curtailment orders—proclaimed coal’s rediscovered virtues. Coal’s primary advantage over water was its abundance. The South could depend on coal because it “can always be mined...but the genius of man or the power of a government has never broken a drouth.” Absent the existence of Plants Atkinson and Arkwright, “the recent shortage of power in the southeast, due to low water behind the dams, could have reached a critical stage—a disastrous stage.” Thus, because America enjoyed “inexhaustible deposits of coal” that had been bequeathed to the nation “by nature”—which presumably would prevent any future power shortages—the United States would realize victory in the war and uninterrupted prosperity afterward.<sup>15</sup>

Abundance was only one of coal’s virtues. Many voices proclaimed that the generation of power with coal now cost less than producing electricity with falling water. According to *New York Times* utilities reporter John P. Callahan, a number of factors including construction and financing costs, long-distance transmission systems, and tax burdens made hydropower two times more expensive than thermal power.<sup>16</sup> A 1941 study by the liberal Twentieth Century Fund also found that coal-fired electrical generation held considerable financial advantages over hydropower. The group’s findings indicated that the investment required to construct a new hydroelectric installation generally amounted to about double that needed for a new coal-fired

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<sup>14</sup> “Macon Plant Adds Million Kilowatt Hours,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun 5, 1941.

<sup>15</sup> “Water Power vs. Coal,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 21, 1941.

<sup>16</sup> Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams*, 126-167.

plant; long-term debt servicing and other fixed costs added significantly to the bill. The report concluded that, only slightly more modestly than Callahan's claims, hydroelectric generation ultimately cost over 50 percent more than steam power production.<sup>17</sup>

Aside from the lower capital expenses of coal plants relative to hydroelectric facilities, technological advances had made coal an increasingly efficient fuel. By the beginning of the World War II era, engineers had designed generators with thermal efficiency ratings much higher than just a few decades earlier. By the end of the 1930s, the steam within power station boilers could safely reach over 900° F and well over 1500 psi (compared to only 530° F and 180 psi in 1903).<sup>18</sup> These advances, simply stated, meant utilities needed less fuel to meet electrical demand. In 1920 the generation of one kilowatt required three to five pounds of coal; by the early 1940s, the generation of the same amount of power required only nine-tenths to one pound of coal.<sup>19</sup>

In the grips of both drought and defense production's spiking demands, southern utilities took advantage of cheaper, more reliable, and more efficient coal-fired generation in the early war years. In a drastic shift, coal powered Dixie through World War II. In 1939, approximately four-fifths of the Georgia Power Company's production derived from falling river water; coal-based energy accounted for the balance. By the end of 1941, with the addition of Plant Arkwright

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<sup>17</sup> The Twentieth Century Fund, *The Power Industry and the Public Interest: A Summary of the Results of a Survey of the Relations between the Government and the Electric Power Industry* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1944), 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Historian Richard Hirsh defines thermal efficiency simply as "the amount of electrical energy that could be generated as a percentage of the total fuel energy." See Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation in the American Electric Utility Industry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 44-46.

<sup>19</sup> Needham, "Power Lines," 197; "3<sup>rd</sup> Arkwright Plant to Open on Wednesday," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 3, 1943. Georgia Power's two major coal-fired stations at the time serve as examples of growing efficiencies. Completed in 1930, Plant Atkinson consumed nearly 1,700 tons of bituminous coal daily, which heated water to 750° F and produced steam at 425 psi, and could generate a maximum of 3,000,000 kWh per day after the addition of the second unit in 1941. The boilers at Plant Arkwright, constructed between 1941 and 1943, produced steam approximately 15 percent hotter and more pressurized than those at Plant Atkinson. To produce 3,000,000 kWh per day, Plant Arkwright consumed slightly less than 1,500 tons of coal. See "Plant Atkinson," Sept. 29, 1941, pp. 1-3, GPSC Files, box 34, folder "Statistical Data"; and "3<sup>rd</sup> Arkwright Plant to Open on Wednesday," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 3, 1943.

and the second unit at Plant Atkinson, coal-fired generation ballooned by nearly 185 percent to just over 53 percent of Georgia Power's total output. The Alabama Power Company, Georgia Power's Birmingham-based sister utility, experienced similar wartime shifts. Coal's share of Alabama Power's production in 1941 leapt to nearly half its output, a 129 percent increase over 1939 levels.<sup>20</sup>

Though drought subsided by the beginning of 1942, coal's importance only grew throughout the war years. From 1939 to 1944, the amount of coal-fired generation in Georgia increased by a stunning 460 percent to account for more than three-fifths of overall kilowatt-hour production. Somewhat more modest, but striking nevertheless, Alabama Power's coal-based generation increased by 199 percent between 1939 and 1944, representing some half of that utility's output.<sup>21</sup> Coal's significance to the Georgia Power Company's corporate image increased as well. The company took every opportunity to justify its transition to coal and to publicize how indispensable its newfound reliance on coal-fired output was to the war effort. By powering the streetcars that carried workers to and from bustling defense-related factories, an advertisement informed readers in 1942, Georgia Power's new units at Plants Atkinson and Arkwright were helping to win the war.<sup>22</sup> A rather macabre Georgia Power ad from 1943 featured the ominous image of an electric chair and wondered when "will Hitler be electrocuted?" No one at that point knew the answer, to be sure. But by providing energy for nearly 500 factories and twenty-five military establishments in the state, coal-derived electricity,

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<sup>20</sup> Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities in the United States, 1939* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 601, 607; Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities in the United States, 1940* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 601, 608; Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities in the United States, 1941* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 601, 608.

<sup>21</sup> Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities in the United States, 1942* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 601, 608; Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities in the United States, 1944* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1945), 601, 607; also see Georgia Power Company, *Annual Reports 1939-1944*.

<sup>22</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, "In 1867---," *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 1, 1942.

“the life-blood of American war production,” steadily helped “to seal [Hitler’s] doom!”<sup>23</sup>

Environmental conditions and war had combined to transform southern utilities from fundamentally hydroelectric corporations into entities that more and more translated lumps of black rock into kilowatt hours for wartime industrial production and everyday life.

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Drought and war pushed the Georgia Power Company to stray from its longtime marriage to hydroelectricity. The company’s affair with coal, though, suffered from its own major problems. Much like hydroelectricity in 1941, coal-fired electricity’s ability to seal Hitler’s doom, much less to secure lasting American prosperity in the postwar years, was far from assured. Energy shortages during and immediately after the war proved remarkably significant in shaping the post-World War II electric industry, spurring both private and public power forces to once again look to the water, at places such as Clarks Hill, for a source of power that would not only sustain the war effort but would ensure prosperity afterward.

The virtually uninterrupted, extraordinary annual increases in thermal electrical generation for wartime production through mid-1945 gave utilities in Dixie and across the nation reason to think they might lack adequate power for the war effort and for the postwar years. By mid-1943 American electrical consumption began to outstrip coal production, which sparked worries over potential coal shortages. In response, the US War Production Board (WPB) imposed nationwide “brownouts” to protect America’s energy supply. The 1943 brownouts, or “semi-dimouts” as Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes described them, prohibited most decorative and display lighting in commercial and municipal spaces, but exempted industrial production from curtailments. The WPB did not impose limitations on domestic electrical consumption but urged people instead to “express their patriotism” by using as little energy as

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<sup>23</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, “Will Hitler Be Electrocuted?” *Atlanta Daily World*, Jan. 6, 1943.

possible in their homes. Though the WPB lifted some restrictions in January 1944, it continued to strongly encourage voluntary conservation measures for the rest of the year.<sup>24</sup>

Early in 1945, though, a combination of unusually frigid temperatures, heavy snowfall, and heightened military-industrial demand for electric power brought another “coal shortage crisis.” A projected shortfall of 22,000,000 tons of coal for the year forced the return of nationwide, WPB-ordered brownouts.<sup>25</sup> The Georgia Power Company, concerned that “there is a serious shortage in the nation’s coal supply,” urged consumers in February 1945 to “save electricity to save coal” in compliance with WPB orders and for the good of the war effort.<sup>26</sup> Calls for conservation seemed to have worked. Within one month of the WPB’s demands, estimates held that electricity savings amounted to 50 percent more than original projections by January 1946. For its part, Georgia Power cheerfully reported that its compliance with WPB-mandated curtailments saved nearly 1,000 tons of coal in the first three weeks alone.<sup>27</sup> Company executives also seemed happy that though their kilowatt-hour production was almost 9 percent lower in 1945 than in 1944, revenues increased by nearly 5 percent.<sup>28</sup>

By the spring of 1945, when it became clear that the war in Europe would soon come to a close, another round of power shortages seemed unlikely. The 1945 brownouts had tamped down electrical demand, saved coal, and bridged the gap until Germany and Japan fell to defeat. What was more, because defense production had created such a demand bubble for electric power from 1940 to 1945, the end of hostilities, economists and utility industry forecasters predicted, would

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<sup>24</sup> Harold Ickes, “Go Ahead and Cuss Me...,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 25, 1943; “Promotional Lighting From Dusk to 10 P.M.” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 3, 1944. Also see David E. Nye, *The Night the Lights Went Out: A History of Blackouts in America* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2010), 56-59.

<sup>25</sup> Jay Walz, “Cold Impedes Struggle against Fuel Shortage,” *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 1945; “Army Tosses Coal Shortage Crisis of 20 Million Tons to Civilians,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 9, 1945.

<sup>26</sup> Georgia Power Company, “Save Electricity to Save Coal,” *Kilowatt News III* (Feb. 1945), 3.

<sup>27</sup> “Huge Brownout Saving of Coal is Indicated” *New York Times*, Mar. 4, 1945.

<sup>28</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1945*, 2; Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities, 1945*, 607.



almost certainly deflate electrical consumption to prewar levels for at least two to three years, allowing the nation's utilities to relax while they added generating capacity to their portfolios. As if on cue, industrial demand plummeted as the Allies overwhelmed the Axis powers. By the end of 1946, national electrical sales to factories sank more than six billion kilowatt hours relative to the 1944 wartime peak. In Georgia, 1946 sales to industrial customers fell by more than 217 million kilowatt hours (a decline of 12 percent) relative to those of 1944.<sup>29</sup>

Yet despite the drop in industrial energy requirements that lasted through much of 1946, overall consumption only rose after the war's end. Though overall usage of electricity grew rather modestly by the end of 1946 (about a 3 percent increase in Georgia relative to 1945), national kilowatt-hour sales nevertheless reached all-time highs in 1946 and again in 1947.<sup>30</sup> By 1948, utilities saw even greater growth, with demand swelling by a national average of 15 percent over 1945 levels.<sup>31</sup> In the South, increases in early-postwar electrical demand surged well beyond the national mean. An Arkansas utility reported that its demand in the summer of 1947 skyrocketed some 50 percent above its wartime peak.<sup>32</sup> Alabama Power sold 25 percent more electric current in 1948 than in 1945 and Georgia Power's total sales in that time increased by 35 percent.<sup>33</sup> Much of the expanded usage in the early postwar years can be attributed to increased commercial activity, but the lion's share of these gains came in the "final consumption horizon": the private home.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Needham, "Power Lines," 184-185; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1944*, 12; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1946*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> Franklin P. Huddle, "The Outlook is Dim," *New Republic*, May 12, 1947, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Needham, "Power Lines," 185-186; Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Ark-Mo Power Company advertisement, "Ol' Sol on the Loose," in *Reddy News*, Aug. 25, 1947, 220, box 76: "Reddy News 1946-1947," RkW Records.

<sup>33</sup> Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities*, 1945, 301, 305; Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities*, 1949, 301; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1948*, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Ronald C. Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 166.

Spectacular increases in electrical consumption for everyday home life might have been cast as cause for celebration. After all, aside from abstract and lofty—but important— notions of freedom as the war’s core purpose, one of the central, more concrete promises World War II held out for Americans was that widespread material prosperity would follow victory. More than anything else, that meant a privately-owned suburban home stocked with an array of electric appliances such as refrigerators, ranges, clothes irons, vacuum cleaners, sewing machines, and radios. As V-E Day approached, utilities and electric equipment manufacturers pledged to make good on the war’s promise.<sup>35</sup> In a May 1945 Georgia Power Company advertisement, a handsome GI and his fiancé share an embrace in a meadow as they gaze into the distance longing for a postwar “dream-home” filled with “frozen food cabinets and automatic washers and electric blankets and air conditioning and lots more electric conveniences.” Georgia Power guaranteed that the young couple’s vision would become reality because “the electric service that keeps them [electrical conveniences] running will continue to be both cheap and friendly. That’s one way we can help make dreams come true!”<sup>36</sup> For homeowners in Georgia, this high-powered dream indeed seemed to have come true. Although domestic electrical consumption increased steadily throughout the war years for reasons peculiar to the wartime economy, the number of Georgia homes with electric service as well as the usage of electric power in Georgia homes jumped to unprecedented levels in the years after 1945.<sup>37</sup> The average electrified home in Georgia Power’s territory in 1948 used about 2,300 kilowatt hours annually, 28 percent higher than 1945 levels and 48 percent greater than the national average in 1948. Moreover, residential

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<sup>35</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 73-75.

<sup>36</sup> Georgia Power Company, “We’ll Build a House on a Hilltop,” *Kilowatt News* III (May 1945), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Although federal government demands on American industrial production during the war prevented most Americans from acquiring new electric wiring and appliances, the mass immigration to and concentration of populations in already well-electrified urban-industrial areas for wartime production jobs caused domestic electrical consumption levels to steadily increase from 1942 to 1945. See Tobey, *Technology as Freedom*, 166-167.

sales' proportion of Georgia Power's kilowatt-hour sales amounted to almost 25 percent more in 1948 than in 1945.<sup>38</sup> Postwar hopes for a consumers' paradise relied on enormous—and quickly increasing—amounts of electric energy.

Yet the unexpected spike in electrical consumption in the early postwar dream home did not inspire confidence in America's future. In fact, rapidly growing energy usage endangered economic growth and the realization of Americans' consumerist fantasies because it threatened to cause another power shortage. And indeed, the post-1945 demand surge once again precipitated dreaded power failures in cities across the United States—credible, palpable threats to postwar progress. Several factors contributed to these collapses. A lack of generating capacity was one. Because of the government's wartime claims over both raw materials and industrial production for defense, utilities simply lacked the ability to adequately expand their generating capacities to keep pace with consistently growing electrical demand. At times in the early postwar years, overall electrical output soared to about 95 percent of capacity—shaky ground considering utility managers generally believed they should maintain a reserve capacity of 15 to 20 percent.<sup>39</sup> Based on Federal Power Commission chairman Leland Olds's estimate, in 1946 and 1947 the nation's ability to generate electricity fell some seven and one-half million kilowatts (or about 43 percent) short of adequate capacity and reserves.<sup>40</sup>

Yet load increases and capacity shortages were not solely responsible for shutting down the grid. Fuel supply also contributed to postwar power shortfalls. In parts of the United States, drought caused postwar electrical shortages. A wartime population boom combined with surging electrical usage in cities such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, and San Diego might have been enough to shut down the grid after the Axis's defeat. But combined with a rainfall deficiency, those

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<sup>38</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Reports, 1945-1948*.

<sup>39</sup> Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation*, 48.

<sup>40</sup> Franklin P. Huddle, "The Outlook is Dim," *New Republic*, May 12, 1947, 25.

factors resulted in sudden blackouts and strict limitations on electrical usage in the Southwest. This lack of electricity prompted California's governor in 1948 to appoint a State Emergency Power Director, prodded the legislature to extend day-light savings through the winter, and forced manufacturers to reduce their workweek to four days.<sup>41</sup>

In the South, inadequate supplies of coal, due in part to striking electrical workers and coal miners, threatened to bring power shortages. Reports shortly after the war's end held that electrical generation was in jeopardy because "coal supplies have reached the point of exhaustion." According to one observer, "if this condition exists much longer, the situation will become chaotic."<sup>42</sup> Labor strife and coal shortages also caused both brownouts and blackouts in places such as New York, Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia. Detroit and other automobile manufacturing centers experienced strike-induced power shortages so grave that the Ford Motor Company in response laid off 45,000 workers. Striking electrical workers and coal miners brought the city of Pittsburgh to its knees in the fall of 1946. Factories, hospitals, department stores, streetcars, and streetlights stopped operating, or faced severe service cutbacks for more than two weeks until bosses and workers agreed to a solution. The lack of ample electrical supply, at least one observer noted, hurled the city back into the pre-modernity of "some darker century."<sup>43</sup>

The looming chaos of the situation well went beyond the inconvenience of dark city streets and dim storefronts. While New Dealers and private utility executives did not agree on much, they did agree that ample electric power would be fundamental to postwar economic recovery, security, and growth, and, thus, that energy scarcity posed grave danger to the nation's

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<sup>41</sup> Needham, "Power Lines," 184-188; also see C. Girard Davidson, "The Need for More Electric Power: Shortages Delay Production" (Apr. 11, 1949), *Vital Speeches of the Day* 15 (May 1, 1949), 446.

<sup>42</sup> "Dixie Coal Shortage Acute; Cotton Mills Face Shutdown," *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 17, 1945.

<sup>43</sup> Nye, *The Night the Lights Went Out*, 60-62, quote from 60.

future economic health.<sup>44</sup> Many Americans worried that not only would obstacles to economic progress and full employment forestall the realization of the long-promised postwar consumer cornucopia, but that such problems might also bring a return of the Great Depression.<sup>45</sup> Without sufficient electricity, these fears seemed to be coming true. Southerners worried in the midst of the 1945 coal strikes that cotton mill operations across the region might completely cease and that jobs outside those in the textile industry could become scarce as well. Between 1946 and 1949, power reductions in the parts of the South resulted in multiple manufacturing shortfalls and tens of thousands of layoffs.<sup>46</sup> A plant in Arkansas, for instance, lost out on the production of an estimated seventy-two million pounds of aluminum in 1948 because it had to operate on about half its wartime level of electricity.<sup>47</sup> Reddy Kilowatt, the US electric industry's cartoon character spokesman created by Alabama Power executive Ashton Collins in 1926, approached the situation in a light-hearted manner, lamenting that the interconnected problems of "coal shortage, ...factory shutdowns, [and] material shortages" had him singing "those Reconversion Blues."<sup>48</sup> In a much more sober tone, *Fortune* reported just after the war that much of America was "depression conscious [and] worried sick about post-war joblessness."<sup>49</sup>

The Deep South did not directly experience long-lasting, crippling postwar power shortages, but the shockwaves of energy famine in other parts of the United States rattled southern electric companies and their consumers. This proved especially true among the electrical customers who believed they were most vulnerable to power outages: farmers. The

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<sup>44</sup> Needham, "Power Lines," 191-192.

<sup>45</sup> See Needham, "Power Lines," 184-189; for more general discussions of fears about a return to the depression in the postwar, see Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 114-119; and Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008) 76, 157.

<sup>46</sup> John P. Callahan, "Consumers Fear Power Shortage," *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1947.

<sup>47</sup> Davidson, "Need for More Electric Power," 445.

<sup>48</sup> Puget Sound Power & Light Company advertisement, "Reddy's Got the Reconversion Blues," in *Reddy News*, Jul. 8, 1946, 163, box 76: "Reddy News 1946-47," RkW records.

<sup>49</sup> *Fortune* quoted in May, *Homeward Bound*, 76.

Rural Electrification Administration's chief, Claude Wickard, claimed in 1947 that because existing generating capacity was insufficient to satisfy rapidly growing postwar demand, the nation's farmers faced an "extremely grave power situation." More than a year later, those concerns had not been allayed. The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), a St. Louis based advocacy and lobbying organization founded in 1942, echoed the REA leader's position. According to the NRECA's president, "there is not a state in the Union in which a cooperative's power situation does not reflect an acute power shortage, which has reached a point of... emergency in the nation."<sup>50</sup> Members of the GEMC certainly believed that their power situation approached emergency conditions. Cooperatives in south Georgia complained about "critical power shortages" in 1947 and 1948, and worried that, without the speedy completion of federal hydroelectric generation stations, rising demand in coming years would only make matters worse.<sup>51</sup>

Sensitive to widespread worries about possible energy shortfalls and economic recession in the postwar era, southern power companies took pains to convince their customers, including REA cooperatives, that they had no reason to fret. Georgia Power told its clients in 1946 that "your electric service is *one thing* you don't have to worry about....No worry about a shortage. There's more reserve today than ever."<sup>52</sup> Other southern utilities tried to parry consumers' worries about energy scarcity by shifting blame to a federal government-induced materials shortage that lingered into the early postwar years. In a Reddy Kilowatt advertisement, the Mississippi Power and Light Company informed the public that "the many factory shut-downs, shortages, and delays that you've been reading about lately in your newspaper" are "due, of

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<sup>50</sup> "Power Shortage Called Emergency," *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1949.

<sup>51</sup> Hank McQuade, *Light up Our Land: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation: The First 50 Years* (Atlanta: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, 1990), 121.

<sup>52</sup> Georgia Power Company, "Worry-Free," *Kilowatt News IV* (Sept. 1946), 3, emphasis in original.

course,” to “an acute shortage of materials” over which the Defense Department still claimed priority.<sup>53</sup>

Even if severe power shortages had not stricken the Deep South, utility managers and public power officials alike believed they had to take preventative action because they might soon face energy famine. Indeed, electricity shortfalls, actual or anticipated, played a major if underappreciated role in postwar public-private power fights at places such as Clarks Hill, where questions of American abundance, and of whether the public or private realm would be responsible for the proper distribution of the nation’s natural resources, took center stage.<sup>54</sup> For private utilities like the Georgia Power Company, at least in public statements, frantic warnings about power shortages functioned as a type of boogeyman, a scare tactic of the “prophets of doom” meant to dupe an anxious voting public. Such deceit, energy firms argued in a repetition on the domino theory, was part of a pernicious ruse to open the way for more government hydropower immediately and for a government takeover of the grid—and all of American life—eventually.<sup>55</sup> Thus, to do its part to answer the challenges of impending postwar power shortages and to fend off potential economic depression—as well as to preempt public power in doing so—the Georgia Power Company, which clearly could not rely solely on coal, looked once again to consolidate its control over the water and expand its hydroelectric portfolio at sites on several rivers in its home state. Most notably, the company set its sights on Clarks Hill, an area on the Savannah River that the federal government, public power advocates, and rural electric cooperatives also wanted to quickly develop in order to meet the challenges of the postwar era.

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<sup>53</sup> Mississippi Light and Power Company advertisement, “Shut-Downs! Shortages! Delays!” in *Reddy News*, Jul. 8, 1946, 163, box 76: “Reddy News 1946-47,” RkW records. Many other privately owned utilities made the same claim. See *Reddy News*, 1946-1948, RkW Records.

<sup>54</sup> Historians have almost universally ignored the significance of power shortages to US postwar political economy. The exception here is Needham, “Power Lines,” 184-189, 191-200.

<sup>55</sup> John Callahan, “No Shortage Seen in Electric Power,” *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1947.

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Hydropower developers, both private and public, had long coveted Clarks Hill as an energy source for southern industrial progress. Canadian-born engineer James Mitchell visited the site in 1911 with plans to use his connections to British capital and his global electrical development expertise to build a hydroelectric production facility. He discovered a better opportunity near Birmingham, though, where he helped found the Alabama Power Company in 1912.<sup>56</sup> In 1928, the Savannah River Electric Company, a Georgia Power affiliate, purchased large tracts of land and secured a permit from the Federal Power Commission (FPC) to develop a dam at Clarks Hill. The company surrendered its license in 1932 (but never sold its land) when it became clear that the Great Depression would continue to clog global capital pipelines and significantly delay or even prevent the project's completion. At that point, the federal government drew up plans for Clarks Hill. After the US Army Corps of Engineers announced its intentions for the site in 1935, Savannah River Electric and Georgia Power pledged their support and reiterated their backing for the Corps' Clarks Hill development during World War II (see Chapter 3).<sup>57</sup> After the war ended and fears of power shortage and recession coursed through the South and the nation, however, circumstances changed. Georgia Power managers, who were also the principle executives of Savannah River Electric, claimed they immediately needed all the power that Clarks Hill could provide so they could stave off energy famine, assure lasting progress, and secure free enterprise in the South.

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<sup>56</sup> Dub Taft and Sam Heys, *Big Bets: Decisions and Leaders that Shaped Southern Company* (Atlanta: Southern Company, 2011), 2.

<sup>57</sup> Carl Vinson, "Honorable Carl Vinson Analyzes the Dondero Bill," (1947), 3-7, box 61, folder "Hon. Carl Vinson statement opposing control by Georgia Power Company of Clarks Hill Power, 1947," The Papers of Walter Wade Harrison, 1900-1985, Special Collections, Zach S. Henderson Library, Georgia Southern University, (hereafter Harrison Papers); For a detailed discussion of the Clarks Hill conflict in the 1930s, see Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 73-85.



In October 1946, an aging but still eloquent Preston Arkwright—now serving as Georgia Power’s chairman and Savannah River Electric’s president—appeared at an FPC hearing in Atlanta to make his case for a new license to develop Clarks Hill. The long-time utility executive assured the commissioners that since that the war had concluded and capital and had once again begun to flow the company could now proceed with the project and reclaim its status as a hydropower utility. In fact, according to Arkwright, Georgia Power and its neighboring utilities had never really wanted to turn quite so decisively to coal, which had become considerably more expensive due to wartime shortages. The company had temporarily transitioned to steam power only because the exigencies of war, rising domestic consumption, and drought demanded that “we had to have [increased coal-fired capacity] in a hurry; because the steam plants could be built very much quicker than the water power plants.” Now, though, both Georgia and South Carolina urgently needed to tap the Savannah River’s energy because, according to Arkwright, “there is a greater demand for electric power at the present time than there has ever been, and from our studies of the question demand is going to keep up and grow very considerably.”<sup>58</sup>

But, Arkwright insisted, even though the Army Engineers should play an advisory role in both the construction of and day-to-day management at Clarks Hill, private enterprise must build the reservoir, dam, and powerhouse. Government ownership of the dam and reservoir would result in lower tax revenues and crippling inefficiencies, largely due to the lack of a federally-owned electrical transmission system in the region, which would worsen fragile postwar energy circumstances. Moreover, it would also signal the revival of the New Deal’s confiscation of private property, ultimately resulting in “the destruction of this Company’s business.”<sup>59</sup> Harlee Branch, serving at the time as Georgia Power’s general counsel (he would become the

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<sup>58</sup> “Excerpt from Statement of Preston S. Arkwright at Hearing before Federal Power Commission for a License to Construct and Operate Clark Hill Hydro Plant,” October 1946, 2-3, box 183, folder “Clark Hill Dam,” JCD Papers.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

company's vice president in 1949 and president in 1951), made much the same point in trying to convince Congressman James C. Davis of Georgia to use his influence in the FPC case. "Georgia and South Carolina need the power now," Branch fumed, and the federal government's usurpation of his client's right to develop its "own lands" at Clarks Hill would "bar the largest single investment of private funds ever sought to be made in the states of Georgia and South Carolina." Anything but a private power triumph at Clarks Hill would do irreparable harm to American free market capitalism and would prevent the speedy completion of a much-needed power producing facility. In short, Brach concluded, government ownership at Clarks Hill would be "absurd and un-American."<sup>60</sup> For Arkwright, Branch, and the Georgia Power Company, if free enterprise were to survive and if depression were to be avoided in the postwar South, the private realm must exercise control over the Savannah River.

Even as the end of the war had changed the situation for private utilities, supporters of the New Deal's ongoing mission to improve the South through the manipulation of watersheds—which included virtually all of Georgia and South Carolina's state and federal representatives—stood fast. Several prominent southern politicians spoke out on behalf of the government's plans at Clarks Hill. Democratic US Senator Richard Russell, long a proponent of federally sponsored public works initiatives that would benefit his home state of Georgia, pledged his backing for the federal government's role in the Clarks Hill project and swore to "fight the electric company's proposal 'to the limit.'"<sup>61</sup>

Perhaps most notably, J. Strom Thurmond, winner of the South Carolina Democratic primary for governor in early September 1946, offered the testimony before the FPC tribunal in Atlanta that best articulated public power advocates' position on Clarks Hill. In his statement,

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<sup>60</sup> Harllee Branch to James C. Davis, Jan. 18, 1947, emphasis in original, box 183, folder "Clark Hill Dam," JCD Papers.

<sup>61</sup> "Project in Georgia Stirs Opposition," *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1946.

Thurmond waved away notions that the government's plans for Clarks Hill reeked of "socialism" and claimed that the Army Engineers should develop the site on the Savannah River for the same reasons that Arkwright and Branch stated: in 1946 and in the immediate future, both Georgia and South Carolina, like the rest of the United States, faced potential power shortages and possible economic depression. Federal agencies, he argued, boasted an unmatched track record of swiftly completing dams and had an ongoing commitment to hydroelectric projects. Only government action at Clarks Hill could quickly provide much needed electricity and help avoid a severe economic downturn. By contrast, Thurmond continued, history showed that private companies dawdled on waterpower and might at any time shift their focus back to coal, leaving Georgians and South Carolinians without a vital energy source. Moreover, South Carolina's governor-elect also averred that the federal government must construct the facilities because its "first consideration...will be the public good. If the Power Company develops this project, their first consideration we feel will be the Company's good." And the public good consisted of more than just electric power. The Clarks Hill project in Thurmond's estimation would include not only improved generation facilities and navigation and flood control mechanisms, but anti-malaria measures, wildlife protection, soil conservation tactics, reforestation programs, and racially segregated recreation opportunities.<sup>62</sup> Though an outspoken proponent of free enterprise, Thurmond's vision for the installation on the Savannah River sounded quite a lot like a revival of the populist critique of New South-style cartel capitalism. It also seemed to call for the extension of TVA-style regional development into Georgia and South Carolina, a consequential position in the escalating rivalry for Clarks Hill.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> J. Strom Thurmond, [Statement to the FPC] October 31, 1946, 1-5, quote on 4, box 61, folder "Clarks Hill Dam Documents, 1935-1978," Harrison Papers.

<sup>63</sup> Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2012), 49-50.

The FPC sided with Thurmond and Russell and rejected Georgia Power's pitch in January 1947, confirming that the Army Engineers would develop Clarks Hill. In any case, Congress had already identified the site at Clarks Hill, along with proposed improvements for river basins across the country, as a fundamental part of the postwar economic growth agenda and had approved over \$35 million for its construction.<sup>64</sup> Although Georgia Power protested the FPC's decision, company managers soon regrouped and adopted a strategy that reflected the reality they now faced. Instead of clamoring for exclusive possession of the land and water at Clarks Hill, Georgia Power executives worked to claim ownership of only the Savannah River's energy.

In the spring of 1947, George Dondero, a rabidly anti-New Deal Republican Congressman from Michigan now working closely with Georgia Power and Savannah River Electric, submitted a bill to the US House of Representatives that called for dividing the water's functions at Clarks Hill. In this scheme, the Army Corps of Engineers would build and maintain the reservoir and dam and would thereafter oversee the facilities' flood control and navigation tasks, but the federal government would have no link to the production or transmission of Clarks Hill's energy.

The Dondero Bill characterized electricity as an "incidental" byproduct of the federal dam and thus directed the FPC to grant the Savannah River and Electric Company a new license that would entitle the company to complete and own all of the electric machinery at Clarks Hill. What was more, the Corps—not the Department of the Interior—would have sole authority to oversee the construction of power lines from the Savannah River hydropower station, a

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<sup>64</sup> "FDR Signs Billion Flood Control Bill," *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 24, 1944.

responsibility it would outsource to Savannah River Electric.<sup>65</sup> Dondero's legislation, it should be noted, did not represent a wholly new departure. In fact, it revived a maneuver that Preston Arkwright proposed as a response to the TVA in the early 1930s. At a congressional committee hearing in 1933, Arkwright claimed that his business as well as his customers were "menaced by the suggestion of the Government building transmission lines into the territory served by" the Georgia Power Company. The TVA's direct connection to preference customers would breed chaos in the South's electrical markets. In order to protect his utility's interests and best serve the region's consumers, the TVA facilities at Muscle Shoals should interconnect with and sell its output to Georgia Power, Alabama Power, and other private companies in the Tennessee Valley.<sup>66</sup> Along with Commonwealth and Southern's CEO, Wendell Willkie, Arkwright brought this proposal to President Roosevelt in 1936, offering to include the TVA in the Southern Super Power Zone.<sup>67</sup> In both cases, though the utility executives made their pitch in the language of broad social benefits and sound business practices, the TVA would act only as a wholesale operation. The New Deal's signature public works project would essentially be emptied of any public power elements.

Dondero's 1947 effort to replicate this strategy on behalf of private utilities in Georgia, like Willkie's and Arkwright's in the 1930s, bore no fruit. After Public Works Committee hearings in 1948, Congress once again confirmed that not only would the Army Engineers build the reservoir and dam, they would construct the powerhouse and would oversee the production of electricity at Clarks Hill.

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<sup>65</sup> US Congress, House, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., HR 3826 (Jun. 13, 1947), 1-2, in JCD Papers, box 183, folder "Clark Hill Dam."

<sup>66</sup> US House Committee on Military Affairs, *Muscle Shoals: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs*, 73<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1933, 134-134; 146-151, quote on 151.

<sup>67</sup> Dub Taft and Sam Heys, *Big Bets: Decisions and Leaders that Shaped Southern Company* (Atlanta: Southern Company, 2011), 120-123.

The failed legislative proposal strongly suggested to southern power companies and their allies that they had at best an uncertain future in hydroelectricity that private capital's controlling hand in the South's political economy might soon fall victim to the New Deal's supposed totalitarian designs. That possibility prompted Dondero to ask of the Clarks Hill affair: "Are we going to have Government ownership and State socialism, or are we going to preserve private ownership?"<sup>68</sup> The grim implications of this rhetorical question for Clarks Hill in particular and the postwar United States in general did not emerge solely in response to FPC's decision or the Dondero Bill's failure. Nor did those implications pertain solely to Clarks Hill. Georgia Power's efforts to regain federal permission to exercise control over the Savannah River's energy, and the state's economic future, took place as a wave of public power rose across the United States in the late 1940s.

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As Georgia Power's sense of urgency concerning Clarks Hill in 1946-47 suggested, private utilities were not alone in crafting plans to meet the challenges of postwar economic conditions by quickly developing reservoirs and dams on the South's waterways. In response to widely shared fears of power shortage and the Great Depression's return, public power liberals pressed for an aggressive expansion of federal river conservation and socially redeeming hydroelectric projects across the United States. Spurred on by President Truman's exhortation to "apply the lessons of our Tennessee Valley experience to our other great river basins," public power interests lobbied for new valley authorities based on the TVA model.<sup>69</sup> Yet even more ominously for private utilities, the Department of the Interior (DOI), stocked with ambitious

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<sup>68</sup> US House Committee on Public Works, *Clark Hill Power Project, Georgia and South Carolina: Hearings before the Committee on Public Works*, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1948, 13.

<sup>69</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," Jan. 5, 1949, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=13293> (accessed Apr. 11, 2015); De Luna, *Public versus Private Power*, 16-21.

public power advocates, worked to expand its role in both constructing more federal electric infrastructure and—by working with REA cooperatives to tap into power directly at Army Engineer dams—building an integrated electrical network anchored in the country’s rivers. Because the contest over Clarks Hill took place against the backdrop of increasing federal hydropower development, it is necessary to briefly recount public power’s expansion, especially that of the DOI, in years immediately following World War II.

Although many valley authority proposals failed in Congress in the late 1930s and in the war years, the potentially dire economic situation of the early postwar moment compelled public power advocates to press for the creation of more federal regional planning corporations similar to the TVA.<sup>70</sup> In fact, in the early postwar years, Congress had as many as ten TVA-style proposals in its hands at any given time, the most ambitious of which were the controversial Missouri Valley Authority and Columbia Valley Administration.<sup>71</sup> The Deep South was not exempt from this trend; utilities in Georgia and South Carolina had to confront a potential valley authority head on. Immediately following the war, members of Congress from Georgia and South Carolina collaborated on a proposal for a TVA-style regional development agency in the Savannah River basin based at Clarks Hill. According to the bill, which enjoyed enthusiastic support as a bold attempt to bring comprehensive conservation measures and broad social improvement to postwar Georgia and South Carolina—much like Strom Thurmond’s vision for Clarks Hill—the Savannah Valley Authority (SVA) would include eleven dams (based on the Army Engineers’ 1935 recommendations) and would be an exercise in regional planning in a

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<sup>70</sup> “Bill Asks 7 Boards to Control Floods,” *New York Times*, Feb. 11, 1937; James C. Williams, *Energy and the Making of Modern California* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1997), 262-266; Louis Broomfield, “Flood Control,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 4, 1945;

<sup>71</sup> Wesley C. Clark, “Proposed ‘Valley Authority’ Legislation,” *American Political Science Review* 40 (Feb. 1946), 62. Also see De Luna, *Public versus Private Power*, 41-52; Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams*, 124-131.

10,000 square-mile area in the Savannah River valley.<sup>72</sup> Putting a fine point on the matter, Georgia Democratic Congressman Carl Vinson plainly stated in 1948 that the plan for Clarks Hill “means a little TVA for Georgia.”<sup>73</sup> Much of the publicity surrounding the “little TVA,” like that accompanying the original TVA, emphasized that the SVA’s primary purpose would be the “production of electricity” and, moreover, that the SVA would have the power to “acquire existing electric facilities in order to supply farms and small villages with electric power.”<sup>74</sup> In the end, like the proposed valley authorities in the Missouri and Columbia River basins, the Savannah River’s own “little TVA” anchored at Clarks Hill failed in a Congress that had grown weary of the TVA idea. Yet the persistent push for new TVAs through the late 1940s indicated to private utilities in the South that reports of the regional development idea’s death had been greatly exaggerated.

Although no independent TVA-style agencies emerged in the postwar era, the belief in comprehensive regional development based in water conservation did not perish. In fact, the Department of the Interior proved to be an even greater threat to private power in the South than the somewhat limited valley authority model. Under the leadership of Harold Ickes, who headed the DOI from 1933 to 1946, Interior dramatically increased in size and significance as a hydropower producer, especially with its Bureau of Reclamation dams in the US West.<sup>75</sup> More troubling for private utilities in the South (which lay outside the Bureau of Reclamation’s dam-building territory), the DOI expanded its reach through the establishment of electrical transmission agencies such as the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) in the Northwest in

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<sup>72</sup> Manganiello, “Dam Crazy,” 189-190; “Arnall Backs ‘Little TVA’ Plan for Savannah River Development,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 16, 1945.

<sup>73</sup> Gladstone Williams, “Georgia Congressman is Credited with Clark’s Hill Development,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 18, 1948.

<sup>74</sup> “Fortson Lauds Benefits of Savannah Project,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 15, 1945.

<sup>75</sup> Clayton R. Koppes, “Environmental Policy and American Liberalism: The Department of the Interior, 1933-1953,” *Environmental Review* 7 (Spring 1983), 21.



1937 and the Southwestern Power Administration (SPA) in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas in 1943. Originally, both the BPA and SPA transmitted power from a very few, specifically identified public dams.<sup>76</sup> The scope of those agencies, however, grew far greater during the war years because of drastic increases in the need for power. By 1945, the BPA became the agency responsible for arranging the transport of all federal electricity in the Northwest and the SPA assumed transmission duties from all public dams in Arkansas, Louisiana, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas.<sup>77</sup> By the end of the decade, the DOI had designs to extend its power shipping operations to the southeast as well.

The legal mechanism behind the rapid enlargement of the DOI's electrical transmission responsibilities was the Flood Control Act of 1944. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this legislation not just for the BPA's and SPA's growth, but for postwar public power in a larger sense. Because Section 5 explicitly granted the DOI the exclusive authority to transmit electricity from federal dams to rural electric cooperatives and other public bodies (a provision that Dondero's 1947 bill sought to undermine specifically for Clarks Hill), the 1944 Flood Control Act had the potential to stitch together the patchwork nature of public power into coherent a nationwide web. The law could firmly link the functions of the various DOI agencies to those of the primary postwar dam-building institution, the Army Engineers, and to federally-funded rural electrical cooperatives. All of this activity could extend well beyond the boundaries of single river valleys.<sup>78</sup>

According to historian Christopher Manganiello, the 1944 Flood Control Act, particularly for Congress and the Army Engineers, functioned to water down TVA-style regional planning

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<sup>76</sup> Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government [Hoover Commission], Task Force on Water Resources and Power, *Report on Water Resources and Power*, Vol. II (GPO, 1955), 447-475 and 520-539.

<sup>77</sup> *Flood Control Act of 1944*, Public Law 534, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., chap. 665, HR 4485 (Dec. 22, 1944), Sec. 5, 3-4, [www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/Omnibus/FCA1944.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/habitatconservation/Omnibus/FCA1944.pdf) (last accessed Apr. 25, 2015).

<sup>78</sup> *Flood Control Act of 1944*, Sec. 5, 4.

for the postwar era. Instead, he writes, the law created a “techno-selective river planning model” that encouraged piecemeal “pork-barrel projects” but included few of the New Deal’s ambitions for broad social improvement.<sup>79</sup> Yet the DOI’s postwar blueprint, which leveled strong criticism of the limited valley authority model, went well beyond building constituent-pleasing dams and shipping electricity from federal power projects to cooperatives and public bodies (also known as “preference customers,” because a chain of federal legislation granted such institutions top priority for federally generated electric power). Instead, the mid-1940s DOI operated with “expansionist fervor” and mimicked the private utility industry’s grow-and-build model, all with the objective of implementing the New Deal’s goals of improving American’s lives through equitable natural resource distribution and access to cheap and abundant electricity.<sup>80</sup>

Ickes articulated this position with an official “power-policy memorandum” in 1946 meant to guide the DOI’s nationwide growth as a producer and shipper of electric power during the process of reconversion.<sup>81</sup> Even before the end of hostilities, he announced that his department would construct for postwar America a “new empire” in the West and “Second Empire” in the South based on the “absolutely essential” conservation of water. Though his empires would center on a massive build-up of federal hydropower capacity, Ickes envisioned soil conservation, swamp drainage, reforestation, irrigation, and navigation improvements as critical elements of his plan for lasting prosperity. DOI-led regional development efforts would furthermore enable social and economic progress for millions through the establishment of productive farms, prolific factories, and modern homes electrified by public power.<sup>82</sup> Just prior to the Nazis’ defeat, the Secretary of the Interior pushed his imperial appeal even further,

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<sup>79</sup> Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 98-99.

<sup>80</sup> Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams*, 44-46, 119-120.

<sup>81</sup> Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams*, 44-47.

<sup>82</sup> Harold Ickes, “Veterans...Here’s Your Empire,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 5, 1943.

revealing plans for an “ocean-to-ocean power project” for postwar America that would far surpass what any isolated regional development agency could accomplish. The DOI was the best institution, according to Ickes, to take on the “Herculean job” of converting America from an efficient war machine to a successful peacetime producer. It would take “regional development at its boldest”—which only the DOI, and not TVA-style agencies, could manage—to cultivate whole river basins as well as to link them together through the long-distance transmission of electricity for widespread social improvement across the continent.<sup>83</sup>

In the early postwar moment, even as Congress had soured on the TVA idea, Interior’s plans closely resembled but radically extended the scope of comprehensive development schemes. The DOI cast itself as both a potential nationwide planning authority and a would-be federal electric utility. As such it would compensate for the inadequacies of an overly coal-dependent private utility industry, whose looming power shortages, according to Assistant Secretary of the Interior C. Girard Davidson, would “cut down production and throw more workers out of jobs,” beginning a “spiral path leading to depression.” The federal government, Davidson continued, must ensure that the United States enjoyed adequate supplies of electric power for homes, farms, and factories by building new multi-purpose dams across the nation. Only then would the electric industry’s heretofore empty “slogans of ‘better living, less drudgery,’ ‘more jobs, more production’” become real and ensure that “all competitors in free enterprise will have an equal opportunity to move forward.”<sup>84</sup>

But this was not just talk. The Interior Department actively worked to implement its ideals in all sections of the postwar United States, including the South. As early as 1947, the DOI contemplated plans to extend the Bureau of Reclamation’s territory and power marketing

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<sup>83</sup> “Ickes Making Bid to Supervise Ocean-to-Ocean Power Project,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 18, 1945.

<sup>84</sup> Davidson, “Need for More Electric Power,” 445, 447.

authority to Dixie. Yet Congress exhibited little desire to stretch Reclamation beyond the US West and the Army Corps of Engineers had firmly staked a claim as the federal dam building institution in the South.<sup>85</sup> The idea that carried the day, then, was to establish in the region a public power marketing agency modeled on the Bonneville and Southwestern Power Administrations. The DOI formally established its newest agency, named the Southeastern Power Administration (SEPA), in 1950 and, as if to stick a thumb in private power's eye, placed its headquarters in Georgia Power's territory just northwest of Clarks Hill in Elberton, Georgia. SEPA's explicit mission was to ensure that rural electric cooperatives and other preference customers in the ten-state area south of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers would receive the cheap energy generated at Army Engineer dams—potentially through federally-owned “backbone” transmission lines that would connect public dams directly to public customers (image 5.1).<sup>86</sup> The DOI's creation of SEPA represented the possible realization of public power advocates' dreams in the southeast: a coherent, wholly integrated electrical production, transmission, and distribution system that would furnish reliable energy, economic stability, and social progress for traditionally underserved communities in postwar Dixie.

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<sup>85</sup> Hoover Commission, *Water Resources and Power*, 540-554; De Luna, *Public versus Private Power*, 95.

<sup>86</sup> For a history of SEPA, see Gus Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers: Power for the People of the Southeast: A History of the Southeastern Power Administration* (Washington, DC: US Department of Energy, 1990).

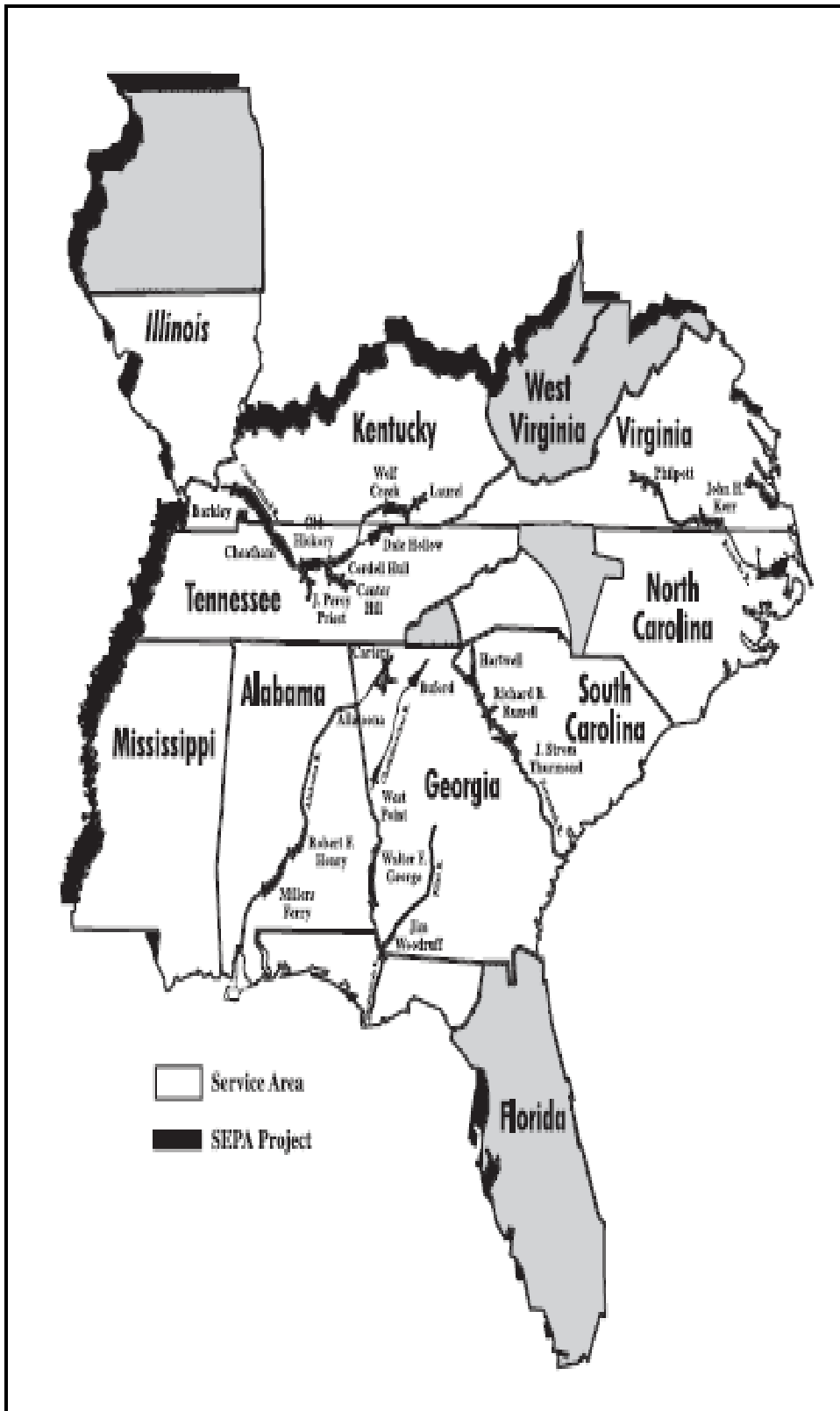


Figure 5.1 SEPA's Territory, US Department of Energy, 2007.

For private utilities in the southeast, the expansion of the DOI's power transmission responsibilities was a nightmare come true, one whose consequences they believed they had already witnessed in the Southwestern Power Administration. A 1947 Reddy Kilowatt-Arkansas Power and Light advertisement warned consumers that they "had better watch out" for the DOI's Southwestern Power Administration. Through that agency, the DOI had foisted a "far-flung competing power system" on the western reaches of the South. The SPA would set in motion the domino effect; it would ultimately act as a "Regional Authority" with the potential to overtake privately owned utilities in the region much as the TVA had in Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. But the SPA, the ad emphasized, would be even more malignant than the TVA: it would, the ad proclaimed, control a territory "3½ times the size...of the TVA" and would be ripe for ever more metastasis.<sup>87</sup> With the creation of SEPA, the "far-flung competing power system" crept ever closer to becoming a reality in the southeast. Not only had a centralized authority seized the fuel source over which private southern energy corporations had long held monopoly control. The mechanism for constructing a rival, government-owned power network across all of Dixie—one that countenanced no single river-basin limitations—was now in place as well.

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As the US Army Corps of Engineers toiled away at Clarks Hill (the site would be completed in 1952), SEPA wasted no time in taking steps to make public power's dreams—and private power's nightmares—come true. SEPA's first administrator, a grizzled public power veteran named Ben Creim, believed that if his new organization were to follow in the footsteps of its sister power administrations, Bonneville and Southwestern, then it must quickly get into the business of constructing power lines to serve rural electric cooperatives in its area. Private

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<sup>87</sup> Arkansas Power & Light Company advertisement, "WATCH OUT!" in *Reddy News*, Jul. 14, 1947, 211, box 76, folder "Reddy News 1946-1947," RkW Records.

utilities across the region nervously anticipated this move and interpreted it as an act of unbridled federal aggression.<sup>88</sup> A power company manager from West Virginia lamented that with the establishment of SEPA, which would control the largest electric service area in the nation outside that of the Bureau of Reclamation, “the Federal Government is welding the final link in a public power chain that threatens to choke off more than twenty major private utility companies throughout an eighteen-state area in the South.”<sup>89</sup> Under “the present Interior Department attitude” of unchecked expansion, another southern utility executive griped to the *New York Times*, all “privately owned power and light companies would eventually be nationalized.” In this light, the Tennessee Valley Authority, which private utilities still denounced as “socialistic in nature,” had clearly become the “lesser of two evils.”<sup>90</sup>

Faced with the prospect of another federal invasion of their territory—with the potential to be far worse than that of the TVA—executives at Georgia Power did not retreat. But they did not exactly dig in their heels either. Instead, they pursued a new strategy. They gave ground to public power. In a drastic reversal of the company’s earlier positions regarding Clarks Hill, Georgia Power managers fully conceded postwar river development and power generation to the Army Corps of Engineers and readily granted that REA cooperatives should receive cheap federal energy—but only indirectly. The construction of SEPA-owned transmission facilities that directly linked Clarks Hill to REA cooperatives, they claimed, would breed unfair competition and would contribute to the nationalization of the electric industry. According to Georgia Power, any electricity that cooperatives received must flow to REA distribution systems only over privately owned transmission lines. By turning their attention to power lines and away from dams, the Georgia Power Company would not so much “unplug the New Deal,” to use historian

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<sup>88</sup> Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers*, 35-38.

<sup>89</sup> Callahan, “20 Utilities Seen in Peril in South,” *New York Times*, Mar. 19, 1950.

<sup>90</sup> John P. Callahan, “Utilities Watch New House Bill,” *New York Times*, Jun. 1, 1947.

Karl Brooks's term, as it would plug the New Deal's infrastructure into its private, increasingly coal-based network. This approach, which the company cast as a partnership with the federal government, would enable Georgia Power to realize a tax-payer funded subsidy while at the same time essentially ending government competition and, indeed public power, in the region. It would enable Georgia Power to funnel the output of public dams into its coal-dominated system and convert it into private power.

If Georgia Power declined to launch an open counterattack on an increasingly aggressive postwar public power sector, its counterparts around the nation did not. The escalating rivalry between the United States and the USSR afforded utilities, lobbying organizations, and national public relations firms the opportunity to bind (and thereby try to destroy) New Deal water-based power programs to the Soviet-led worldwide communist conspiracy. A few electric industry leaders in the early 1950s explicitly sported the "paranoid style" in making these associations, claiming, for instance, that those who agitated for federal power initiatives "are of course the Communists, who are guided from Moscow," or that they were members of "a Commie-front organization" with designs to transform the United States into a "modified Marxist state."<sup>91</sup>

Yet despite the occasional attempt to stoke fears of a Soviet takeover by way of the grid, the private power companies' campaign against public power was no McCarthyesque free-for-all that saw wild-eyed fanatics haphazardly hurling accusations of communism at anything standing in their path. Rather, the utility industry launched surgical strikes against American liberty's true enemy—the "creeping revolution" of "Fabian socialism" that revealed itself piecemeal and

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<sup>91</sup> Quotes in Lee Metcalf and Vic Reinemer, *Overcharge* (New York: David McKay Co, 1967), 98, 102. In an influential 1964 essay inspired by rhetoric surrounding Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater's bid for the presidency, historian Richard Hofstadter defined "the paranoid style" as "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" about one's political enemies. See Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's*, Nov. 1964, 77-86, quote from 77.



slowly destroyed American free market capitalism—the New Deal.<sup>92</sup> For its part, this operation at times produced its own brand of seemingly undisciplined oratory. One call to arms exhorted utility managers to “quit pussy-footing and begin fighting this socialistic monster” before more innocent and unsuspecting American citizens could be “raped and murdered” by “public power fanatics and socialistically minded politicians.”<sup>93</sup> Regardless of the overheated tone, this approach conformed to the industry’s public relations design: the industry’s preferred method in its quest to discredit New Deal public power was to horrify American consumers. In 1950, Reddy Kilowatt encouraged utilities in their battle against “encroaching socialism” to “Reach Mass Market with Emotional Appeal!” and to “Sell the Sizzle!” because “people think, buy and vote emotionally.”<sup>94</sup> By repeating ungainly phrases such as “socialism-communism” and arguing that federal electricity was an “un-American” ploy hawked by devious “planners” and “crackpots,” private electric companies might convince consumers of the need to shudder at public power’s ostensibly inevitable trajectory toward tyranny.<sup>95</sup>

Yet American electric industry leaders did not allow the idea of public-power-as-socialism to float freely as an abstraction. Rather, they carefully calculated their efforts to make a coherent if emotionally-laden argument about a free enterprise system in serious jeopardy. Warnings about capitalism’s and liberty’s imminent demise and the continuing stain of New

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<sup>92</sup> See John Flynn, *The Road Ahead: America’s Creeping Revolution* (New York: Devin-Adair Company, 1949), 9, 136; and “Soft Socialism—The Handwriting on These Walls...,” *Time*, Mar. 14, 1949, 108-109. Also see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: WW Norton, 2009), ix-x, 60; and Kevin Kruse, *One Nation under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), xiv.

<sup>93</sup> H.T. Wilson, Letter to the Editor, *Electric Light & Power*, June 1950, reprinted in Reddy Kilowatt Service, *Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter IV: The Crusade against Creeping Socialism* (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1950), 16, box 25, folder 6, RkW Records.

<sup>94</sup> Reddy Kilowatt Service, *Why G.R.I.P.? Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter II*, (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1950), 12-13, box 25, folder 6, RkW Records; Reddy Kilowatt Service, *The Crusade against Creeping Socialism: Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter IV*, (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1950), 6-11, box 25, folder 6, RkW Records.

<sup>95</sup> Reddy Kilowatt Service, *Target ’52 – ’53: Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter VII*, (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1951), 24, box 25, folder 7, RkW Records.

Deal socialism would appeal to Americans on the basis of what they stood to lose in their everyday lives. In particular, the utility industry focused on how the toxicities of public power poisoned the US tax system as well as Americans' places of work and business—familiar arenas of daily life to which private power companies could effectively “link socialism and what it means into something every person understands.”<sup>96</sup>

The specter of confiscatory and redistributive taxes as a means to undercut free enterprise became a standard refrain for utilities in the Cold War years. Often such complaints revived anti-TVA discourses, pointing out that publically owned electric enterprises enjoyed unfair tax exemptions, which enabled them to sell electricity at low rates that could not possibly recover actual costs. In many other instances, however, the private electric industry cast such tax policy as a way not only to stealthily destroy private enterprise but to force American consumers to fund their own enslavement. A typical public relations spot from 1951 prodded readers to think along these lines. “Who asked you to foot the bill so that this country could have socialized electricity?” the ad inquired. “Nobody!” came the answer. “That’s your money that’s financing socialism!”<sup>97</sup> And this system would only grow bolder, with greater confiscation and greater redistribution, until the entirety of America found itself in the clutches of an authoritarian regime. “The more of this below-cost electricity the government sells,” a similar ad claimed, “the more taxes the government must collect to make up the difference between selling price and cost.” Such activity threatened not only to nationalize the electric industry but also represented “a long first step toward Socialization of *all* business.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Reddy Kilowatt Service, *The Crusade against Creeping Socialism: Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter IV* (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1950), 3, box 25, folder 6, RkW Records.

<sup>97</sup> America’s Local Business Managed, Tax-Paying Electric Light and Power Companies advertisement, “Who ASKED You?” *Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 18, 1951, 74, emphasis in original.

<sup>98</sup> America’s Business Managed, Tax-Paying Electric Light and Power Companies advertisement, “Pay this Bill for Me, Will You?” *Saturday Evening Post*, Apr. 16, 1949, 106, emphasis in original; also see Andrew Needham, “The End of Public Power: The Politics of Place and the Postwar Electric Utility Industry,” in Kim Phillips-Fein and

The notion of the long first step, of castigating public power as a gateway to complete socialism, which would result in the end of everyday American freedoms—or, once again, the domino theory—was another common tactic for the postwar utility industry. This idea had been in circulation for quite some time, but gained a national audience in 1950 when Ashton Collins’s Reddy Kilowatt Corporation, in partnership with the American Medical Association and other industry associations, publicized an advertisement titled “The Story of Ten Little Free Workers.” Placed in countless newspapers and other publication across the 1950s, the ad began with a description of the calamitous downfall of the first little free worker, Reddy Kilowatt: “Ten little free workers—Reddy was doing fine / Until the socialists got him—then there were nine.” Following Reddy’s demise, “federal medicine” took out the independent “doc.” Then the railroads, oil companies, steel producers, and legal profession all became victims of the government takeover. Next to fall were the farmers, who, in a telling linkage to Soviet communism, “have been collectivized.” The advertisement’s apocalyptic vision ended with a cautionary tale for Americans’ daily lives. Grocers, clerks, and even reporters all plodded off sadly to federally controlled jobs that they could work only “when and where ordered, and at a fixed rate” because citizens had failed to band together to urge their political representatives to “keep government out of business.”<sup>99</sup>

Georgia Power officials agreed with this take on public power. In 1948 Charles Collier, who served as vice president for both Savannah River Electric and Georgia Power, claimed that “Government ownership” on the Savannah River would mean the “socialization of American

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Julian E. Zeilzer, eds., *What’s Good for Business: Business and American Politics since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 157-176.

<sup>99</sup> Reddy Kilowatt, “The Story of Ten Little Free Workers,” 1950, RkW Records, box 25, folder 5; Metcalf and Reinemer, *Overcharge*, 99.

industry” and the end of “private power and enterprises.”<sup>100</sup> At least some consumers tended to concur. An Atlanta resident, for example, urged Senator Walter George to oppose government involvement in the construction of the facilities on the Savannah River because it “would add to the already numerous unnecessary burdens the Government has inflicted on the taxpayer.”<sup>101</sup> Another Atlantan foresaw nothing short of a Reddy Kilowatt-style totalitarian apocalypse resulting from “public power at Clark’s Hill.” Not only would that project have negative tax implications, but its completion would further encourage “the Socialistic element in our country which is trying to Communize the United States by taking over, first the public utility business, then ultimately the railroads, coal, oil, lumber, and finally land.”<sup>102</sup>

After the creation of SEPA in early 1950, however, company leaders under the management of Georgia Power president C.B. McManus at least for a time reined in their rhetoric. (It should be noted that Georgia Power continued to support the promulgation of anti-New Deal rhetoric and lobbying activity through their contributions to staunchly anti-communist, anti-civil rights, and anti-labor industry associations such as the Southern States Industrial Council.)<sup>103</sup> There were compelling reasons for this newfound restraint. Georgia Power had to convince both the DOI and Georgia’s REA cooperatives that it would be a good energy shipping partner. Continuing to bash public power in general as a socialistic monster would curry the company no favor with rural cooperatives or with consumers in general, especially given that public opinion research found in 1949 that nearly seven in ten Americans still liked public

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<sup>100</sup> “U.S. Bid at Clark’s Hill ‘Socialism,’ Collier Says,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 2, 1948.

<sup>101</sup> Clarence Haynie to Walter George, Mar. 22, 1948, box 183, folder “Clark Hill Dam,” JCD Papers.

<sup>102</sup> Leona Westbrook to James C. Davis, Mar. 17, 1948, box 183, folder “Clark Hill Dam,” JCD Papers

<sup>103</sup> The Georgia Power Company, like many utilities in the South and across the nation, regularly contributed dues to the Southern States Industrial Council (SSIC) and Georgia Power’s executive vice president, J.J. McDonough, served as the SSIC’s chairman. See Metcalf and Reinemer, *Overcharge*, 206, 221. For a comprehensive history of the SSIC, see Katherine Rye Jewell, “Dead as Dixie: The Southern States Industrial Council and the End of the New South, 1933-1954” (PhD diss., Boston Univ., 2010).

power.<sup>104</sup> Georgia Power also had to maintain good relations with the DOI given McManus's appointment as head of the DOI's Defense Electric Power Administration (created to coordinate electric power supply for defense production at the outset of the Korean War) in 1950. Now the company focused its tamped down critique of federal involvement in the southern electrical landscape on SEPA's potential power lines. In this way, unlike with other public-private battles over hydroelectricity in the early postwar years, the Atlanta-based utility could attempt not to so much to forestall the construction of more New Deal-style infrastructure, especially where that meant new dams, but to plug public infrastructure into its private power system. The ongoing struggle for electric power at Clarks Hill helped give birth to the Sunbelt model of federally subsidized free market capitalism.

The key moment came in July 1950 when McManus used an appearance before President Truman's Water Resources Policy Commission, headed by long-time public power champion Morris Cooke, to attempt to deflate public-private hostilities and implement his company's new strategy. In his statement to the commission, McManus surprisingly reversed his company's earlier position on Clarks Hill and flatly admitted that utilities in his region "do not oppose these river developments." To resist such projects, in a context in which private utilities lacked the financial wherewithal or will to build new dams, would be to "take a 'dog in the manger' attitude." Because Army Engineer dams contributed to southern modernization through flood control, navigation, recreation, and even power generation, McManus continued, they were

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<sup>104</sup> Richard Munson, *The Power Makers: The Inside Story of America's Biggest Business...and Its Struggle to Control Tomorrow's Electricity* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1985), 107; Aaron Wildavsky, *Dixon-Yates: A Study in Power Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 8-9.

“legitimate governmental enterprises.” But the legitimacy of government enterprise stopped there.<sup>105</sup>

Aiming to keep the DOI out of the South, McManus insisted that private utilities must purchase all energy generated at Army Engineer hydroelectric plants at the “busbar” (i.e. at the point of generation). Private companies like Georgia Power would then transmit that electricity to preference customers in accordance with the provisions of the 1944 Flood Control Act. According to McManus, such an arrangement would enable Georgia Power, which owned all power lines in the state and had plans to build more, to assume the task of transmission more cost effectively and more efficiently than SEPA. It would also prevent SEPA from “provid[ing] destructive competition for an industry which has worked hard and successfully to develop this area.”<sup>106</sup>

Georgia Power’s president did not conjure his power purchasing offer out of thin air. He based his 1950 proposal on an agreement that his utility and the DOI signed in 1948—two years before SEPA’s establishment—regarding the disposal of the energy generated at the Army Corps of Engineers’ Allatoona dam on the Etowah River near Cartersville, Georgia (some 40 miles northwest of Atlanta). Congress first authorized Allatoona in the Flood Control Act of 1941, which allocated \$3 million to the Army Engineers for the initial work, and reauthorized the dam in the Flood Control Act of 1944 with a budget of \$14.4 million. Construction at the site began on only after World War II ended and finally came to completion in January 1950.<sup>107</sup> Yet even

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<sup>105</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Georgia and the Georgia Power Company* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1951), 32.

<sup>106</sup> C. B. McManus, “Statement of Mr. C.B. McManus, President of the Southern Company, before the President’s Water Resources Policy Commission,” July 31, 1950, 6, Harrison Papers, box 62, folder “Statement of C.B. McManus, President of Southern Company & Georgia Power Company, before President’s Water Resources Policy Commission, July 1950.”

<sup>107</sup> The President’s Water Resources Policy Commission [Cooke Commission], *Ten Rivers in America’s Future: The Report of the President’s Water Resources Policy Commission*, Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 523-573.

before the United States' victory over Japan, Georgia Power had already drafted a preliminary contract with the DOI regarding Allatoona. The pact stipulated that the Corps would build and thereafter manage the reservoir, dam, and powerhouse, and that Georgia Power would purchase all electric energy produced at Allatoona, provided that it supplied rural electric cooperatives with low-cost electricity at DOI-determined rates. The deal inspired laudatory comments in the *Atlanta Constitution* as “the first time that such a project was brought about through co-operative action between the government and private utilities.”<sup>108</sup>

It was thus in the spirit of “co-operative action” that the Interior Department agreed to the 1948 “tri-contract” (referred to as such because it ultimately involved three parties: the DOI, Georgia Power, and Georgia’s rural electric cooperatives) for the sale of Allatoona’s power to the Georgia Power Company. In the years before SEPA’s establishment, the Allatoona accord served as the presumptive model for the disposal of public power in the entire southeast. This arrangement received tacit confirmation when the Federal Inter-Agency River Basin Committee’s southern regional subcommittee, established in 1945 under President Roosevelt primarily to study the possibility of forming a public power marketing agency in the region, disbanded without making recommendations after Georgia Power and the DOI came to the Allatoona agreement.<sup>109</sup>

For McManus, the continuation of the Allatoona pact at Clarks Hill would prove to be the best solution for all parties. It would enable the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation’s cooperatives to benefit immediately from cheap federal power because they would receive electricity from Georgia Power’s system of transmission lines, which already crisscrossed the state. In addition, it would allow rural cooperatives and other public customers to abandon

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<sup>108</sup> J.R. Hornady, “Great Possibilities Seen in Inland Waterways,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 11, 1945.

<sup>109</sup> Hoover Commission, *Report on Water Resources and Power*, Vol. II, 540-541. Also see De Luna, *Public versus Private Power*, 95.

hydropower and enjoy the reliability and abundance of Georgia Power's coal-fired electrical system. Because water had disappointed the South so many times, McManus claimed, it could now be counted on only as reserve power. Even massive Army Engineer installations such as Allatoona and Clarks Hill, McManus warned the commission, could not contend with the region's periodic droughts. If REA cooperatives hitched their networks directly to a fickle southern waterscape, they would continue to lag behind the prosperity that private utilities' customers enjoyed. Given coal's ascendance, though, rivers would no longer have to form the foundation for southern electrical generation and progress—for private or public customers. McManus thus proposed that, since water had proven itself to be such an unreliable fuel source, the impotent federal government water system could “be mingled with the power from our generating sources.” Georgia Power's “steam plants can be operated to ‘firm up’ government hydroelectric power and, in effect, convert it into power usable at all times.”<sup>110</sup>

By 1950, to be sure, Georgia Power's growing numbers of increasingly potent steam plants produced enough energy to be useable at all times. Georgia Power had decisively become a coal-based utility since the announcement of the FPC's Clarks Hill decision in early 1947. Whereas in 1946 the company's steam plants accounted for about 53 percent of total capacity (as a result of the wartime additions of Plant Arkwright and a new unit at Plant Atkinson), coal power in 1950 accounted for 70 percent of Georgia Power's overall generating capacity following the addition of even more units at Plants Atkinson and Arkwright and the completion of powerful Plant Mitchell (45,000 kilowatts, near Albany, Georgia) and Plant Yates (100,000 kilowatts, near Newnan, Georgia). And even as the company brought two new dams online in the 1950s (Sinclair Dam on the Oconee River and Oliver Dam on the Chattahoochee River), coal far outpaced water in both capacity and production. In 1955, Georgia Power's coal-based kilowatt-

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<sup>110</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Georgia and the Georgia Power Company*, 32, 34.



hour sales accounted for 87 percent of all sales while coal-fired capacity accounted for three-fourths of total generating capacity. The disparity between Georgia Power's coal- and water-based capacity and production only continued to grow across the 1950s.<sup>111</sup> McManus's plan for intermingling public waterpower with private coal power would not only prevent the need for SEPA to construct power lines from Clarks Hill—or any other dams in the Southeast—to rural electric cooperatives. It would also dilute public power, rendering it indistinguishable from the energy generated in Georgia Power's private network. It even might spell the effective end of public power in the South.

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Representatives of Georgia's rural electric cooperatives clearly divined Georgia Power's intentions and what McManus's proposal would mean for public power's future. A Georgia Power victory at Clarks Hill would fatally injure public power in the Southeast and at the same time would mean tax-payer funded subsidies for private utilities. Faced with these possible outcomes, the GEMC and SEPA fought back—and realized ostensibly positive results—in an attempt to shape the emerging Sunbelt economy in public power's favor.

As a counteroffer to McManus's proposal for Clarks Hill's energy, SEPA's Ben Creim offered Georgia Power the opportunity to “wheel” electricity (that is, to act only as the power *delivery service*, not as a power *buying/selling agent*) over its privately owned power lines from Clarks Hill to REA cooperatives' distribution networks. Wheeling arrangements had become commonplace in the United States by 1950, but because of the precedent-setting Allatoona deal, McManus and his successor at Georgia Power, Harllee Branch, refused to accept any such contracts. The company continued to insist that it would settle for nothing less than purchasing all of the power generated at all public dams in Georgia. The GEMC, SEPA, and Georgia Power

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<sup>111</sup> See Georgia Power Company, *Annual Reports 1946-1955*.

stood locked in a stalemate over which side would own the power flowing from public dams in the South.<sup>112</sup>

Given Georgia Power's intransigence, SEPA grew more aggressive in subsequent years. In the autumn of 1952, SEPA's managers convinced Congress to authorize over \$1 million for a forty-one mile "backbone" transmission line from Clarks Hill to the Greenwood County Electric Power Commission, a publically owned electric utility in Greenwood County, South Carolina. In addition, SEPA requested over \$6 million for the construction of hundreds of miles of backbone lines to initiate the integration of public dams and preference customers in Georgia and across the agency's service area.<sup>113</sup> For local REA leaders, the successful construction of federally owned power lines at Clarks Hill would ensure the purity public electricity, and the continuation of public power, for the entire South. In the words of NRECA executive manager Clyde Ellis, "this is, powerwise, a situation of 'as Georgia goes, so goes the southeast.'"<sup>114</sup> According to the GEMC's John Chambless, if Clarks Hill's electric current flowed into Georgia Power's coal-based system—a vast web of generating stations, power lines, and distribution networks in which electricity had become completely fungible—as energy that Georgia Power owned, it would be seamlessly integrated with private power and thus "lose its identity" as public electricity.<sup>115</sup> If that came to pass, government power networks, a "God given right that made the blessings of electricity available for the first time to the rural people," would effectively cease to exist.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers*, 37-38, 43-45. Also see Wyatt Wells, "Public Power in the Eisenhower Administration," *Public Policy History* 20, No. 2 (2008), 238-239.

<sup>113</sup> Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers*, 45; De Luna, *Public versus Private Power*, 99-104; Hoover Commission, *Report on Water Resources and Power*, Vol. II, 545-547. Also see: "SEPA Official Hits Back at Georgia Power Co." *Atlanta Journal*, Feb. 13, 1952.

<sup>114</sup> Clyde T. Ellis, "Our Problems of Survival, Function and Growth," (Sept. 1953), 18, Harrison Papers, box 50, folder "NRECA Region II Meetings: Greenville, SC, Sept. 1953."

<sup>115</sup> Chambless, "Statement Concerning Disposition of Clark Hill Power," Jun. 18, 1953, 1-2, JCD Papers, box 76, folder "Georgia Electric Membership Corp."

<sup>116</sup> Chambless, "Report [on the Clarks Hill Project]" n.d. [1953?], 3, JCD Papers, box 76, folder "Georgia Electric Membership Corp."

Moreover, the failure of SEPA to construct its own power lines would mean generous federal subsidies for Georgia Power. Not only would the GEMC “lose any real control over Clark Hill power under the [Georgia Power Company’s proposed] contract, but “the Georgia Power Company stands ready...to enjoy a \$1,464,000 yearly benefit from the Clark Hill project.”<sup>117</sup>

For southern cooperatives, the need to preserve the “identity” of their power became paramount after November 1952 when the Republican Dwight Eisenhower won election to the White House and Republicans gained slim majorities in both houses of Congress. Unlike in BPA’s and SPA’s territories, no federal power lines existed in the southeast, and under the Eisenhower administration it became clear that none would rise over the South. While campaigning for office, Eisenhower made it clear that he would act as friend to the private power industry, denouncing public electricity as “creeping socialism” and swearing to chip away at the New Deal’s “malignant bureaucracy.”<sup>118</sup> This position won him the praise of many in the private power business. Creator of Reddy Kilowatt and former Alabama Power executive Ashton Collins professed in October of 1952 that, despite being a lifelong southern Democrat, he planned to vote for the Republican Eisenhower “because he is an avowed Free Enterpriser—not a socialist under Democratic cloak.”<sup>119</sup> Southern utilities, especially those in the Southern Company family, must also have taken comfort in the knowledge that Eisenhower’s well-known

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<sup>117</sup> Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, “FACTS about Georgia Power Company Proposal for the Distribution of Clark Hill Power: G. P. Co. Facts vs G.E.M.C. Facts,” 1-2 (n.d.), Harrison Papers, box 61, folder “GEMC Statements on Clarks Hill Dam, 1946-1956.”

<sup>118</sup> Martin V. Melosi, *Coping with Abundance: Energy and Environment in Industrial America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 204-205. Eisenhower quoted in “Ike Never Paid a Power Bill,” *The New Republic*, Nov. 29, 1954, 8.

<sup>119</sup> Ashton B. Collins, “Iowa Utilities Association” speech, Oct. 6, 1952, 2, box 3, folder 10, RkW Records.

golfing companion, the native Atlantan and legendary amateur golf champion Bobby Jones, sat on the Southern Company board.<sup>120</sup>

At least in the short term, “Ike” did not disappoint utility leaders. Within weeks of his landslide victory, Eisenhower began to make good on his campaign promises by implementing a scheme—devised by the McKinsey Company consulting firm—that would reconfigure the federal government’s role in the nation’s economy. The plan called for removing, in as much as possible, Washington’s involvement from sectors of the economy that “free enterprise” could and should handle. For the electric power industry, this meant ending the “federal monopoly over power” in parts of the Northwest and the South. In place of a federal monopoly, the federal government and private utilities would form, echoing McManus’s plans for Clarks Hill, a “partnership” to ensure that rural consumers enjoyed plenty of cheap electricity.<sup>121</sup>

For rural cooperatives, the need to preserve the “identity of power” as public energy was more urgent than ever. The appropriations requested by SEPA’s administrator in late 1952 had been denied or underfunded by Congress. Even the Greenwood backbone line—on which about half the construction had been completed by mid-1953—was defunded and forcibly sold to a private energy firm under orders from President Eisenhower.<sup>122</sup> Indeed the stated policy of the Eisenhower administration was that it would oppose the construction of any new federal transmission systems unless private companies refused to serve preference customers. What was more, in a drastic about face of the early post-World War II trend, the DOI now seemed to be on the side of private power. Eisenhower’s Interior Secretary, Douglas McKay, refused to sell Clarks Hill power—which had begun to flow in 1952—directly to GEMC cooperatives, opting

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<sup>120</sup> It should be pointed out that although critics frequently cited their relationship as *prima facie* evidence of back channel dealings, both Eisenhower and Jones vehemently denied any collusion in business matters, especially in the “Dixon-Yates” affair (see chapter 5), based on their personal friendship. See Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 181-184.

<sup>121</sup> Brooks, *Public Power, Private Dams*, 176-185.

<sup>122</sup> Hoover Commission, *Water Resources and Power*, 550-554.

instead to pen a string of one-year Allatoona-style contracts with Georgia Power.<sup>123</sup> Prospects for government power lines, and indeed for public power, looked bleak.

The GEMC persisted, though, and pursued its case against Georgia Power's electricity buying plans in court in 1953 and 1954 with former Georgia governor Ellis Arnall serving as its lead counsel. Both the GEMC and Georgia Power held fast to their positions but neither side made much progress in the case until Eisenhower's Attorney General, Herbert Brownell, issued a surprise ruling in July 1955. Though officials in McKay's DOI reportedly tried to suppress the ruling, which was not publicized until October 1955, Brownell argued that Georgia Power's and the DOI's position on Clarks Hill "flouts the Congressional" purpose as articulated in the Flood Control Act of 1944 and that "by restricting the construction of transmission of facilities, it would...permit the private utilities in the vicinity of each dam to monopolize, on its own terms, the power produced at the Federal project." Therefore, he concluded, "Section 5 of the Flood Control act of 1944 does not authorize the Secretary of the Interior...to enter into the proposed contract with the Georgia Power Company" and that the DOI must contract directly with preference customers even if they lacked the means to transmit their own power from government dams.<sup>124</sup> Brownell, who had already become *persona non grata* in the South for his opinion in the 1954 *Brown v. Board* case, took things even further when he intimated that the DOI might aid cooperatives in acquiring or building power lines that would bind together a coherent, southern public power network.<sup>125</sup> That suggestion seemed closer to reality when both chambers of Congress, once again controlled by Democratic majorities following the 1954 midterm elections, produced committee reports that insisted that if cooperatives in the southeast

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<sup>123</sup> "Decision Nears on Clark Hill Power Dispute," *Atlanta Journal*, Dec. 9, 1954.

<sup>124</sup> Clyde Ellis, "Memorandum to All Rural Electric Systems, NRECA Board of Directors, Statewide Presidents, Managers and Editors," Oct. 13, 1955, 1, 15, 18, Harrison Papers, box 61, folder "Clarks Hill Dam Documents, 1935-1978."

<sup>125</sup> Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers*, 48-50.

did not soon receive power-delivery contracts that adhered to Brownell's decision, appropriations would be earmarked for the construction of government transmission facilities.<sup>126</sup>

With Brownell's and Congress's intervention in 1955, the GEMC seemed at long last to have won at Clarks Hill. Smelling blood in the water, the GEMC's chief executive, Walter Harrison, issued a proposal to SEPA in March 1956 for the construction of a backbone transmission system that would integrate Clarks Hill's facilities with the Army Engineers' new Jim Woodruff dam on the lower Chattahoochee River and, thus, with rural cooperatives across the state.<sup>127</sup> Faced once again with the creation of a rival electric system that would cut across the heart Georgia—which Branch, gloves now off, castigated as “tyranny” and “a device for socializing our economy”—the Georgia Power Company agreed to reconsider negotiations for a wheeling arrangement.<sup>128</sup> Within two months of Harrison's proposal, Georgia Power, the GEMC, and SEPA had come to an agreement for the disposal of Clarks Hill's electric power by way of a wheeling contract.<sup>129</sup> This contract was expanded in 1957 when SEPA agreed with private utilities to wheel electricity from all Army Engineer dams in Georgia, to the GEMC's rural electric cooperatives.<sup>130</sup>

Even as preference customers in Georgia had seemingly preserved the identity of their power, Georgia Power kept control over the state's transmission system. Although this settlement represented a dramatic compromise compared to the company's demands for Clarks Hill in 1946, it prevented the DOI from building a competing electric system in the state and indeed across the South. To this day, in fact, SEPA owns no power lines; all transmission

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<sup>126</sup> Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers*, 48-50.

<sup>127</sup> “Branch Doubts Congress Ok on Dam Linkup,” *Atlanta Journal*, Mar. 28, 1956.

<sup>128</sup> “Danger Foreseen to Private Power,” *New York Times*, Jun. 6, 1957.

<sup>129</sup> Joe Hamilton, “Pact Nearing in the Clark Hill Row?” *Atlanta Journal*, May 16, 1956.

<sup>130</sup> Georgia Power Company, “Summary of Contract between Georgia Power Company and Southeastern Power Administration,” Oct. 11, 1957, JCD Papers, box 205, folder “Buford Dam 1957”; Norwood, *Gift of the Rivers*, 50.

facilities in the ten-state area south of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers remain either privately owned or jointly owned by private companies and statewide consumer-owned utilities (see Chapter 5). The federally-funded energy flowing from Clarks Hill had been seamlessly integrated with and subsumed within Georgia Power's privately controlled, coal-dominated network. The Atlanta-based utility had successfully converted the output of public dams across the region into private power. The potential growth of a public power network in the South had been halted and the seeds of the Sunbelt had been planted.

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To some extent, as historian Karl Brooks has argued about Hells Canyon, the fight for Clarks Hill ultimately “unplugged the New Deal” in the South by entrusting to the private realm reliable flows of electric power for continuous economic growth and human progress in traditionally underserved communities. Yet there are different lessons to be gleaned from a consideration of fights for hydroelectricity in the 1940s-1950s South. If the spirit of the New Deal was unplugged by the mid-1950s, many features of the system remained “plugged in.” The New Deal state was being dismantled, but the New Deal's infrastructure remained intact (and in fact continued to grow) and served in large part as the foundation for a new type of political economy. The Clarks Hill debate points to a crucial moment in the mid-twentieth century South when this emerging mode of social provision—one based on federal largess, private enterprise, and perpetual growth—began to coalesce. It reveals that questions of political economy in the postwar South revolved in no small measure around public and private claims on nature, energy, electrical democracy, and monopoly capitalism. But the settlement at Clarks Hill also demonstrates that coal—not water—would power the New South after World War II. By the late 1950s, the farmers and other rural people behind the GEMC had not yet fully bought into coal

and the politics of private power. Their fervent pursuit of increasingly large amounts of electricity, though, reveals that they clearly had bought into an energy-driven politics of prosperity. As the next chapter shows, the lure of the American dream led them not only to capitulate to private power, but to assist the Georgia Power Company in successfully forging a triumphant model for the Dixie's regeneration based in the nexus of coal, consumerism, and corporate monopoly capitalism.



## 6 CHAPTER 5: THE HEART OF THE NEW SOUTH

1965, according to the Georgia Power Company, was a year for celebration in the US South. In the century that had passed since the Confederacy's overwhelming defeat in the Civil War, a New South had finally come to life. No longer did mono-crop agriculture, dawdling country life, and rigid tradition dominate the region—that regime had “vanish[ed] like fall leaves.” Now, finally, Dixie could boast of fully regenerated civilization. For the Georgia Power Company, the state of Georgia more so than any other place sparkled as the grand symbol of the South's transformation and the city of Atlanta in particular embodied the southern success story. But it was more than a mere symbol. The region's most important city, Georgia Power exclaimed, was the beating “Heart of the New South.” The culmination of 100 years of uninterrupted progress, the “Gate City” had been reborn. The sheer will of its native sons, who emerged from the South's fecund land, had miraculously converted Dixie into a “pulsing industrial giant [with] high-rise offices piercing the skies [and] factories throbbing and humming tunes” of prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

1965 was notable in the Southeast for another, far less conspicuous reason as well: it was a year that signified the triumph of coal, consumerism, and corporate monopoly capitalism in the region. In June of 1965, with virtually no public announcements, the Georgia Power Company completed construction of the newest, most potent coal-fired generating station in the South, Plant Harlee Branch.<sup>2</sup> Plant Branch sat only eighty miles southeast of the capital city, just outside the lower-piedmont town of Eatonton in Putnam County (home of renowned authors Joel Chandler Harris and Alice Walker). At the time of its opening, Georgia Power's new plant was

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<sup>1</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1965* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1966), 24-25.

<sup>2</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* ran only one article on Plant Branch—which in three short paragraphs discussed technical and financial matters—in 1965. See Jim Montgomery, “Georgia Power Plant to Add \$40 Million Generating Unit,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 25, 1965.

imposingly large. Its first generating unit boasted a capacity of 250,000 kilowatts, making it the largest single power producer in the South. Work had already begun on three incrementally larger additional units at the site which, when completed in 1969, would make Plant Branch the first power station in Dixie with a generating capacity of more than one and one-half million kilowatts (1.54 million kilowatts total)—over half the utility’s entire generating capacity in 1965. Linked to the region’s new 230-kilovolt transmission system—and soon to be connected to an even more expansive 500-kilovolt transmission network—Plant Branch’s plentiful electric current could be flashed in an instant to the rapidly growing Atlanta metropolitan market, or even hundreds of miles away to other booming New South cities.<sup>3</sup>

Plant Branch was remarkable for more than just its productive prowess. In the same year the plant opened, Georgia Power and Pittsburgh-based Consolidation Coal executed an exclusive, long-term contract for a continuous supply of bituminous coal to flow to Plant Branch from a new mine at Tackett’s Creek in Claiborne County, Tennessee. The means through which 1.5 million tons of Appalachian coal would be annually shuttled to the Georgia utility’s newest power station was the “unit train.” Coal mine operators, electric utilities, and railroads in the eastern United States implemented the unit-train idea in the early 1960s as a way to ship entire trainloads of fuel seven-to-ten times faster and much more cost effectively than the old individual car-load method. Loaded only with coal from a specific mine, a unit train chugged directly to specific power plant, dropped the entirety of its cargo in the utility’s coal pit in a matter of minutes, and headed directly back to the mine. Georgia Power’s Plant Branch was among the nation’s first generating stations to adopt this delivery service and at the time was one of the country’s largest unit-train customers. Whereas most unit trains in the United States

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<sup>3</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report 1965*, 16. Georgia Power retired all four units at Plant Harlee Branch between December 2013 and April 2015.

consisted of about seventy 100-ton cars and weekly deliveries, the 100-car coal train that transported coal from northeast Tennessee unloaded its freight in middle Georgia three times per week.<sup>4</sup>

Though it stood above the crowd, Plant Branch did not stand alone. Since the World War Two years, Georgia Power had constructed six new coal-based generating stations across the state, added new units to its oldest thermal plant, Plant Atkinson, and, with the Alabama Power Company, co-invested in a mine-mouth power plant (a generating station located at a coal mine). Georgia Power's counterparts in the Southern Company system, especially Alabama Power, expanded their coal-based holdings at a similar rate and likewise came to rely on the unit train fuel delivery system. The work, though, was not yet done. Even before the completion of Plant Branch, Georgia Power had drawn up plans for yet another coal consuming behemoth, Plant Bowen. Located near Cartersville, Georgia, Plant Bowen would dwarf even Plant Branch and would come online in 1972. Thanks to the seemingly unending streams of coal traveling over rail lines across the region as well as seemingly unending increases in electrical consumption—intertwined elements that constituted the “grow-and-build” strategy and the formula for private power's ultimate victory—southern utilities produced a veritable explosion of electrical generating capacity in the almost three decades since the Second World War's end.<sup>5</sup> Nationwide, productive capacity in power stations increased precipitously in that timeframe, but the explosive

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<sup>4</sup> “Coal-Mine Project Set for Tennessee,” *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1965; Joseph Carter, “Unit Coal Trains Cut Freight Costs,” *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1964; “\$15 Million Deep Mine To Open in Claiborne Co.” *Middlesboro (KY) Daily News*, Jan. 29, 1965 in box 5, folder 36, Southern Railway Historical Association Records LMS 2003.009, Central of Georgia Railway Industrial Development, 1943-1975, Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History Archives and Library, (hereafter referred to as CGR Records); also see Richard L. Gordon, *U.S. Coal and the Electric Power Industry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 73-75.

<sup>5</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, “grow-and-build” was a deliberate utility industry strategy, designed and preached by Samuel Insull, that sought to construct new and more efficient generating capacity ahead of consumer demand, which would stoke greater electrical usage, justifying the construction of even newer and more powerful generating stations. See Richard F. Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation in the American Electric Utility Industry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

growth in the Deep South—based almost solely on coal—far exceeded national averages.<sup>6</sup> In Alabama, generating capacity from 1949 to 1972 expanded by over 600 percent; Georgia's electrical production capability grew by more than 800 percent, and 95 percent of its output came from Appalachian bituminous.<sup>7</sup> Such energy transitions were not unique to the private utility industry in the South; the TVA, too, now produced far more power in coal-fired plants than at hydroelectric dams.<sup>8</sup> Though apparently unnoticed by the consumers using increasingly large amounts of electricity and little touted by the private power cartels, the lifeblood that coursed through the pulsing heart—and all of the other vital organs—of the New South was electric power derived from Appalachian bituminous coal.<sup>9</sup>

The sources of power in the South—both fuel supplies and production plants—had not always been so obscure. As noted in the preceding chapters, private utilities and public power activists in the South frequently and loudly clashed in fights for control over rivers and dams across much of the twentieth century. Individuals such as Helen Dortch Longstreet and James Key and organizations such as the Municipal League of Georgia and the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation ensured that ordinary southerners knew about the infrastructures and flows of natural resources that made modern life possible. For its part, at least until the World War II years, Georgia Power explicitly touted its conquest of nature as a crucial factor in southern progress and free enterprise. Jubilant fanfare often accompanied the opening of a new

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Table 8.11a Electric Net Summer Capacity: Total (All Sectors), 1949-2011," <<http://www.eia.gov/totalenergy/data/annual/showtext.cfm?t=ptb0811a>>, (accessed July 10, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities, 1949*, 601, 605; Federal Power Commission, *Statistics of Electric Utilities, 1972*, 701, 704.

<sup>8</sup> Martin V. Melosi, *Coping with Abundance: Energy and Environment in Industrial America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 203-204.

<sup>9</sup> Historian Christopher J. Manganiello rightly points out that water remained crucial to southern power generation even in an era dominated by fossil-fuel driven power. The distinction I draw is that water was no longer the primary fuel source for the generation of electric power; rather, primarily as a cooling agent, water was relegated to a means through which coal-fired power could be produced efficiently. See Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped A Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 6-7.

dam—such as Tallulah Falls—and the utility warmly invited tourists to gaze upon the beautiful examples of humanity’s ability to harness nature. What was more, Georgia Power executives insisted that dams constituted the core of their corporation’s identity and frequently referred to their utility as a *hydropower* company. Shortly before he died in 1939, Georgia Power founder and long-time chairman Henry Atkinson insisted that eternity honor his legacy as a *hydropower* pioneer. His tombstone should read, he requested, “He put to work for Georgia the mountain rivers that had for centuries been running to waste.”<sup>10</sup>

Yet as hydroelectricity’s role in postwar southern power production swiftly receded from view in the wake of the Clarks Hill controversy, coal plants, coal mines, and coal trains did not replace dams and rivers in the public’s eye. Even as it provided more power for more people than water-driven electricity ever did, coal-fired electric energy drew little notice and inspired little celebration (or scorn) in the late 1950s and 1960s. Environmental and energy historians have offered explanations as to why such energy systems faded from the consumer’s vision. Because fuel sources and generation centers were located far from sites of consumption, they claim, people in their everyday routines failed to notice, and thus failed to account for, the networks of steel, concrete, and fuel that enabled their increasingly energy-intensive lives. Indeed it has become cliché to assert that consumers only noticed electricity when it ceased to work. It would be difficult to argue that this eventually happens with essentially every large-scale environmental technological system (and that such murkiness has serious implications for both human and ecological health). Yet, almost universally, scholars have neglected to demonstrate just how this

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<sup>10</sup> “H.M. Atkinson, 76, Power Company Chairman, Dies,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 22, 1939. Much the same could be said of Alabama Power’s leaders. Thomas Martin, Alabama Power’s long-serving president, considered hydropower his company’s “destiny” and threatened to resign in the mid-1950s when Southern Company’s CEO, Eugene Yates, wanted to forgo construction of a dam on the Coosa River in favor of a new coal-fired plant. See Dub Taft and Sam Heys, *Big Bets: Decisions and Leaders that Shaped Southern Company* (Atlanta: Southern Company, 2011), 184-187.

obfuscation worked.<sup>11</sup> We are left to assume, it seems, that a process we might call historical friction somehow obscured these indispensable technological systems over time. I use the term “historical friction” as shorthand for what appears to be a mostly unseen, wholly unintended byproduct of distance and the banality of the everyday conspiring to rub coal and power plants off of people’s consciousness. Granted, the wear and tear of passing time helped ease the extraordinary elements of the built environment into the unnoticed normality of daily life, but the evidence strongly suggests that coal and power plants began to disappear in the service of realizing a specific set of ends.

This chapter proposes that far more than just historical friction was at work in removing the true heart of the postwar New South from plain view. A deliberate and productive process increasingly—but never totally—shrouded coal in a cloak of invisibility that enabled consumers to forget about the origins of the energy required for modern life. Scholars interested in the study of social memory have demonstrated that interrogating past events that a given society has forgotten is as important as analyzing the things it has chosen remember; remembering and forgetting are tightly interwoven properties and neither happens as the unintended consequences of historical accident. As one historian of the South puts it, “campaigns to remember the past by forgetting parts of it have occurred in many times and places.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Much of this work is based on that of William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W.W. Norton & Co, 1991). Also see Paul N. Edwards, “Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems” in Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg, eds., *Modernity and Technology* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2003), 188-191; Peter S. Soppelsa, “The Fragility of Modernity: Infrastructure and Everyday Life in Paris, 1870-1914 (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009), 18; David E. Nye, *The Night the Lights Went Out: A History of Blackouts in America* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2010); Paul W. Hirt, *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s-1970s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 1-2; Jones, *Routes of Power*, 12; Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5, 18, 251; and Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 68.

<sup>12</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “Introduction: No Deed But Memory,” in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Where These Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 6.

Much the same could be said about process of obscuring coal's place in energy production. The campaigns to help consumers "forget" about the place of power plants and Appalachian bituminous in the postwar New South emerged in reaction to the persistence of the public power threat in the 1950s and 1960s. Following the settlement at Clarks Hill and the conclusion of another nationally consequential controversy in the South known as "Dixon-Yates," an episode in which public and private power fought over coal-fired generating stations and marketing territory (discussed below), utilities invested increasingly large amounts of resources in keeping the uneasy peace. Advertising and public relations campaigns—which highlighted the ways the free enterprise system could provide a clean, comfortable, and convenient life for the individual consumer, especially in the region's booming suburban settlements—became private power's weapon in the ongoing struggle against public power. In stark contrast to earlier practices, such pieces rarely mentioned the sources of energy providing all of the benefits of postwar American abundance. By deemphasizing the place of coal, power plants, and power lines in making such a life possible, even to the point of dubbing coal-fired electricity "flameless," the southern utility industry attempted to further corporate capitalism's "quest for social and moral legitimacy" and to remove from the equation an awareness of the natural resources and infrastructures that had served as the basis of public power's consternation for much of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup>

Though this strategy seemed to pay dividends from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, the twin threats of economic and energy crisis broke the silence, prompting many people—including cooperative members and consumer advocates/environmentalists—to once again ask serious questions about the true quality and foundations of their lives in this newest New South. To quell

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<sup>13</sup> Roland Marchand quoted in Andrew M. Shanken, "Better Living: Toward a Cultural History of a Business Slogan," *Enterprise & Society* 7 (Sept. 2006), 486.

the rising storm of popular protest and potential financial disaster in the early 1970s, Georgia Power yet again sought relief and stability in the arms of the state by pursuing a bailout and federal subsidies—ironically with the aid of Georgia’s rural electric cooperatives who, in a stark reversal of their historical position, wholly bought into the system of private power and welcomed coal and nuclear energy as power sources for rural Georgia’s future. The public power-private power partnership confirmed a long-established, if not fully recognized, trend: southern “free market” capitalism and energy provision depended largely on governmental largess. This pact, which brought to resolution many of the issues discussed in the previous chapters of this study, had lasting implications for southern regional development and energy policy, weaving together coal, consumption, and corporate monopoly capitalism as the basis on which Dixie would finally achieve full regeneration.

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Before coal and power plants temporarily faded from view in the 1960s, their centrality to the provision of electric energy in the South grabbed national attention as key aspects of a high-level political scandal. The ten-year scuffle over Clarks Hill went a long way toward settling the rather cacophonous public-private power disputes that, at least since the 1910s, had kept sources of southern power at the forefront of the public’s mind. Yet other fronts in the ongoing public power-private power rivalry opened in the early 1950s. The most momentous of these battles, referred to as the “Dixon-Yates” affair, renewed older fights over the TVA’s territorial limitations. This clash, though, did not simply rehash the old issues of control over the South’s rivers; it took matters in a new direction. Dixon-Yates became a proving ground for the place of coal in the continued public-private struggle for dominance over both the discourses and materiality of southern modernization.



As discussed in the previous chapter, Dwight Eisenhower campaigned for the presidency in 1952 to a large extent on a platform that promised both to restore the place of free enterprise in and to root socialism out of American life. For the most part, however, President Eisenhower governed in more moderate tones, pledging that he would seek to arrange a “partnership” between federal power programs and private enterprise in providing the nation’s electrical needs in a time of rapid growth.<sup>14</sup> In practical terms, and keeping in sync with larger Cold War-era thinking, the partnership policy worked essentially as a means of domestic containment. Much like its pledge to limit communism to the places where it already reigned, the Eisenhower White House would not invade or actively work to dismantle public power agencies like the TVA. It would, however, commit to preventing the Tennessee Valley Authority’s “malignant bureaucracy” and “creeping socialism” from spreading into areas controlled by private enterprise.<sup>15</sup> The administration’s explicit policy held that any power needs in and around the Tennessee Valley that exceed the TVA’s current capacity—power needs almost certain to arise in a swiftly industrializing and growing region—would have to be satisfied by privately owned utilities.<sup>16</sup> Eisenhower’s containment policy ruled with little incident until 1954 when a major disagreement centering on control over the geography of power in the South rattled an already uneasy peace.

In 1952, in the midst of the Korean War, TVA managers realized that, due to the outside demand the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), national defense manufacturers, and domestic consumers placed on its generating and transmission capacity, “prompt action was imperatively

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<sup>14</sup> “Statement Relative to Power Policy of the Department of the Interior,” n.d. [Aug. 1953?], 1-2, box 52, folder “Statement of US President Eisenhower and Secretary Douglas McKay on Power Policy, Denver, CO, Aug. 1953,” The Papers of Walter Wade Harrison, 1900-1985, Special Collections, Zach S. Henderson Library, Georgia Southern University, (hereafter Harrison Papers).

<sup>15</sup> Eisenhower quoted in Michael Straight, “Ike Never Paid a Power Bill,” *New Republic*, Nov. 29, 1954, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Dixon-Yates: A Study in Power Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 17; Melosi, *Coping with Abundance*, 204-206.

needed to avoid a grave power shortage.”<sup>17</sup> TVA leadership feared that in a potential replay of immediate post-World War II energy famine conditions, their agency could become unable to furnish major urban markets, like Memphis, with adequate power. To meet that city’s projected energy requirements—and those of the entire system—the TVA sought Congressional permission and appropriations to expand its generating capacity with the construction of a new coal-fired power plant thirty miles north of Memphis in Fulton, Tennessee.<sup>18</sup>

This was not the first time the TVA had looked to coal to serve its customers’ needs in a moment of looming power shortage. Until the Second World War, the TVA had produced essentially every kilowatt of its output in hydroelectric facilities. Waterpower, however, proved insufficient to furnish all of the Tennessee Valley’s energy requirements in time of war and in war’s immediate aftermath. Coal became the antidote in the short term. To the horror of political conservatives and utility managers, who condemned the TVA’s steam plant construction as plainly unconstitutional, coal power became the TVA’s long term answer as well. The conflict over public coal-fired power began to come to a head in 1948 when the TVA proposed to build a massive coal-burning station called New Johnsonville. President Harry Truman favored the development at New Johnsonville, but found that Congress failed to match his level of enthusiasm. Chastising law makers for their foot-dragging, Truman insisted that New Johnsonville required immediate action, because “everyone knows that our Nation’s power supply is tight—that our margin of reserve is inadequate.” The people of the Tennessee Valley “need the power for their comfort and their prosperity,” he continued, “but it is also urgently

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<sup>17</sup> American Enterprise Association, “Analysis of the Dixon-Yates Contract and Its Development,” ca. 1955, 6, box 184, folder “Dixon Yates,” James C. Davis Papers, MSS# 507, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA (hereafter JCD Papers).

<sup>18</sup> Wildavsky, *Dixon-Yates*.

needed to meet potential national security requirements.”<sup>19</sup> The president’s tongue lashing seemed to have worked. The Truman White House saw to it that New Johnsonville received full funding in 1948 and that the project came to speedy completion (its first unit went online in 1951). The TVA—an agency explicitly created as a federal water conservation and hydropower corporation—was now in the business of constructing coal-fired plants as well as generating, transmitting, and selling coal-fired power.<sup>20</sup>

For private power, the creation of any new TVA generating station stung badly enough, but the TVA’s foray into the coal-fired power business also implied other, more worrisome changes. Across the United States, federal power had nearly always been associated with waterpower. The legislation that created organizations like the Bureau of Reclamation and the TVA limited their operations to building dams on and transporting power from rivers. Water-driven power was coded as public and, especially after the 1930s, thermal power was coded private.<sup>21</sup> Increased capacity based in coal would decouple the TVA from the Tennessee River, allowing it to impinge upon private power’s conceptual turf. A turn to coal, which would require more extensive and more potent transmission facilities that could extend well beyond the TVA’s borders, would enable the TVA to invade private power’s physical turf as well. Private southern utilities and their allies in Congress thus saw this development as the thin end of a public-power wedge that would cut into their territory and as yet another socialistic attempt to strike at free enterprise. Though the president justified New Johnsonville as an emergency measure, southern utilities (particularly in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, but also in Arkansas and Kentucky)

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<sup>19</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Statement by the President Upon Signing the Government Corporation Appropriation Act,” Jun. 30, 1948, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, <<http://trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/viewpapers.php?pid=1694>>, (accessed Apr. 26, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that New Johnsonville was not the first coal-fired plant in the TVA system. The TVA inherited coal-fired plants in Alabama when the agency was created in 1933. As the first coal-fired plant constructed by the TVA, though, New Johnsonville marked a new departure for the agency.

<sup>21</sup> Needham, *Power Lines*, 159-160.

nonetheless found the TVA's new trend rather troubling: while the TVA's outsize demand would likely be temporary, the infrastructure designed to meet exigent conditions would most definitely be permanent. Even when fears of power shortage eventually subsided, the TVA could not simply scale back its coal-plant electrical production. The sunk costs attending investments in such large infrastructural expansions would demand that TVA managers seek new revenue by generating and transmitting energy to as yet undetermined customers. "From bitter experience," a Southern Company executive glumly quipped, "we knew where that market would be found."<sup>22</sup>

The TVA's proposed Fulton plant did not enjoy the same level of backing as New Johnsonville. Due to fierce criticism from private utilities in the South and opposition from a Congress and White House controlled by Republicans after the elections of 1952, the newly proposed Fulton power plant languished in the planning stages for some two years. Then in 1954, after Congress had delayed funding for the coal-powered plant at Fulton for as long as possible, President Eisenhower announced his support for an alternative. In order to contain the TVA to its current territory, the free enterprise system would partner with the TVA and AEC to supply Memphis with new sources of electric power. Middle South Utilities, a holding company headed by Edgar Dixon, and the Southern Company, led by Eugene Yates, proposed to build a jointly owned coal-fired power station in the Middle South territory of West Memphis, Arkansas—not in the TVA territory of Fulton, Tennessee as originally planned. In a convoluted arrangement purportedly meant to please all parties involved, the AEC's Paducah, Kentucky facilities would purchase electricity from the Dixon-Yates generating station. That power, though, would not flow directly to AEC facilities. Instead, the West Memphis plant's electricity would cross over the Mississippi River and enter the TVA's Memphis market as "replacement

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<sup>22</sup> Southern Company vice president, James Crist, quoted in Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 179.

power.” The TVA would in turn ship electricity to the AEC, albeit now with a substitute source of energy supplied by the privately-owned Dixon-Yates entity in West Memphis.<sup>23</sup>

The Dixon-Yates proposal proved no more pleasing to public power than the Fulton plant had to private power, and several parties voiced their disapproval of the arrangement. AEC management professed their unhappiness, believing the agency would likely be forced to pay the higher rates associated with a private utility.<sup>24</sup> The TVA’s leadership and its Congressional supporters likewise expressed their displeasure with the proposal. Both Democratic US Senators from Tennessee, Estes Kefauver and Albert Gore, joined TVA chairman Gordon Clapp in denouncing Dixon-Yates as the backdoor ploy of a Republican Party-private power cabal to begin the slow but steady process of dismantling the TVA.<sup>25</sup> Other public power activists criticized the plan as a scheme by Middle South and Southern Company to realize handsome windfall profits based on generous federal subsidies. The Dixon-Yates deal, former Federal Power Commission (FPC) chair Leland Olds claimed, would “compel the TVA to purchase this power from the private power combine” in perpetuity and would ensure that “Messrs. Dixon and Yates...get a debt-free steam station, in good repair, worth at least \$30 million.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the only group pleased with the plan was the Southern Company-Middle South combination, which would initially have to directly invest only about 5 percent (or about \$5.5 million) of the total

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<sup>23</sup> Melosi, *Coping with Abundance*, 206. David Howard Davis, *Energy Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1974), 130-132. Both Middle South Utilities and Southern Company, as holding companies and not operating utilities, were unable to directly construct and operate generation and transmission facilities. In order to fulfill the Dixon-Yates contract, then, they jointly formed a new operating utility, the Mississippi Valley Generating Company, which would oversee construction in West Memphis, operate the plant, and build and maintain the transmission lines that would interconnect with TVA lines in Memphis at a point over the Mississippi River.

<sup>24</sup> Wildavsky, *Dixon-Yates*, 140-142.

<sup>25</sup> William Kerwin, “Ike’s Views Not Changed on TVA,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Jul. 10, 1955.

<sup>26</sup> Leland Olds, “The Truth about the Dixon-Yates Contract: Comment on the Southern Company Advertisement Entitled ‘Sixteen Points Emphasize Strength of Dixon-Yates Contract,’” Nov. 19, 1954, box 62, folder “Dixon-Yates Contract, 1954-1955 (Southern Company),” Harrison Papers.

estimated construction cost for a project that would not only help prevent TVA expansion, but would inaugurate privately owned utility penetration into the TVA's market.<sup>27</sup>

What ensued between Eisenhower's sanctioning of the Dixon-Yates deal in June 1954 and the cancellation of the contract in 1955 was a front-page worthy, densely tangled political drama that left few of those involved unscathed. Senator Kefauver openly accused the president of colluding with Georgia-based golfing chum and Southern Company board member, the legendary Bobby Jones, and with officials in the Federal Power Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission to ensure the deal's approval.<sup>28</sup> The scandal somehow even reached into the vice president's office as well. "Nixon, Dixon, and Yates," charged Tennessee Governor Frank Clement, were all guilty of a level of shady intrigue that would contribute to the "lowering of the American standard of public morals."<sup>29</sup> The chief financier for the Dixon-Yates project was exposed as a double agent: not only did he secure private funding for the plant at First Boston Company, but he also secretly worked in the President's Bureau of the Budget. A former employee of the Mississippi Power and Light Company (a Middle South operating subsidiary) blew the whistle on continued Wall Street chicanery and holding company activities, denouncing the whole affair as a fraud.<sup>30</sup> Democratic Party hopefuls in the presidential election year of 1956 tried to use the force built up in the controversy to their advantage—Governor Clement predicted that Dixon-Yates would precipitate "the downfall of the great Republican party in 1956"—but by

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<sup>27</sup> American Enterprise Association, "Analysis of the Dixon-Yates Contract and Its Development," 1, box 184, folder "Dixon Yates," JCD Papers; also see Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 179.

<sup>28</sup> Eisenhower, Jones, and others vehemently denied these charges, though Sen. Kefauver continued through 1956—unsuccessfully—to press for an investigation to determine whether a criminal conspiracy actually took place in the Dixon-Yates affair. See Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 181-184.

<sup>29</sup> William M. Blair, "Nixon, Dixon, Yates Accused of Harming Nation's Morals," *New York Times*, Dec. 11, 1954.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Straight, "New Light on Dixon-Yates," *New Republic*, Oct. 11, 1954, 8-9.

then the affair had apparently run out of steam.<sup>31</sup> The controversy concluded rather anticlimactically in 1955 when the city of Memphis announced that it would build its own generating plant. Dixon-Yates quietly receded into the background.

Though it produced little in the way of criminal investigations or electoral results, a more long-term and significant development resulted from the altercation. Dixon-Yates had sufficiently frightened enough politicians to the point that Congress refused to issue any new appropriations for even modest TVA building programs. Yet the agency supplied energy to a region of the United States that in the postwar years experienced steady growth in both population and energy needs. To meet the TVA's requirements for current and future growth—without out resorting to complicated, invasive, and potentially criminal Dixon-Yates style solutions—the idea of a self-financing bill for the TVA made its way into Congress in 1957. The legislation as originally proposed called for as much as \$750 million in TVA bond issues and, according to southern electric industry leaders, a potential increase of its territory of up to 25,000 square miles (figure 6.1).<sup>32</sup>

Predictably, such a plan—at least the territorial provision—drew denunciations as a socialist plot. Because the electric power industry was “the first target of government ownership advocates,” New Hampshire Senator Styles Bridges claimed at the annual meeting of the Edison Electric Institute in 1958, “the implications of [TVA self-finance and expansion] spell trouble for

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Straight, “New Light on Dixon-Yates,” *New Republic*, Oct. 11, 1954, 8-9; also see Richard Rudolph and Scott Ridley, *Power Struggle: The Hundred-Year War over Electricity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 106-108.

<sup>32</sup> Wildavsky, *Dixon-Yates*, 323-325; Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 193-194.

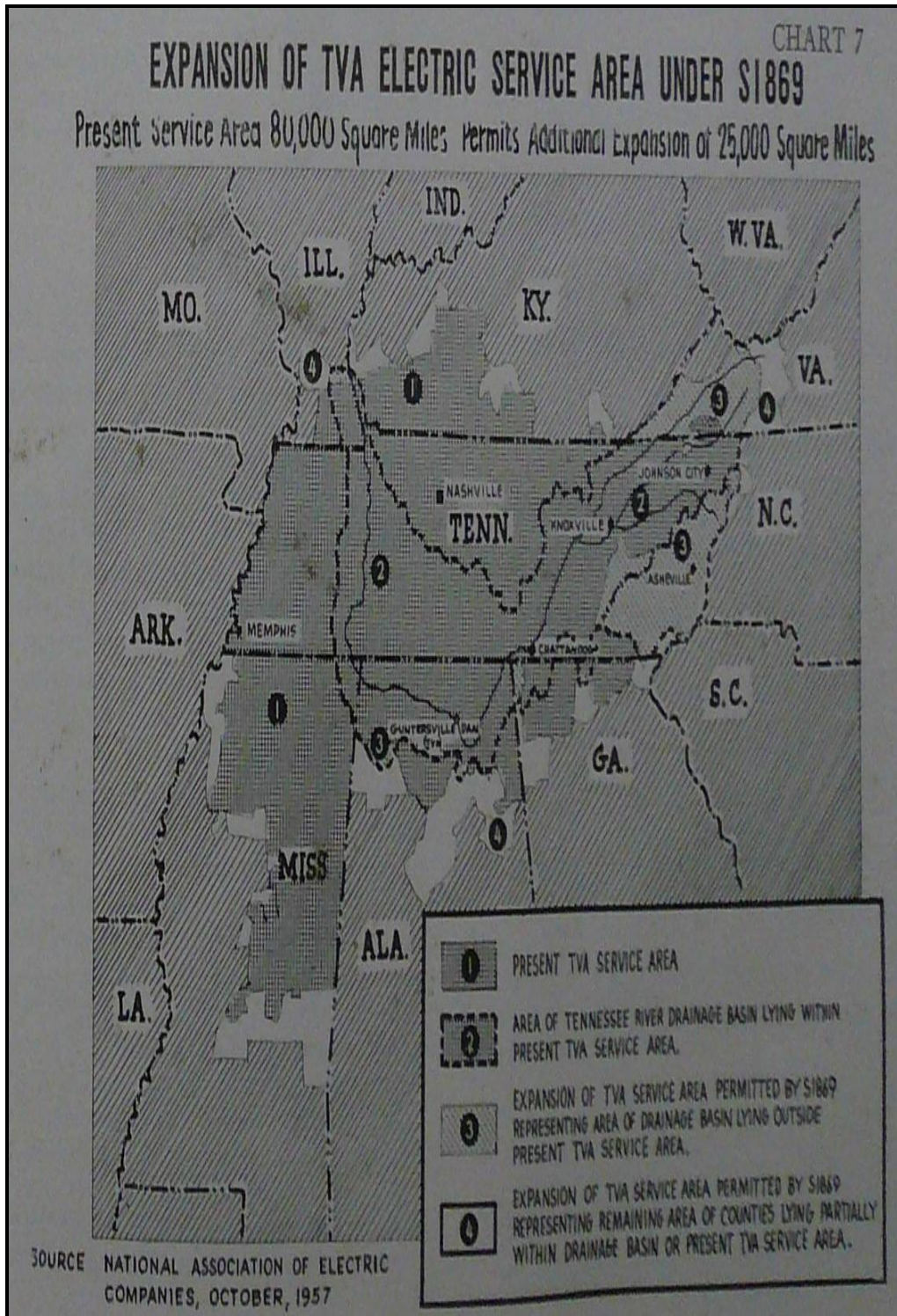


Figure 6.1 Expansion of TVA, 1957.



our whole free enterprise system.” The root cause of such a worry was the type of power such expansions implied: more coal-fired power plants. It also implied more TVA transmission lines. As long as the TVA remained tied to the water, it could be contained; a given waterway contained only so much potential power and the TVA had essentially exhausted possibilities on the Tennessee River. If, however, it continued to invest in coal-fired steam generation and high-tension transmission networks, as it had consistently done since the end of the war, the agency could widen its service area without constraint. What was worse, Bridges feared, such a program would initiate the domino effect, establishing “a precedent for similar organizations in the Pacific Northwest, the Missouri River basin, and who knows where eventually.”<sup>33</sup>

Southern Company president Harllee Branch (appointed to that position in 1957) echoed Bridges’s sentiment, in relatively moderated language, at a congressional committee hearing in 1958. Pleading for “fair play”—by which he essentially meant the end of public power’s place as a government sponsored competitor in the electric industry—Branch argued that an increasingly coal-powered TVA, with expanded transmission capabilities, would quickly and dramatically breach its current boundaries and launch a new incursion into Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and the Florida panhandle (served by Southern Company operating subsidiary, Gulf Power).<sup>34</sup> In order to protect free enterprise and Southern Company’s territory, Branch concluded, the TVA must be contained by a “fence.” As president of the Southern Company and past president of the EEI, thus essentially one of the US private utility industry’s most prominent spokesmen, Branch had a loud voice and wielded considerable influence. With the help of allies in Congress

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<sup>33</sup> Sen. Styles Bridges quoted in “What Others Think: EEI Holds Twenty-Sixth Annual Convention,” *Public Utilities Fortnightly*, Jul. 3, 1958, 51.

<sup>34</sup> In the mid 1950s, the electric utility industry often complained that public power was a favored competitor on an uneven playing field. Advertisements in popular periodicals often featured images such as a football player tackled by a referee. Lee Metcalf and Vic Reinemer, *Overcharge* (New York: David McKay Co, 1967), 96. Harllee Branch, as president of the Georgia Power Company, the Edison Electric Institute, and the Southern Company, used this argument throughout the 1950s. See for example, Harllee Branch, “Fair Play and the Pocketbook,” *Public Utilities Fortnightly*, Jun. 7, 1956, 793-799.

(Georgia Representative Carl Vinson in particular), and power company executives from across the South, Branch's proposal met with success. In 1959, the TVA Revenue Bond Act severed the Tennessee Valley Authority from dependence on Congressional appropriations, ordered the agency to pay \$1 billion to the US Treasury over a half century, and most importantly, limited any future territorial expansions of the New Deal's signature public power accomplishment to just five miles beyond its 1957 borders.<sup>35</sup>

By the end of the 1950s, private power had won several crucial victories in the South. After the Dixon-Yates fiasco, Harllee Branch and Congress had built their "fence" around the TVA and the larger public power system in the South had been effectively incorporated within the private utility industry following the Clarks Hill accord. What was more, many ordinary Georgians had grown less enamored with continued federal intrusions into southern affairs. As Washington increasingly bent to the demands of civil rights activists and hacked away at Jim Crow, southerners began to reject a broad range of New Deal interventions in their region. Indeed, a popular "backlash" against further developments on the Savannah River, seen in much the same light as civil rights legislation, emerged in both Georgia and South Carolina.<sup>36</sup> With a weakened public power structure and fewer public power sympathizers, private utilities, it seemed, could finally build their coal-based version of the New South without any further worries over the public power threat.

Or so it may have seemed. In fact, despite the events of the 1950s, public power still weighed heavily on the minds of utility managers. The Georgia Electric Membership Corporation (GEMC) continued to agitate for preference rights to the federal electricity that would soon be available at new Army Engineer dams on watersheds across the state. And though

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<sup>35</sup> Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 193-196.

<sup>36</sup> See Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power*, 116-164.

Georgia Power did not as a rule oppose these new government facilities—in fact after the Clarks Hill settlement the company generally welcomed new public dams as additional sources of peaking power and revenue—tensions between the utility and the GEMC continued well into the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> Continued aggressions on the part of the REA’s cooperatives, wrote the *National Review* in 1959, were the unsavory work of “blatherskites” and “socialist profiteers” who would force “many private power companies...out of business, because they cannot compete with the tax-exempted, interest-subsidized cooperatives.”<sup>38</sup> Such hostilities were further stoked by activists such as Leland Olds, who claimed in 1958 that public power must continue to press for more federal hydropower because soon, “an all-embracing private power monopoly” would crush competition and lead the United States to fall behind the Soviet Union in electrical prowess.<sup>39</sup> What was more, the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Reclamation pursued an ambitious plan in the 1950s and early 1960s to construct a competing federal transmission system in the US Southwest that drew private power’s scorn as the clear progeny of Karl Marx and the obvious precursor to a socialist takeover.<sup>40</sup> Though federal developments in the Southwest posed no immediate threats to private utilities in the South, the domino theory of federal power held that they soon might. Yet instead of continuing down the path of overt and vociferous opposition to public power as the 1960s approached, private power chose another direction. Rather than constantly castigating public power’s quest for more dams, coal-fired plants, and power lines as components in a Fabian socialist stratagem—although that tactic never fully disappeared—private power began to remove these structures from view. Through

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<sup>37</sup> See Hank McQuade, *Light up Our Land: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation: The First 50 Years* (Atlanta: Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, 1990), 155-182; and Lori Coleman, “Our Whole Future is Bound Up in This Project: The Making of Buford Dam,” (MA thesis, Georgia State Univ., 2008), 75-80.

<sup>38</sup> Frank Chodorov, “Socialist Profiteers,” *National Review*, Feb. 28, 1959, 546.

<sup>39</sup> “An Approach to Giant Power Legislation,” *Public Utilities Fortnightly*, Aug. 14, 1958, 267-268.

<sup>40</sup> Needham, *Power Lines*, 160-162.

aggressive and coordinated sales campaigns, private utilities emphasized the ways the free market could provide individual consumers with the best possible lives in a postwar New South that seemingly contained no coal, power plants, or power lines.

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“Now you can have springtime in your home the whole year ‘round” announced an April 1965 Georgia Power advertisement. The all-electric home would always be “COMFORTABLE!” “CLEAN!” “CONVENIENT!” “Only flameless electric heating and cooling give you year-round comfort conditioning...together with these wonderful benefits!” Regardless of seasonal swings in the weather, the ad explained, consumers could always enjoy a perfect indoor climate. “During the bitter winter months, electric home heating keeps your family warm and snug with never a disturbing draft. And in summer, electric air conditioning does away for good with sweltering days and sleepless nights.” Moreover, the cleanliness of flameless living made “even off-white and light colored furnishings...completely practical” and its convenience eliminated the “need for constant adjustments.”<sup>41</sup>

By the mid 1960s—even as generating stations like Plant Branch burned millions of tons of Appalachian bituminous coal per year—the comfort, cleanliness, and convenience of flamelessness had become one of the US electric utility industry’s most recognizable mottos. More and more, utilities’ promotional efforts in the late 1950s and 1960s focused on the results from which electrical consumers would benefit and obscured the networks of nature and technology that made a better life possible. To be sure, part of the motivation for pursuing a “flameless” public relations campaign sprang from business realities. On the one hand, electric utilities were in competition with natural gas companies for greater shares of the increasingly

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<sup>41</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, “Now You can Have Springtime in Your Home the Whole Year ‘Round,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 26, 1965.

important domestic market. The emphasis on the modernity and invisibility of electricity in the home clearly linked the gas flame with the primitive and the backward. On the other hand, the rise of the air conditioner, though in only about 12 to 13 percent of American homes by 1960, had significantly tilted peak electrical usage times to the summer months. To fight off the natural gas industry and to balance their “load”—that is, to ensure that their generating equipment operated at optimal levels all year long—electric utility managers vigorously promoted “flameless” electric heating units.<sup>42</sup>

Far more than sales strategies, though, were at play in Georgia Power’s 1965 “Springtime” advertisement—a promotional piece in which nature as well as coal, power plants, and other electrical infrastructures were conspicuously absent. Historical friction alone, though, did not rub away coal-fired electricity’s place as the lifeblood coursing through the heart of the New South. The invisibility of the infrastructures foundational to modern life required a productive discursive process. The utility industry generated this seeming obscurity largely in an attempt to disaggregate cause (coal, power plants, and power lines) from effect (electrical comfort, cleanliness, and convenience) and thereby to thwart any further successes of the New Deal state in the realm of public power. If ordinary people were content with the highly electrified lives that private enterprise gave them, they would presumably feel no need to investigate electrical infrastructures or fuel sources, or to pressure a liberal state for more New Deal-style solutions to meet their energy needs.

An examination of this process requires a broader, more national scope and a step back in time. The private utility industry’s efforts in the 1960s to cast electricity as a largely unseen force

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<sup>42</sup> See “Electric House Heating—1955” *Electrical World*, Nov. 14, 1955, 129-144; Gordon W. Evans, “Summer Peaks: What to Do?” *Electrical World*, Jan. 21, 1957, 76; and “Appliances: Appliance Sales Shot up 15% to \$8.5 Billion in ’59,” *Electrical World*, Feb. 29, 1960; also see Hirsh, *Technology and Transformation*, 50.

that would grant individual consumers the happiness of perpetual “springtime” had roots in the early post-World War II years when rivers, power plants, and power lines were anything but invisible. On the contrary, both private power and public power were rather prolix about the remote sources of their energy production. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the decade following World War II ordinary southerners constantly discussed dams and power shortages, and public power seemed poised to expand dramatically due largely to worries over the private utility industry’s inability to provide enough electric energy for a surprisingly power hungry postwar United States. Concerned with the continuation of New Deal hydropower policy in the postwar era—especially that the construction of dams such as Hells Canyon and Clarks Hill, in concert with Grand Coulee and the TVA, would form the basis of a nationwide federal electrical network—utility industry leaders worked to convince the public that only the free enterprise system could truly provide the energy required for a prosperous future.

Although it continued to encourage consumers to constantly acquire new electric appliances, the utility industry’s primary concern in the late 1940s and early 1950s was not to convince individual consumers about the improved lives they would lead under the free market. Instead, private power focused on warning Americans of the dangers that public power’s expansion represented. To that end, in 1949 the Electric Companies Advertising Program (ECAP, founded in 1941 to publicize the virtues of the private utility industry) joined forces with the prominent advertising firm of Bozell & Jacobs to formulate a public relations campaign that would meet New Deal-style public power head-on. The potent, straight-forward tagline they devised charged that “GOVERNMENT IN ANY BUSINESS IS SOCIALISM.”<sup>43</sup> ECAP and Bozell & Jacobs spread their message far and wide by placing advertisements in a wide array of publications. To tug at the heartstrings and highlight the dystopia that future generations would

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<sup>43</sup> Metcalf and Reinemer, *Overcharge*, 95-98.

face, their ads often featured children and asked the reader such questions as “Who’d want to leave a socialistic U.S.A. to his kids?” and “How can you explain these times to a boy?”<sup>44</sup> In an obvious reference to Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal-inspired aims for World War II (the “Four Freedoms”), one particularly telling piece in *Life* magazine in 1950 featured a young boy gazing forlornly at four freedom-representing items—a Bible, a key, a pencil, and a ballot—and asked “Will you leave these to your children?” If the federal government came to own the electric industry, Americans would no longer be able to bequeath liberty to their children because “when government, moving step by step, controls *enough* things, you have a socialist government, whether you want it or not. *You’ll* be controlled, too. Then what freedoms will you be able to pass on to your children?”<sup>45</sup>

In league with ECAP and Bozell & Jacobs, Ashton Collins drafted his Reddy Kilowatt character into the fight as well. Whereas Reddy originally worked to persuade women in the 1920s and 1930s to use more electric power in the home, he now played a much grander role. In 1950, Reddy Kilowatt became a soldier in the war against public power. Reddy’s mission was to lead the charge in a public relations campaign titled “Grass Roots Impact Plan” (GRIP), which “call[ed] for action in the crusade against creeping socialism” in localities across the country.<sup>46</sup>

Utilities participating in GRIP could use the image of Reddy Kilowatt and prefabricated anti-public power advertisements to warn their customers about the perils of “socialism-communism”

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<sup>44</sup> “Who’d Want to Leave a Socialistic U.S.A. to His Kids?” advertisement referenced in Richard Munson, *The Power Makers: The Inside Story of America’s Biggest Business...and Its Struggle to Control Tomorrow’s Electricity* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1985), 107; America’s business-managed, tax-paying Electric Light and Power Companies advertisement, “How can You Explain These Times to a Boy?” in *Time*, Apr. 16, 1951, 54. Though the by-lines of these and many other advertisements read “America’s business-managed, tax-paying Electric Light and Power Companies,” they were produced by ECAP and Bozell & Jacobs. See Metcalf and Reinemer, *Overcharge*, 99-100.

<sup>45</sup> America’s business-managed, tax-paying Electric Light and Power Companies advertisement, “Will you leave these to your children,” *Life*, Apr. 3, 1950, 134, emphasis in original. For a discussion of the Four Freedoms, see Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1998), 221-230.

<sup>46</sup> Reddy Kilowatt Service, *The Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter I*, (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1950), 1, box 25, folder 6, Reddy Kilowatt Records, 1929-1999, Archives Center, National Museum of American History (hereafter RkW Records).

to American life. One such advertisement from 1950 spoke directly to consumers about their bottom line. “His game will cost you MONEY,” Reddy warned, referring to a bureaucratic “crackpot.” More than just pocketbook issues were at risk though; the federal government would use taxpayers’ dollars to build a public electrical network. According to Reddy, “Socialists and slick politicians...want to build **SOCIALISTIC, GOVERNMENT-OWNED** Electric Power Plants all over the country!” Reddy claimed to have no knowledge of why the government wanted to build “extra power plants you don’t need.”<sup>47</sup> But GRIP’s authors made the point explicit: public power enthusiasts aimed to use nature and infrastructure to initiate a totalitarian take over. In response, GRIP openly sought to stoke “the fear that the government socialist planners for public power will scream ‘Power Shortage’ at the slightest opportunity,” and—as was the case with the Fulton, Tennessee power plant and the resultant Dixon-Yates affair—use that pretense to build even more federal dams.<sup>48</sup>

Critical of public power as he was, though, Collins believed that denigration alone was insufficient. He thus advised power company executives that, beyond simply denouncing the purportedly incessant increases in New Deal-inspired public power, they must stress the ways the free enterprise system had responded to the threats of power shortages in the early postwar years. For the starkly anti-socialist Collins, who had positioned himself as a public-relations guru for the postwar utility industry, this part of private power’s strategy was critically important given prevailing political circumstances. The Truman administration, along with its public power cohorts, Collins charged in an October 1952 speech, had revealed itself as “an avowed enemy of

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<sup>47</sup> Reddy Kilowatt advertisement, “His Game will Cost You MONEY!” 1950, emphasis in original, box 25, folder 5, RkW Records.

<sup>48</sup> Reddy Kilowatt Service, *Reddy for Anything! The Grass Roots Impact Plan, Chapter VI*, (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1950), 4, box 25, folder 7, RkW Records.



electric companies under the Free Enterprise system” with plans for “regimenting them [power companies] as slaves of a government bureaucracy.” Public power fanatics, according to Collins, would achieve their objective of building more federal dams by fomenting class warfare and highlighting free-market capitalism’s supposed failure to meet postwar energy needs. Thereby, he continued, public power could convince the people to acquiesce to “a form of Socialism that can only lead to the destruction of our form of government.” Echoing the perspective of a utility executive from Pittsburgh, Collins warned his audience that “if we do not adequately anticipate our prospective growth, we will add grist to the mill of the proponents of public power and those determined to nationalize the electric industry.” Thus, just as the United States had invested billions of dollars in postwar Europe to rebuild the foundations of free enterprise in order stamp out any seedlings of communism, private utilities must pursue and, more importantly, vigorously promote an aggressive power plant construction program—a sort of domestic Marshall Plan.<sup>49</sup> The twin threats of public power and power shortage would continue to have dramatic effects on the South’s landscapes, calling into existence ever more power plants driven by Appalachian coal.

By no means did private power companies stand alone in promoting perpetual growth. Indeed in the post-World War II South, “economic progress became a regional obsession.”<sup>50</sup> But southern power companies in particular seemed to have heard Collins’s message loud and clear and stood at the forefront of efforts to promote the South as a land of unlimited economic development.<sup>51</sup> Private power’s central theme in the early postwar years was growth—and

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<sup>49</sup> Ashton B. Collins, “Iowa Utilities Association” speech, Oct. 6, 1952, 1-2, box 3, folder 10, RkW Records.

<sup>50</sup> James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Progress, 1936-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 1; also see Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 105-146.

<sup>51</sup> Southern utilities and holding companies placed advertisements highlighting southern economic growth in an array of publications across the nation in the 1950s. See for example, Southern Company advertisement, “Southern Fibers Clothe the Nation,” *Newsweek*, Sept. 29, 1952; Middle South advertisement, “GROWTH Opportunities for

growth, as Collins suggested it should, meant power plants. “The year 1952 was one of continued growth and expansion,” the Georgia Power Company proudly claimed in its 1952 annual report. “New construction and peak demand...reached the highest figures in the Company’s history.”<sup>52</sup> This was no idle boast. From 1947 to 1950, Georgia Power added 350,000 kilowatts of capacity (all in coal-fired stations) to its portfolio, bringing its total capacity to over 981,500 kilowatts. The trend continued into the middle of the decade: by 1955, the utility reached 1.45 million kilowatts after adding nearly 500,000 more kilowatts to its generation system.<sup>53</sup> Stunning growth in this era marked not only Georgia Power but American utilities in general.<sup>54</sup>

The Georgia Power Company, no less than its counterparts across the South, did not reserve these impressive statistics for the skeptical eyes of its stockholders. To the contrary, the utility and its affiliated companies openly boasted of their astonishing postwar growth spurt and based their 1950s advertising campaigns—waged in publications across the nation—on the theme of power plant expansion. The use of the production facility as a promotional symbol had deep roots in the American past. Since the 1890s, companies had placed their factories at the center of their public relations programs, informing consumers that “they were dealing with a stable, competent firm.” The sheer size of a power plant in a utility advertisement certainly spoke to the success of a given electric company, particularly its “large capacity, well-developed

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You,” *Time*, Jun. 10, 1957; Southern Company advertisement, “Cash Registers are Ringing with the South’s Success Story,” *Saturday Evening Post*, Nov. 9, 1957; Duke Power Company advertisement, “We Thought You’d be Coming,” *York Times*, Nov. 17, 1957; and Southern Company advertisement, “Cash Registers are Ringing with the South’s Success Story,” *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 1957.

<sup>52</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1952* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1953), 1.

<sup>53</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Reports, 1947-1955*.

<sup>54</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, “Table 8.11a Electric Net Summer Capacity: Total (All Sectors), 1949-2011,” < <http://www.eia.gov/totalenergy/data/annual/showtext.cfm?t=ptb0811a>>, (accessed July 10, 2013).

expertise, ample capitalization, and modern production techniques.”<sup>55</sup> A 1952 advertisement serves as an illustration. Displaying images of two coal-fired power plants, the ad bragged of “the growth of the Georgia Power Company” and of the “\$130,000,000 construction program” that would soon add more, even larger generating stations to the company’s system.<sup>56</sup> Even more on the nose, a 1954 Southern Company advertisement claimed that a new Alabama Power Company coal-fired plant near Mobile, Alabama, depicted at the top of the ad, stood as the “Symbol of Growth” for the modern South.<sup>57</sup> If we take seriously the production of a series of advertisements as at least some measure of popular reception, it becomes clear that in the early Cold War moment, southerners seemed to have been convinced as to the promise of economic prosperity embodied in free enterprise and fossil fuels.

The emphasis on unending growth rooted in coal and power-producing infrastructure only grew more explicit as the 1950s wore on. Consider for instance a 1959 Southern Electric Generating Company (SEGCO, a collaborative mine-mouth coal-fired plant venture between Alabama Power and Georgia Power) advertisement titled “Natural Resources Harnessed for Power.” The textual portion of the SEGCO ad included language about abundance, economic progress, power company expansions, and the inexpensive electricity that would energize daily life in a “dynamic four-state region.” The illustration above the text, however, had much more to say. The image depicted an enormous lump of bituminous coal that surrounds a seemingly small thermal power plant. Out from the plant, and thus out from the coal, protruded high-tension

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<sup>55</sup> Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 31.

<sup>56</sup> Georgia Power Company-Southern Federal advertisement, “Growing with Atlanta and Georgia,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 16, 1952.

<sup>57</sup> Southern Company advertisement, “Symbol of Growth,” *New York Times*, Apr. 14, 1954.

transmission lines as well as a team of horses, both racing beyond the bounds of the advertisement.<sup>58</sup> According to cultural critic Judith Williamson, this advertising technique, although it seemed at first glance to privilege natural resources, was typical for displaying the industrial capitalist system's dominance over nature. In seeing the power plant in the center of the chunk of coal, the consumer became aware of the magnificence of the project of transforming combustible black rocks into energy. The depiction of the conversion of nature into culture (in this case electric power) thus implicitly carried and underscored the charge of the transformation itself, insisting on humanity's superior status. At the same time, such imagery granted electricity an inherent anteriority: kilowatts—horsepower—were always in the coal. It just took technical skill and free market mechanisms to wrench them out for humanity's benefit.<sup>59</sup> In short, the coal-fired power plant as "Symbol of Growth" was no mere symbol of current levels of growth. Such imagery reinforced the long-preached ideology that the private corporation operating in the open market had conquered nature through sophisticated infrastructure and thus played a central role in generating prosperity, making a New South, and ultimately protecting capitalist free enterprise from the socialistic incursions of the New Deal state.

Yet by the final years of the 1950s, as the tide had begun to turn in favor of southern utilities after Clarks Hill and Dixon-Yates, private power companies began to alter their message. Now, rather than crowing about the natural resources and power stations on which free enterprise had based postwar economic progress, private utilities would deemphasize corporate growth and would work to obscure the natural sources and industrial sites of electrical generation. A national sales effort, called "Live Better Electrically," helped forge this new path.

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<sup>58</sup> Southern Electric Generating Company, "Natural Resources Harnessed for Power," *Atlanta Constitution*, Mar. 18, 1959.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertisements* (London: Boyars, 1978), 17, 19, 103-108.

Beginning in mid 1950s, equipment manufacturer General Electric (GE) launched a series of wide-reaching promotional campaigns designed in large part to boost appliance and kilowatt-hour sales. But the firm had other motivations in mind as well. From the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, GE drew fire from many of its almost 200,000 employees for its harsh anti-union practices and suffered from a larger image problem as a heartless corporation. To recast its reputation, GE's staunchly anti-socialist managers hired former Hollywood actor Ronald Reagan in 1954 to both soften its image and halt the advance of New Deal liberalism into the realm of free enterprise. Essentially, GE charged Reagan with helping to resuscitate "the moral legitimacy of the [outsized] business corporation" in 1950s America.<sup>60</sup> To accomplish this task, he hosted a weekly television program, called *GE Theater*, and embarked on a nationwide speaking tour that highlighted GE's—and the free market's—contribution to postwar progress.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, GE adopted "progress" as one of its key words in the 1950s; "Progress is Our Most Important Product" became its corporate slogan. American citizens experienced GE's free market progress through "People's Capitalism," a thinly veiled, but widely deployed, Eisenhower-era assertion that the American system of capitalism had beaten the Soviets at their own game of broadly distributing national wealth.<sup>62</sup> "In a competitive People's Capitalism," a 1957 GE ad declared, "everyone gains again because part of the profits are plowed back into business to spur growth that leads to new products, new jobs and new services."<sup>63</sup> Yet the benefits of corporate-directed progress, another GE public relations piece professed, was "not only to improve the jobs of all

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<sup>60</sup> Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 2; also see Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the 1950s* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 74-75.

<sup>61</sup> Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009), 93-114.

<sup>62</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 124-126.

<sup>63</sup> General Electric advertisement, "People's Capitalism," *Time*, May 17, 1957, 13.

[Americans], but to also offer more of the personal satisfactions that mean a better life for them and their families.”<sup>64</sup>

GE consolidated the ideas of its mid-1950s sales drive—improved family life, social progress for all people, and the superiority of free enterprise—in the Live Better Electrically program, first introduced in 1956. In combination with GE’s Medallion Home Program, which debuted in 1957, Live Better Electrically was a mass marketing campaign that urged people—especially women—to stuff their homes with as many electric appliances as possible. GE informed consumers that the level of electrical saturation in their homes bore a direct relationship to the cleanliness, comfort, and convenience they would experience on a daily basis. In following this advice, according to a 1957 jingle, “you can make your family’s life much brighter / you will find your work much lighter / it’s as easy as can be / when you live better electrically,” and “you can have more time for fun and pleasure / family moments you will treasure / it’s an opportunity / to live better electrically.”<sup>65</sup> In short, Living Better Electrically “means a wonderful new way of life for you and your family.”<sup>66</sup>

Individual testimonials purportedly confirmed GE’s claims. A woman from Illinois praised her all-electric home for the comfort, convenience, and even liberation it afforded her: “I just love our Medallion Home—especially the kitchen. All these appliances...sure make my job easier.”<sup>67</sup> Homemaker Mildred White of Indianapolis took the point even further, stating both she and her mother agreed that “without those machines we’d all be full time washer women.” Even more than the freedoms afforded by electrical cleanliness, comfort, and convenience,

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<sup>64</sup> General Electric advertisement, “How 280,000 People at General Electric Benefit from its Progress,” *Time*, Jun. 17, 1957, 2.

<sup>65</sup> General Electric television advertisement, “Live Better Electrically,” 1957 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEMxYRoW1b0>>, (accessed Mar. 3, 2012).

<sup>66</sup> General Electric advertisement, *House and Home*, Jul. 1958, 166-167.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

White valued the socially leveling aspects of living better electrically. “Now we know,” she stated, that “total-electric living is not just for rich people.”<sup>68</sup> Implicit in White’s statement about the democratic nature of living better electrically was a clear 1920s and 1930s holdover as well as a repetition of an Eisenhower-era discourse about “people’s capitalism.” Public perception held that electrical modernization, at least until after the Second World War, *was* just for the well-to-do and, especially in the South, almost exclusively for white people.<sup>69</sup> The economic boom of the late 1940s and 1950s had changed circumstances.

As a sales pitch, GE’s injunction to seek a cleaner, more convenient, and more comfortable life seemed to have produced results, helping millions to live better electrically with the realm of free enterprise. By the end of the decade, the trade association journal *Electrical World* reported, the “appliance-TV industry made a spectacular comeback” relative to pre-1957 figures. Large item sales, including refrigerators, washing machines, and television sets, saw the most impressive gains, each exceeding the 90-percent saturation threshold in American homes.<sup>70</sup> Whether Americans had fully bought into GE’s version of free market politics is up for debate. But people had certainly bought the goods—if not at quite the levels *Electrical World* claimed—driving the larger politics of prosperity that insisted social leveling would arrive through consumer capitalism, not the state’s heavy-handed policies of forced redistribution.<sup>71</sup>

Much like GE’s 1950s public relations campaigns in general, however, Live Better Electrically was clearly more than just a call for consumers to buy countless new appliances. As historian Andrew Shanken writes, “what might at first appear to be an appeal to mass

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<sup>68</sup> General Electric advertisement, *House and Garden*, Apr. 1960, 30-31.

<sup>69</sup> See Ronald C. Tobey, Ronald C. Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 10-39.

<sup>70</sup> “Appliances: Appliance Sales Shot up 15% to \$8.5 Billion in ‘59,” *Electrical World*, Feb. 29, 1960.

<sup>71</sup> Historian Ronald Tobey writes that refrigerator saturation in the United States in 1960 was 93.5 percent, but that washing machine saturation was only at 73 percent. See Tobey, *Technology as Freedom*, 7.

consumption veiled an important public relations move.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, the private electric industry specifically engineered such sloganeering to produce discourses that would bolster corporations’ standing in the public’s mind. An electric industry leader explicated this point. The promise of better living through the domestic electrical modernization provided by the American capitalist system, he said in the mid-1950s, had to compete with socialistic dreamers who based their “outward appeal on the promise of *better things* for the masses.”<sup>73</sup> This technique did not originate in the 1950s. Live Better Electrically drew from a deep well of corporate mottos that hailed “better living.” Advertising executives in the 1930s coined the “Better Things for Better Living” catchphrase when Du Pont both scurried to clean up its image as one of the “Merchants of Death” and worked to reject the New Deal’s intrusions into business affairs. While it was “born in the Depression,” “better living” did not die in the 1930s; it persisted as the watchword of several companies in the World War II era and came to “narrate” the rise of consumer capitalism in the postwar years.<sup>74</sup> General Electric continued that narration with its Live Better Electrically campaign, seeking to erase its image as a union-busting corporate villain and to confirm the free market as the mechanism through which even blue-collar Americans could lead lives of clean, comfortable, and convenient abundance.

Utilities in the South quickly assimilated the Live Better Electrically slogan into their advertising campaigns, repeating the messages that highlighted the advantages private enterprise afforded to ordinary people. In keeping with the national model, Georgia Power aimed its Live Better Electrically advertisements specifically at women. A 1957 piece encouraged homemakers to “let electricity help all through the day, all through the house.” Electricity would restructure in-home work as well as leisure, lightening the housewife’s load and even making housework

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<sup>72</sup> See Shanken, “Better Living,” 485.

<sup>73</sup> Quote from Anderson, *Hollywood TV*, 76, emphasis added.

<sup>74</sup> See Shanken, “Better Living,” 485-514; quote from, 514.



enjoyable. “It makes the work go easier, the jobs go faster....At housecleaning time you’ll find yourself humming along with your vacuum cleaner. Afterward, you can relax...with your favorite records or television show. Electricity not only gives you free time but helps you enjoy it.” And the benefits of Living Better Electrically were available even to those of modest means: “Only electricity can do so many jobs and do them so well at such low cost.”<sup>75</sup> A 1959 Georgia Power-Live Better Electrically advertisement featuring a cartoon depiction of an overjoyed, smartly dressed housewife pushed better electrical living into the realm of the supernatural. A “miraculous new range...not only cooks meat and fowl to desired degree of doneness” but “frees you of pot-watching [and] clock-watching, too.”<sup>76</sup>

The Live Better Electrically campaign marked an important moment for the American electric industry. It underscored the ways individuals could both partake in and stimulate postwar economic progress by using steadily increasing amounts of affordable electricity in the home. It furthermore closely associated high-intensity electrical living with the core values of an American nation locked in a crucial war with both the international communist and internal socialist threats. Perhaps as significantly, a central feature of Live Better Electrically was its failure to mention the fuels and infrastructures that made improved domestic life possible. In its advertisements, the energy behind better living simply seemed to appear out of thin air, or, as the above referenced Georgia Power ad put it, as a “miracle.” Yet as late as 1959, Georgia Power and its counterparts in Dixie continued to emphasize growth and power-plant construction. The company’s 1958 annual report (published in 1959) informed stock holders that the company was “Still Growing for the Job Ahead,” and advertisements featuring new power plants assured

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<sup>75</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, “How to Love Living in Your New Home,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb. 21, 1958.

<sup>76</sup> Georgia Power Company-Westinghouse advertisement, “Never Again a Ruined Roast!” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 15, 1959, emphasis in original.

consumers, “More power on the way.”<sup>77</sup> Utility industry insiders saw the continued focus on coal and generating stations as a critical misstep and argued that only by taking Live Better Electrically a step further—by deliberately removing power plants from their advertisements—could utilities polish their corporate image, boost American free enterprise, and defeat public power.

Reddy Kilowatt creator Ashton Collins, once again, played the role of chief exhorter for the utility industry, urging southern utilities to change course. In a speech at the 1959 annual meeting of the Southeastern Electric Exchange (an Atlanta-based regional trade association founded in 1933) in New Orleans, Collins promised to be “coldly analytical” in discussing “our industry shortcomings” in the realm of public relations. Power companies in the South—based in no small measure on his advice in 1952—had become overly proud of their astonishing engineering feats and construction accomplishments. This tack, he said, no longer adequately addressed the challenges facing the utility industry, particularly the issues of public power and customer dissatisfaction over electrical rates. “Does any man in this audience have a Power Plant for sale?” he pointedly asked. “No!” he exclaimed. “Then why do we need emphasis on power plants per se in Company promotions?” Regardless of the type or size of power station a company relied on to generate energy, “the same kind of electricity, (in other words a kilowatt) is produced in any of these plants, regardless of what the plant looks like.” The scolding continued: “You are not selling power plants, you are selling the product of those plants. You send electricity through the wires, and all of it, your only product, has to go into the hands of the customer through two little holes in the wall, silently.” After all, “our customers just want to know if they can snap switches and get good electric service.” From that point forward, he

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<sup>77</sup> See Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1958* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1959); 1-2; and Georgia Power Company advertisement, “More Power on the Way...on Schedule,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 22, 1959.

suggested, “we should not rely on pictures of power plants *for our sales and advertising jobs with the public.*” These sorts of public relations gimmicks did not do enough to “solve such important problems as...government ownership and [consumer discontent with] rates.” Instead, power companies must “direct our sales and advertising stories to the product or package that reaches the homes and hands of the customers.” In order to emphasize product over production, illustrated in the evolution of Reddy Kilowatt-Southern Company subsidiary advertisements, utilities must embrace “simplicity plus repetition,” they must “funnel the key notes of the business down into simple terms and repeat and repeat them until everybody knows them.”<sup>78</sup>

Southern electric companies immediately heeded Collins’s advice and shifted their promotional focus away from power plants and growth. Of course, utilities did not completely dispose of advertising campaigns that cast the South as a region ripe for continued economic expansion, but as the 1960s began, they did place increasing importance on the direct relationship between private power and individual benefits. A key element of this new public relations emphasis addressed the ongoing threat of public power, seeking to “inform customers and the general public about the Company...as an investor-owned, tax-paying business.”<sup>79</sup> A series of advertisements in 1960 extended “people’s capitalism” to Dixie, and identified ordinary southerners such as third grade teacher Marjorie Neal and cattle farmer Alex Dunaway as “power company owner[s].” As stockholder-customers, they, like “almost everyone in the nation, [have] at least an indirect financial interest in electric company operation.” Such widespread investment embodied the “American way of doing business—a way that has served our nation well.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ashton B. Collins, “Our Power Plants are Not for Sale!” Nov. 16, 1959, box 3, folder 12, 1-9, emphasis in original, RkW Records.

<sup>79</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1960* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1961), 36.

<sup>80</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, “Marjorie Neal: Third Grade Teacher and Power Company Owner,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Oct. 18, 1960; and Georgia Power Company advertisement, “Alex Dunaway: Cattleman, Contractor, and Power Company Owner,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 18, 1960.

Everyday people would realize the return on their investment in the Georgia Power Company's business, as GE's Live Better Electrically campaign had begun to suggest in the late 1950s, through the increased cleanliness, comfort, and convenience of all-electric living—values the Georgia Power Company explicitly began to stress in the mid-1960s.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the greatest advantage consumers would experience through all-electric living was the erasure of the messiness and vagaries of nature. A whole suite of electric industry advertisements in the 1960s promised to bless consumers with “an ideal indoor climate.”<sup>82</sup> Despite the utility industry's promotion of electric heating in the 1950s and 1960s, no single appliance signaled greater potential control over Dixie's sweltering environs than the air conditioner, which white southerners adopted at greater rates than the nation as a whole in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, the proportion of all southern homes with air conditioning was 18.2 percent (compared to 12.4 percent nationally), while only 3.9 percent of African American homes in the South contained an air conditioner. By 1970, just over half of southern homes (50.1 percent) had air conditioning, while only one-fifth (20.8 percent) of black southerners' homes and 35.8 percent of all American homes could enjoy “an ideal indoor climate.”<sup>83</sup> According to promotional materials, air conditioning would not only enable southerners to beat the heat, but it would jettison many other ill effects of the South's harsh climate, including laziness and high mortality and morbidity rates. Apparently, air conditioning would also dispatch the southern penchant for immorality as an electrically cooled sanctuary would entice more lost souls into church.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1963* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1964), 40; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1964* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1965), 50; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1963* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1964), 40; and Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1965* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1966), 50;

<sup>82</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, “Have You Noticed?” *Atlanta Daily World*, Mar. 25, 1964.

<sup>83</sup> Raymond Arsenault, “The End of the Long Hot Summer: The Air Conditioner and Southern Culture,” *Journal of Southern History* 50 (Nov. 1948), 610-611.

<sup>84</sup> See Arsenault, “The Cooling of the South,” *Wilson Quarterly* 8 (Summer 1984), 156-157; Robert S. Thompson, “‘The Air-Conditioning Capital of the World’: Houston and Climate Control,” in Martin V. Melosi and Joseph A.

None of the foregoing sales efforts mentioned the sources of power behind the people's capitalism or the cleanliness, comfort, and convenience of all-electric living; but neither did any of them explicitly work to remove coal and power plants from consumers' view. That labor would be performed by the "flameless" public relations campaign of the 1960s. Georgia Power first promoted flamelessness in 1960, almost immediately following Collins's insistence that southern power plants were not for sale.<sup>85</sup> The rest of the American electric industry began using the term in 1961 after the Live Better Electrically program adopted "flameless" as its "key word" and urged utilities to "use the word 'flameless' in all its advertisements." As noted above, the electric industry's stated motivation for "the elimination of the flame" sprang from competition with the natural gas industry.<sup>86</sup> But in the context of the ongoing struggle against public power, and in combination with Collins's 1959 advice, the private utility industry's "flameless" campaign operated on a deeper level, scrubbing the once-vaunted generating station from the public's consciousness. Flameless living, as Georgia Power intimated in its 1965 "Springtime" advertisement, would replace the coal-fired power plant as the apotheosis of humanity's triumph over the cruel realities of the natural world and the primitive technologies of earlier civilizations. Flameless electricity, according to a 1965 Georgia Power ad, would eliminate nature's dirt. It would leave the home "unsoiled by fuel grime and dust"; "there are no by-products of combustion."<sup>87</sup> A series of Florida Power and Light advertisements illustrated this point even more clearly. Asking the reader, "Wouldn't you rather switch [to flameless electricity]?" each of the ads in the series featured a hard-working woman with a kerchief on her head shrouded in

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Pratt, eds., *Energy Metropolis: An Environmental History of Houston and the Gulf Coast* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 91-92. For a national-level examination of the rise of the air conditioner as a climate-control device, see Gail Cooper, *Air Conditioning America: Engineers and the Controlled Environment, 1900-1960* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002).

<sup>85</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, "Buy This Electric Range...Get an Automatic Can Opener Free!" *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 1, 1960.

<sup>86</sup> "LBE Program Gets New Approach," *Electrical World*, Mar. 7, 1960, 83.

<sup>87</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, "Clean Flameless Electric Heat," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 4, 1965.

darkness. A 1970 ad, for example, advised a woman carrying a huge load of laundry to an outdoor clothesline that if she owned a flameless electric dryer, she would be set free.<sup>88</sup> Another of these ads displayed a woman hunching into and attempting to clean a dark and caked-over oven. If she went flameless, however, she would be liberated not simply from the grime of a conventional oven but from the “drudgery of the past.”<sup>89</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, flamelessness promised not only to relieve women of drudgery and dirt, it helped create and justify an image of an increasingly modernized land of corporate monopoly and capitalism consumer plenty and, at the same time, worked to obscure the place of dirty coal-burning generating stations like Plant Harlee Branch as the heart of the New South. Such a process, though, was never even and never complete. In fact, even as Georgia Power’s generating plants annually pumped out tens of billions of seemingly invisible coal-derived kilowatt hours by the end of the 1960s, there were rumblings across Georgia suggesting that many ordinary people still had the sources of southern power in sight and were displeased with the way a corporate cartel generated and distributed the energy that had become so interwoven with life in the modern South.

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The struggles for control over electric energy in the South appeared to have settled into a peaceful moment following Clarks Hill and Dixon-Yates. In addition, utilities like Georgia Power worked to produce discourses that would remove contentious sources of fuel and power from consumers’ view beginning in the early 1960s. Indeed, by the beginning of the 1970s, all appeared quiet on the southern power front.

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<sup>88</sup> Florida Power and Light Company advertisement, “Wouldn’t You Rather Switch,” *Miami Times*, Feb. 6, 1970.

<sup>89</sup> Florida Power and Light Company advertisement, “Wouldn’t You Rather Switch,” *Miami Times*, Mar. 7, 1970.

Yet, as discussed above, southern utility executives knew that threats to their monopoly status still existed and, as early as 1962, once again began to alert consumers to the dangers lurking behind calls for public power. In a pamphlet titled “Why Hobble the Leader?” Alabama Power and Edison Electric Institute president Walter Bouldin issued the warning. Small circles of public power radicals, he wrote, “are hobbling [American power development] by policies and actions which have no foundations in the public interest.” Their policies were plainly part of a socialistic ploy for wealth redistribution: “Government power does not pay its way. To produce that power, the government takes the people’s money and pays them little or nothing for the use of it. Most government power is then sold to consumers who pay nothing in their electric bills for the federal government’s support.” This path proved so hazardous to continued American prosperity not just because it would lead to domestic socialism, but, Bouldin hinted, because it would assist the Soviet Union in its quest for global dominance. “In the world competition of electric power, the leadership of America is not yet challenged; but some powerful groups in our country,” he wrote, seek to “impair a leadership that is based on individual direction and enterprise.” Among the powerful institutional culprits that would hobble the leader, Bouldin named the Department of the Interior and the Rural Electrification Administration. He branded REA-funded cooperatives in particular as “another hobble” that “conscript the taxpayers’ money” and offer no “service which the investor-owned utility is not ready, willing, and able to supply.” Georgia Power Company chairman Jack McDonough heartily recommended Bouldin’s missive to “every thoughtful American” as a work that “shows how government competition adversely affects *these companies and their customers*.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Edwin Vennard and Walter Bouldin, *Why Hobble the Leader?* (New York: Edison Electric Institute, n.d. [1962?]), 20-23, quotes from 20, 22; signed note from Jack McDonough attached to pamphlet, emphasis in original, box 63, folder “REA Pamphlets and Brochures VII: Southern – Tisinger,” Harrison Papers.

Bouldin's and McDonough's thoughts on the public power threat proved rather prescient. In the late 1960s and 1970s, ordinary Georgians would once again launch assaults on the Georgia Power Company's monopoly status, loudly questioning the company's colossal coal-fired power plants as well as its nascent nuclear power program, first announced in 1967. What neither Bouldin nor McDonough seemed to have anticipated was that their utilities would face not just the traditional forces of public power—forces that Bouldin clearly identified in his pamphlet. They would also have to confront global financial disaster as well as a homegrown southern environmentalist-consumers' rights movement that, in addition to criticizing the pollution of Georgia Power's generating stations and the dangers of nuclear power, agitated for complete public control over the provision of electric power. Rural co-ops and environmentalists, holding opposition to the private power's cartel status in common, might seem to have made for an ideal coalition. Yet critical differences over the significance of energy consumption to Dixie's continued regeneration—especially in a time of economic uncertainty—saw the two sides part company. In order to preserve at least a modicum of the New Deal-inspired dream of an independent public power network in the South, Georgia's cooperatives bought into—and indeed became a federal subsidy pipeline for—private power, both bearing witness to and helping realize the larger effects of the coal, consumerism, and corporate capitalism nexus.

Though several minor issues strained southern public-private power relations following Bouldin's 1962 warning, renewed tensions between the GEMC and Georgia Power emerged full-force in late 1969. The overt point of contention concerned control over territory—no law in Georgia protected the cooperatives' territory—but the question also revolved around power supply. The GEMC's leadership saw in the rapid expansion of Georgia Power's coal-fired generating network a possible channel for invading the co-ops' territory. That their turf might be



up for grabs was to large degree an unintended consequence of the cooperatives' success. With low-cost loans and cheap power (furnished wholesale by Georgia Power following Clarks Hill, see Chapter 4) the GEMC's member co-ops electrified large swaths of the Georgia countryside—rural districts the Georgia Power Company for financial reasons refused to develop. The co-ops' electrical modernization of formerly undeveloped portions of the state made such places increasingly enticing for the streams of migrants moving both to the South and away from the city center in the decades following World War II. Between 1950 and 1970, suburban counties such as Cobb and DeKalb more than tripled in population, while suburban Gwinnett County more than doubled, introducing an additional, interrelated factor that put the cooperatives' territorial integrity at potential risk.<sup>91</sup> As unincorporated sections of Georgia grew into highly coveted suburban spaces the in 1950s and 1960s—growth in large part enabled by the co-ops—nearby towns and cities collaborated with suburban settlements for annexation for reasons that ranged from the expansion of tax-bases, increases in the numbers of white voters, and extension of city services to outlying areas. Georgia law prohibited REA-funded cooperatives from entering markets of more than 1,500 residents, and, in an era of urban incorporation and southern population growth, fewer and fewer places could be counted in that group.<sup>92</sup> In practical terms, these trends meant that the Georgia Power Company had the

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<sup>91</sup> See McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 172-173. From 1950 to 1970, Georgia's population as a whole grew from about 3.4 million to about 4.6 million (or 33.7 percent) and Atlanta's population grew from about 290,000 to 497,000 (or 71.3 percent). Metropolitan Atlanta's suburban counties experienced far greater rates of population growth. From 1950 to 1970, Cobb County's population increased some 280 percent (to about 197,000), DeKalb County's population increased by about 208 percent (to about 415,000), and Gwinnett County's population increased by about 124 percent (to about 72,000). See US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "1950 Census of Population: Preliminary Counts," Sept. 6, 1950, <<https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/pc-02/pc-2-34.pdf>> (accessed May 11, 2016), 2-4; and Richard L. Forstall, "Georgia: Population of Counties by Decennial Census, 1900-1990," Mar. 27, 1995, <<https://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ga190090.txt>> (accessed May 11, 2016).

<sup>92</sup> Southern rates of urban annexation—the most voracious in the nation—were about 9 percent greater than those in the rapidly growing US West, 3.5 times great than those in the Midwest, and seven times greater than those in the Northeast. See Ira R. Kaufman and Leo F. Schnore, "Municipal Annexations and Suburbanization, 1960-1970," unpublished paper, March 1975, 36, <<http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/cde/cdewp/75-4.pdf>> (accessed May 11, 2016).

opportunity to use its massive coal-fired capacity to launch a “territorial invasion” on Georgia’s REA membership, which owned no generating or transmission facilities, ultimately leaving rural co-ops with a significantly diminished market—or no market at all. “On a long-range basis,” the GEMC’s Power Committee reported in December 1969, the potential damage could not “be adequately measured in dollars—even in millions. It could well be survival versus total abolition.”<sup>93</sup> The Georgia Power Company’s coal-fired power plants, and the potential danger to public power they represented, were anything but invisible.

GEMC general manager Walter Harrison encouraged his associates to head off the possibility of total abolition by taking their case to friendly members of the Georgia General Assembly. By the end of April 1971, the GEMC had drafted a bill that would protect the territorial integrity of its member corporations by designating well-defined power distribution zones for Georgia Power, Georgia’s fifty municipal electric systems, and rural cooperatives throughout the state. Yet instead of heightening tensions between the private monopoly and the rural co-ops, the bill drew these long-standing rivals into the beginning of a fateful alliance. While both Georgia Power and the GEMC agreed to the legislation, the state’s municipal electrical companies balked. With the backing of House Majority Leader George Busbee, municipal advocates claimed that the deal would forever lock their clients into their current service areas and thus smacked of collusion between Georgia Power and the GEMC. Busbee denounced the proposal as an example of “Georgia Power fraud” and the municipals’ attorney Clifford Adams likened it to a cake that Georgia Power and the GEMC would divide only between themselves.<sup>94</sup> Busbee’s might and the municipals’ protest saw that the bill was tabled for the 1972 legislative session.

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<sup>93</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 172-173.

<sup>94</sup> Beau Cutts, “Power Areas Bill Held up for Study,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 27, 1972.

When Georgia Power and the GEMC resubmitted the territorial integrity measure for approval in 1973, municipal power advocates fought it as an unfair power grab by an already wealthy cartel. In trying to convince co-op members to pressure their leaders into changing course, they also charged that the Georgia Power Company and its fast-talking lawyers had bamboozled the GEMC. The mayor of Fitzgerald, Georgia cast the proposed legislation as “that gnawing cancerous kind of greed that grips one who sees a monopoly almost within reach.” Georgia Power, he continued, “will be the winner [and] the people of Georgia will be the losers” if the legislation passed.<sup>95</sup> Ultimately, it mattered little that municipal power activists continued to resist the territory bill: back-room politicking in late 1972 ensured Busbee’s silence on the matter and won Governor Jimmy Carter’s reluctant support. Carter quietly signed the Georgia Territorial Electric Service Act (GTESA) into law in March 1973, segmenting Georgia into thirty-eight distribution zones controlled by the GEMC.<sup>96</sup> The state’s most lucrative urban markets, including Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, and Savannah, as well as any new industrial customers, remained in Georgia Power’s territory. Municipal systems kept their territories but were prohibited from expanding beyond city limits.

Walter Harrison and the GEMC cast the new law as a victory in public power’s long quest for independence from the private power monopoly.<sup>97</sup> It might have been more appropriate, however, to cast the GTESA as the beginning of a partnership that funneled federal subsidies to a monopoly power company in desperate need of cash. It was effectively a government subvention that took the expensive job of wiring the swiftly expanding suburbs and

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<sup>95</sup> Dick Pettys, “Cities’ Power Territory Bill Fears are Refuted,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 1, 1973; also see Bill Jordan, “Utilities Bill Called Work of Georgia Power Lawyers,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 16, 1973.

<sup>96</sup> “Georgia Territorial Electric Service Act,” n.d., 1-2, box 55, folder “Georgia Territorial Electric Service Act, Oct.-Nov. 1972,” Harrison Papers.

<sup>97</sup> Walter Harrison form letter to Dear...., Nov. 7, 1972, box 55, folder “Georgia Territorial Electric Service Act, Oct.-Nov. 1972,” Harrison Papers; McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 174-181.

exurbs out of Georgia Power's hands—particularly important given the high-cost job of construction of new power plants—placing that job instead in the GEMC's hands and on the REA's ledger.<sup>98</sup> The territorial service act, moreover, was also an important stepping stone to a far more consequential public power-private power partnership in the realm of electrical generation and transmission.

Before that could happen, however, the GEMC had to first sidestep other obstacles. At the same time that they faced extinction resulting from Georgia Power's possible incursion into their turf, the GEMC's cooperatives faced steep price hikes. Due to alarming inflationary trends in the late 1960s, Georgia Power's borrowing and fuel costs had risen precipitously—a serious problem given its ongoing construction program. “Current securities costs,” the company admitted to stockholders in its 1970 annual report, “remain much higher than the composite annual cost on the aggregate of all such securities issued in the past [and] we expect the imbedded cost of money to the Company to continue to rise for the foreseeable future.” As a result, in May 1970 the utility asked the Federal Power Commission (which controlled wholesale rates for power sold to public entities) for a 30 to 38 percent increase in wholesale rates to rural electric cooperatives—the first rate increase request in the history of the REA.<sup>99</sup> Not surprisingly, the GEMC cried foul. Walter Harrison criticized the petition as an “unreasonable and unjustifiable” measure that “could mean take-over of some of the REA cooperatives by Georgia Power [and] the death of others.”<sup>100</sup> The FPC declined to issue an immediate ruling on the matter; it opted instead in July 1970 to host extended hearings and delay judgment for five months. For the FPC, this was standard procedure. The agency's rules stated that if

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<sup>98</sup> See Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 256-258.

<sup>99</sup> Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1970* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1971), 3. Georgia Power claimed the rate increase would be “slightly in excess of 30 percent.” The GEMC's leaders insisted that the rate increase would amount to 38 percent. See McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 184, 186.

<sup>100</sup> Fred Heller, “Co-ops Pledge to Fight GPC's Proposed Boost,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1970.

commissioners had not ruled on a petition within the suspension period, the proposed rate hike would be automatically instituted—bad news for Georgia’s rural cooperatives.<sup>101</sup> According to the GEMC’s board, the FPC’s foot dragging along with Georgia Power’s aggressions and refusal to negotiate on rate increases pushed co-ops to the breaking point. Remaining the helpless customers of a utility that controlled all electrical generation and transmission in the state was no longer tenable. Thus, in a striking reversal of its historical position as a federal hydropower customer (even though by 1970 more than 80 percent of its electricity came from Georgia Power’s coal-fired plants), the GEMC would begin drafting plans to build its own generating stations—both coal-fired and nuclear—and transmission lines.<sup>102</sup>

Rather than allowing the suspension period to lapse, the FPC continued to order new rounds of hearings on Georgia Power’s proposed rate increase and the case dragged on with no clear end in sight. In the meantime, though, even as it negotiated with Georgia Power over territorial integrity, the GEMC pursued its plans for full independence. At a hearing in Washington in October 1971, Harrison pleaded with Congress to release the \$545 million in REA funds that had been appropriated earlier in the year so his organization could build its own generating and transmission systems.<sup>103</sup> Though little happened in the short term to answer Harrison’s appeal, the REA’s administrator, David Hamil, grew increasingly sympathetic to the GEMC’s desire to conduct its own generation and transmission business. With the creation of the Federal Financing Bank in 1973, Hamil now had the means to furnish southern cooperatives with the funds required to construct their own facilities.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Bob Hurt, “Georgia Power Rate Increase is Blocked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 29, 1970.

<sup>102</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 186-187.

<sup>103</sup> “Rural Georgia Electric Cooperatives Seeking Release of Appropriated REA Funds,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 28, 1971.

<sup>104</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 187-188.

Georgia Power's managers certainly saw the GEMC's quest for independence as a significant problem, one made worse by larger developments. Global events in the early 1970s, including continued inflationary trends and hostilities in the Middle East, sent both borrowing and fuel costs to new highs.<sup>105</sup> Georgia Power's expenses shot up more than one-third by the end of 1973. As time progressed, the company's financial health only worsened as costs continued to rise and stock prices continued to fall. By September 1974 Southern Company equities had shed nearly 45 percent of their January 1974 value leading Georgia Power executive William Dahlberg to plainly state that his company stood "on the brink of insolvency." Of course, money problems meant that the company would not only have trouble making payroll, meeting property taxes liabilities, and showing enough earnings to satisfy stockholders. Perhaps even more worryingly, they meant Georgia Power might also be unable to pay the interest on its outstanding bonds. The inability to service debt threatened the utility's continued construction program (the Southern Company had already reduced funds earmarked for construction by \$1.7 billion, or one-third, in the summer of 1974), which, in a moment when electrical consumption levels steadily increased, threatened the return, yet again, of power shortages. In another candid moment, Dahlberg admitted that "we were broke" and the company had few good ideas about where to look for answers.<sup>106</sup>

In a remarkable historical irony, it was Georgia's rural electric cooperatives that came to the rescue of the state's cash-strapped monopoly power supplier in mid-1974, agreeing to use low-interest, tax-free REA loans to help build the first 800,000 kilowatt unit at Plant Edwin Hatch—the first nuclear plant in the Southern Company system and the largest single capital investment ever made in Georgia to that point. The historical record is unclear about which side

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<sup>105</sup> Rudolph and Ridley, *Power Struggle*, 143-143.

<sup>106</sup> Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 254-258, Dahlberg quotes on 256 and 263.

first approached the other. Those sympathetic to Georgia Power report that the co-ops made the initial contact in the fall of 1974 and that, because of the long and tortured relationship between the parties, the GEMC's openness to a deal—due largely to its inability to cope with constant price increases—came as a shock.<sup>107</sup> By contrast, the GEMC intimated that, because of a federal anti-trust proceeding it had initiated over rights to nuclear power (made possible in large part through tax dollars) and looming financial disaster, Georgia Power's lawyers first approached the co-ops' leaders and signed a "Power Supply and Planning Procurement Agreement" in April 1974.<sup>108</sup> Regardless of who began the negotiations, both sides came to the table with considerable strengths and weaknesses: the GEMC had federal money but no generating or transmission system and Georgia Power had a well-established power network but essentially no funding.

To solidify its standing as an equal partner with the Georgia Power Company, the GEMC, an organizing and advocacy corporation, decided that it needed to create a new company specifically dedicated to the business of generating and transmitting electric power. On August 6, 1974, the GEMC's board voted to create the Oglethorpe Electric Membership Corporation, named for the Englishman who founded the colony of Georgia; Oglethorpe EMC was officially incorporated by the state two days later and instantly became the largest electrical co-op in the United States. Georgia Power and Oglethorpe quickly drew up a contract stipulating that the co-ops would receive a minority stake (30 percent) in both of Plant Hatch's first two units and that the REA would provide the tax-free, low-interest financing. Convinced that Oglethorpe's dealings represented a solid plan for southern co-ops' future, REA administrator David Hamil approved an initial loan of \$206.5 million in November 1974, and a subsequent loan of almost

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 259-261.

<sup>108</sup> McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 187-189.

\$400 million more, to fund the completion of the South’s first nuclear generating station.<sup>109</sup> To say the least, Georgia Power’s managers seemed quite comforted at the knowledge that in the near term the federal government would invest some \$600 million in its business. “The only way we could build” the first units at Plant Hatch, a Georgia Power executive recalled, “was to get somebody else to pay for them.” With the Oglethorpe-REA bailout, “we were relieved of raising capital for new construction.”<sup>110</sup>

Although the Georgia Power Company and the GEMC had continued to butt heads until at least 1972, the irony of the cooperatives’ private power buy-in was somewhat mitigated by the larger history of public power. From the early post-World War I years, when groups such as the Municipal League of Georgia and the Giant Power Board emerged (see Chapter 3), public power activists had located constant increases in electric energy provision and high levels of individual electrical consumption at the core of their agendas for improved rural living standards. When federally-backed public power became a reality in the 1930s, New Deal programs only deepened the connections among electrical expansion, electrical consumption, and social uplift. Not only was this the case with the TVA and the REA—which included courses that taught rural people how to use electricity in daily life—but with programs such as the National Housing Act and the Electric Home and Farm Authority, both of which subsidized home wiring and appliance purchases.<sup>111</sup> In the late 1940s and the 1950s, as rural electrification expanded in the postwar years, farmers celebrated the ready availability of electric power and high levels of consumption

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<sup>109</sup> Tom Henderson, “OEMC Plans to Invest in Georgia Power Plants,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 8, 1974; also see Oglethorpe Electric Membership Corporation, “Background Material on Oglethorpe Electric Membership Corporation,” n.d. (1976?), 2, box 58, folder “Oglethorpe EMC, 1974-1976,” Harrison Papers; and McQuade, *Light up Our Land*, 193-194.

<sup>110</sup> Quotes from Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 260.

<sup>111</sup> See Jones, *Routes of Power*, 222; Tobey, *Technology as Freedom*, 115-118; Gregory B. Field, “‘Electricity for All’: The Electric Home and Farm Authority and the Politics of Mass Consumption, 1932-1935,” *Business History Review* 64 (Spring 1990): 32-60; Michelle Mock, “The Electric Home and Farm Authority, ‘Model T Appliances,’ and the Modernization of the Home Kitchen in the South,” *Journal of Southern History* 80 (Feb. 2014): 73-108.



as some of their greatest achievements. In 1947, TVA chairman Gordon Clapp lauded rural electrification as a force that had moved electric power “from the luxury goods counter for city trade to the homes, farms, and factories of small communities and rural areas; electricity is one of the tools we use in building a standard of living we are willing to call American.”<sup>112</sup> In a pamphlet titled *1951: Presenting 15 Years of Progress*, Planters EMC (Millen, Georgia) proudly reported that “those now enjoying electric service are reaping untold benefits obtained only through electricity: Lights for Home and Farm, Appliances for Better Living.”<sup>113</sup> The recognition of consumerism as a central fundament of American values gained a significant boost in the 1960s and early 1970s when Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, as well as countless other officials, affirmed that the greater national good required ever more consumer activity and the protection of consumers’ rights.<sup>114</sup> Certainly from the co-ops’ perspective, not to mention that of millions of other Georgians, the levels of consumption required for modern American life would not have been possible without steadily expanding and reasonably priced electricity—the provision of which, after the developments of the early 1970s, would be guaranteed by the system of private power. This is not to argue that the GEMC would inevitably join forces with Georgia Power, but to suggest that larger, mid-twentieth-century historical forces nurturing corporate capitalism’s version of energy-intensive, coal-powered consumerism proved enticing to even the most committed public power enthusiasts as New Deal liberalism came to an end.

Of course, not all Georgians agreed that the Georgia Power Company’s monopoly status and policy of unending growth (both bulwarked by the creation of Oglethorpe EMC) was good

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<sup>112</sup> Gordon R. Clapp, “Electricity Goes to Work in the Development of a Region,” Dec. 9, 1947, 1, box 55, folder “Georgia EMC General Documents, 1942-1948,” Harrison Papers.

<sup>113</sup> Planters Electric Membership Corporation, *1951: Presenting 15 Years of Progress* (Millen, GA: Planters Electric Membership Corporation, 1951), 6, box 58, folder “Planters EMC, 1951, Presenting 15 Years of Progress,” Harrison Papers.

<sup>114</sup> Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic*, 345-346.

for the state's future. A small, but not inconsequential, group, called the Georgia Power Project (GPP), sprouted from the grassroots in the 1972 and loudly articulated this position across much of the 1970s. In league with the local Textile Manufacturers' Union, the American Association of Retired Persons, Save America's Vital Environment, and other citizens' associations, the GPP cast its fight as "battle between the people and the Georgia Power Company," seemingly dragging traditional public power-private power issues into the 1970s. Yet the GPP did not have New Deal-style goals in mind. Like many protest organizations born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was a child of 1960s radicalism and its key members cut their teeth as activists in Students for a Democratic Society and the anti-Vietnam War movement.<sup>115</sup> The GPP's philosophy, in the words of GPP spokesman Bob Hall, was guided not by 1930s beliefs in the constant conquest of nature for energy production and consumer plenty. Rather, the GPP held "that the long-term solution to the problems posed by the Georgia Power Co. is for the people...to assume direct control of its operations. We are socialists, working toward a time when the company will be run and managed by its workers and consumers. We believe this is necessary not only for the Georgia Power Co., but also for many other economic and political institutions which so dominate our lives."<sup>116</sup>

If in the long term the GPP aimed to bring radical change to the southern electric industry (and indeed all of southern society), its short-term objectives seemed far more prosaic. The group's apparent mission following its founding in 1972 was to challenge Georgia Power's petitions to the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC, which controlled retail rates for Georgia Power customers) for electrical rate increases—but this strategy served the GPP's larger aims. Because of the financial difficulties it faced, the Georgia Power Company had requested

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<sup>115</sup> The Georgia Power Project, "The Georgia Power Project," *The Great Speckled Bird* (Atlanta, GA), Sept. 11, 1972; Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 359.

<sup>116</sup> Sam Hopkins, "Georgia Power Timing Attacked," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 23, 1973.

that consumers pay higher rates each year from 1969 to 1972. In June 1971, company president Edwin Hatch told the PSC that his utility had “reached the end of our rope” and would soon be dead without a \$45 million rate increase, which would mean the average customer’s bill would be about 8 percent higher.<sup>117</sup> In 1972, Georgia Power requested almost \$48 million (or 12.4 percent) more from ratepayers, an appeal that in large part brought the GPP into existence. The GPP’s protests against the latest proposed increase reportedly brought some seventy-five citizens—including housewives, white collar workers, union members, students, and civil rights activists—to the PSC meeting in September 1972 to offer testimony against the higher prices that, one elderly Georgia woman said, would be “impossible for the old and poor to pay.”<sup>118</sup> The PSC granted only a fraction of Georgia Power’s request (\$17.9 million), leading the company once again to request large rate increases in both 1973 and 1974 and sparking even greater outrage among Georgia’s consumers and the GPP.<sup>119</sup>

When the commission gathered on a morning in January 1975 to hold public hearings on an emergency rate increase filed in late 1974, hundreds of irate citizens overwhelmed the meeting. The commissioners summoned police officers who escorted the raucous and overflowing crowd to Atlanta’s Central Presbyterian Church, where the inquiry resumed after lunch. After two weeks of closed-door deliberations, the PSC granted Georgia Power only about half of its emergency request (about \$25 million). Predicting fatal financial shortfalls for the rest of the year, Georgia Power soon thereafter filed yet another petition with the PSC—this time for a whopping \$305 million in permanent rate hikes, or a 28 percent rise in consumers’ monthly bills.<sup>120</sup> The GPP and its allies were more incensed than ever.

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<sup>117</sup> Charles Lambeth, “At ‘End of Rope,’ Georgia Power Says,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun. 30, 1971.

<sup>118</sup> The Georgia Power Project, “The Georgia Power Project,” *The Great Speckled Bird*, Sept. 11, 1972.

<sup>119</sup> Sam Hopkins, “Georgia Power Timing Attacked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 23, 1973.

<sup>120</sup> Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 262-263.

Protestors gathered at the state capitol in Atlanta in late February 1975 and charged that Georgia Power's claims of financial troubles were a ruse designed to coax the PSC into forcing ordinary consumers to foot the bill for the utility's unnecessarily outsized power plant construction program. "We want a chance to speak...the truth about Georgia Power's so called crisis," a GPP organizer told the crowd. "We are sick of bailing out the Company." Following the speech, the protestors began to chant "No more bailouts!" and "There is only one way...Georgia Power's got to pay."<sup>121</sup> These street-level demonstrations followed on the actions of angry consumers, some of whom proposed to the GPP that it organize "rate strikes," in which consumers would revive the moral-economy spirit of eighteenth-century English bread riots and pay only what they thought was fair. Others suggested full-on "electricity strikes," wherein domestic power users would restrict their electrical consumption to a "barebones-minimum." In addition, the GPP took its case to both the Georgia Supreme Court and the US District Court, charging that the Georgia Power Company had colluded with members of the PSC and thus violated a rash of state and federal legislation as well as the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>122</sup> Though its actions met with no success in the courts, the GPP's rallies seem to have borne some fruit. In April 1975, the Georgia Public Service Commission granted Georgia Power a rate increase of only \$116 million. Realizing that his company would have considerable difficulty meeting even short term financial obligations, Georgia Power's new president, Robert Scherer, announced that he would eliminate \$1.4 billion from the 1975-1977 construction budget. This decision meant that eighteen planned generating units—including two additional units at Plant Hatch, two units at a new nuclear facility named Plant Alvin W. Vogtle, and two

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<sup>121</sup> Krista Brewer, "Slide Show at the Assembly," *The Great Speckled Bird*, Feb. 27, 1975.

<sup>122</sup> Sharon Bailey, "Georgia Power Sued by Group," *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb. 8, 1975. See E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (Feb. 1971): 76-136.

units at a massive new coal-fired plant to be named Plant Robert W. Scherer—would not, at least in the foreseeable future, be built.<sup>123</sup>

The prospect of fewer generating units in Georgia Power’s system by no means came as a disappointment to the Georgia Power Project and its allies. The cancellation of new units, especially in nuclear generating stations, had been one of the GPP’s underlying goals all along. In addition to its advocacy on behalf of consumers, the GPP was an environmentalist organization that sought to not just to lower rates but to halt nuclear programs that gave “corporate executives” the “power to bring disease, death, and malformation” to all of society.<sup>124</sup> Environmentalist objections to electric utility practices had roots in the mid-1960s when activists fought against unsightly power plants and transmission lines. In short, they concentrated, like much of the incipient environmentalist movement, on aesthetic qualities.<sup>125</sup> As the 1960s wore on, however, environmental activists focused more of their attention on the human and ecological health concerns associated with nuclear power—a turn not at odds with the aims of consumer activists. Consumer protection and environmental protection co-evolved in the decades following World War II and their goals, centering on quality of life issues, remained similar in the 1970s.<sup>126</sup> Indeed, by the early 1970s, many activists seemed to believe that, in the words American consumer protection crusader Ralph Nader, “a coalition of these two movements is essential if either is to succeed.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Taft and Heys, *Big Bets*, 264-266; Sam Hopkins, “Ga. Power: Less Would Do,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 8, 1975.

<sup>124</sup> R. Cronk, “New! Improved! POLLUTION!” *The Great Speckled Bird*, Sept. 11, 1972.

<sup>125</sup> Eugene Levy, “The Aesthetics of Power: High-Voltage Transmission Systems and the American Landscape,” *Technology and Culture* 38 (Jul. 1997): 575-607; also see Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119-152.

<sup>126</sup> See Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1987), 1-12.

<sup>127</sup> Nader quoted in Rudolph and Ridley, *Power Struggle*, 147.

The GPP clearly agreed with Nader’s position, and its activism plainly fit with Nader’s model that encouraged “citizens fighting utilities as nuclear proliferators [to adopt] the strategy of cutting off the flow of money to utilities for nuclear expansion—by entering rate fights and [filing law] suits.”<sup>128</sup> From the GPP’s perspective, this tactic would both help consumers keep more of their money and improve environmental conditions. In the words of GPP leader Bob Hall in 1973, “if the company pursued conservation policies instead of seeking such a high rate of growth through advertising and promotional sales, then we could decrease that growth rate considerably and not need so many new plants and so many increases on our light bills.”<sup>129</sup> At the core of the GPP’s work was thus a mission to join a new regime of consumption with environmental protection, a direct critique of the apparently successful, but now faltering, strategy that drove postwar economic expansion. The organization seemed to have had good reason to believe its version of a slow-growth, more environmental and consumer friendly New South would come to life when the PSC denied Georgia Power its \$305 million in April 1975.

Along with utilities across region, Georgia Power anticipated the rise of a consumerist-environmentalist critique. Already in 1970, the company began to greenwash its image. One advertisement claimed that “our rights-of-way often serve as nurseries for families of quail” and for other “conservation uses.”<sup>130</sup> But as groups like the GPP called power plants and fuel sources back into prominence, Georgia Power sought to extend its appeal beyond conservation issues. Coordinated by the Reddy Kilowatt Corporation, utilities in the South attempted to tackle the public relations problems associated with air and water pollution, landscape degradation, and

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Sam Hopkins, “Georgia Power Timing Attacked,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan. 23, 1973.

<sup>130</sup> Georgia Power Company advertisement, “Our Rights-of-Way Often Serve as Nurseries for Families of Quail,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Oct. 1, 1970.

natural resource depletion.<sup>131</sup> A confidential report from 1973, titled *Public Acceptance of Nuclear Power*, focused on helping utilities minimizing the damage protest groups could heap on nuclear proliferation programs. “Growing, active interest in ‘big issues,’” Reddy Kilowatt, Inc. wrote, “constitutes a major shift from the not-too-distant past, when people were satisfied with electricity per se and rarely questioned how it was produced. Today...people are concerned with the social, environmental, and economic effects of its production and consumption.” The public relations firm suggested that utilities specifically work to convince women, who, in the context of women’s liberation movement had evidently become more hostile to corporations, as to the virtues of nuclear power. The report also argued that local power companies could essentially ignore the small protest group, as a typical “minority of the population [that] will oppose any issue.”<sup>132</sup> Yet Georgia Power, one of the key contributors to the Reddy Kilowatt report, could not wave away the minority of the state’s population that lead the fight against nuclear power and helped Georgians once again have a clear view of the power plants and fuel sources underwriting their lives. The GPP’s work, at least in part, had helped stop consumers’ dollars from funding new power plants, casting serious doubt on whether nexus of power plants, consumerism, and corporate hegemony would continue to hold together.

That vision for a regenerated Dixie came back to life, though, when Oglethorpe EMC once again bailed out its old nemesis, the Georgia Power Company, in 1976. Armed with a new round of REA loans, Oglethorpe negotiated a 30 percent interest in the generating units that Robert Scherer cancelled in mid-1975: two additional units at Plant Hatch, two units at Plant Vogtle, four units at Plant Scherer, and several other units around the state. In addition,

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<sup>131</sup> See Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., “Environment: A Reddy Kilowatt Program,” n.d., (1970s?), box 24, folder 2, RkW Records.

<sup>132</sup> Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., *Public Acceptance of Nuclear Power: Analysis and Approaches* (New York: Reddy Kilowatt, Inc., 1973), 3-6, 25-26, 40-42, quote from 3, emphasis in original, box 25, folder 3, RkW Records.

Oglethorpe agreed to buy into and extend Georgia Power’s transmission network with a plan called the “Integrated Transmission System.” All told, by the end of 1976, the Oglethorpe-REA investment in Georgia Power’s generation and transmission system—a structure in which Oglethorpe had agreed to become a junior partner—totaled a stunning \$1,962,000,000, by far the largest loan in the history of the REA to that point in history.<sup>133</sup>

When Plant Hatch opened in May 1976—three years behind schedule and more than two times over budget—Robert Scherer heartily thanked the REA for the timely and generous infusion of cash that made nuclear power and a stronger economy possible.<sup>134</sup> REA administrator David Hamil also delivered an address at the dedication. He characterized nuclear power as the rural southerner’s salvation from the volatilities of coal-fired electricity in an age of economic and environmental uncertainty. In addition to saving consumers lots of money, “nuclear power will keep your air and water clean. Since there is no ‘burning’ involved with nuclear fission, this plant will not emit smoke, sulphur, or other combustible products....This is a major factor in energy conservation and energy independence.” He also framed nuclear energy as the culmination of the farmer’s long quest to be full participants in the regime of postwar American consumerism. Electricity had enabled “the resurgence of vigor in rural life. All across our land, people who were once forced to leave the land and rural communities in search of jobs—and a better life—are finding new opportunities in the countryside.” “Energy is the key to a revitalized rural America,” Hamil concluded. “There is no way to escape the fact that energy demand will continue to increase.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Oglethorpe Electric Membership Corporation, “Background Material on Oglethorpe Electric Membership Corporation,” n.d. (1976?), 2-3, box 58, folder “Oglethorpe EMC, 1974-1976,” Harrison Papers.

<sup>134</sup> Robert W. Scherer, untitled address, n.d. (May 1976?), 2, box 58, folder “Oglethorpe EMC, 1974-1976,” Harrison Papers.

<sup>135</sup> David A. Hamil, “Rural Electrification Steps into Tomorrow,” May 28, 1976, 3-5, box 58, folder “Oglethorpe EMC, Dedication Ceremony, Edwin I. Hatch Nuclear Plant, Baxley, GA, May 1976,” Harrison Papers.



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In the spring of 1982, after four years of returned stability following the Oglethorpe-REA bailout, Georgia Power opened Plant Robert W. Scherer for operations in Juliette, Georgia with one 880,000-kilowatt unit. Over the next seven years, three more units joined the first giving Plant Scherer a total capacity of 3,520,000 kilowatts, making it the largest coal-fired power plant in the Western Hemisphere. Since the mid-1980s, Plant Scherer has delivered electric power to millions of southerners, enabling them to enjoy the modern life that the dreamy American standard of living after World War II seemed to promise to all.<sup>136</sup>

As Hamil predicted, electrical demand in the South only continued to increase. By the beginning of the new millennium, Dixie had become perhaps the most energy intensive section of the nation. In 2012, the US South contained only about 33 percent of the nation's population but consumed some 42 percent of the nation's electric power. The vast majority of that consumption took place in the private home, primarily in the region's expansive suburbs. As of 2012, the average household in Georgia consumed about 1,280 kilowatts hours per month (or about 15,335 kilowatt hours annually), twice 1970 figures, and an amount equivalent to the average American home's yearly electrical consumption in 1946.<sup>137</sup>

Despite the completion of units three and four at Plant Hatch and two additional nuclear generators at Plant Vogtle, coal and coal-fired power plants remained the heart of the New South past the first decade of the twenty-first century (in 2011 coal still accounted for nearly 70 percent of electrical generation in Georgia). On a daily basis, the four units at Plant Scherer combine to

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<sup>136</sup> Georgia Power Company, "Plant Robert W. Scherer," <<http://www.georgiapower.com/about/pdf/Plant%20Scherer%20Brochure.pdf>> (accessed May 11, 2016).

<sup>137</sup> Electricity Consumption by State, 2012, <<http://www.ipsr.ku.edu/ksdata/ksah/energy/18ener7.pdf>> (accessed Jan. 17, 2013); US Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Georgia," <<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/13>> (accessed May 16, 2016); Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1946* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1947), 6; Georgia Power Company, *Annual Report, 1970* (Atlanta: Georgia Power Company, 1971), 5.

burn some 30,000 to 40,000 tons of coal (or about 1288 tons per hour, or about 11 million tons per year) brought in from the Black Thunder Coal Mine in Wyoming on thirty-three train sets that, like those destined for Plant Branch in 1965, never stop running on an 1800-mile loop. Each train set measures about one and half miles long and each carries over 10,000 tons of low-sulphur, sub-bituminous coal. With all of the coal that it burns, Plant Scherer is not only the largest electrical production station in the Western Hemisphere but is also, not surprisingly, the largest producer of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the United States at some 25 million tons per year. (The third largest producer of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the United States, Plant Bowen, at nearly 21 million tons per year, also calls Georgia home.) As a result of its coal burning process, the power station in Juliette also sends around three cubic feet, or nearly two tons, of mercury into the atmosphere every year. Untold amounts of other heavy metals—arsenic, chromium, lead, nickel, selenium, and thallium—have reportedly been found in Scherer’s 750 acre ash pond.<sup>138</sup>

Like the other coal-fired power plants in Georgia, Plant Scherer, funded by both private investments and federal dollars, stands as an imposing archive that houses loads of obscure but critical information about the newest New South.<sup>139</sup> It speaks to the powerful appeal of the highly electrified life and to the superiority of coal (though natural gas, another fossil fuel, has recently taken a large share of coal’s place in southern electrical generation). But Plant Scherer also bears witness to the success of corporate capitalism’s links to coal and consumerism, a nexus forged in the 1950s and 1960s and, despite a searching critique by consumer-environmental activists, consolidated in the 1970s. This intense and powerful entanglement—

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<sup>138</sup> John McPhee, “Coal Train—II: Going into Thunder.” *The New Yorker*, Oct. 10, 2005, 70-71; Georgia Power Company, “Plant Robert W. Scherer”; Heather Duncan, “Report Slams Plant Scherer for Ash Ponds,” *Macon Telegraph*, Jan 8, 2009. Accessed on Feb. 03, 2010 at <http://www.macon.com/2009/01/08/579650/report-slams-plant-scherer-for.html>.

<sup>139</sup> I gratefully acknowledge historian Jonathan Hill as the source of the idea that a power plant works as an “archive.”

signifying in many ways the rise of the Sunbelt and the triumph of neo-liberalism that continues into the twenty-first century—became the dominant formula not just for regenerating Dixie but for bringing energy security and economic prosperity to the entire United States. In the mid-1970s, journalist Kirkpatrick Sale described the rise of the Sunbelt as a “power shift” in which the United States saw the center of influence swing away from the Northeast and toward the “southern rim.” For Sale, this transition turned on the ideal of perpetual growth led by federally-backed investment in private enterprise. The issues raised in the foregoing pages can help us think more about the basis on which such a shift in power was based.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Kirkpatrick Sale, *Power Shift: The Rise of the Southern Rim and Its Challenge to the Eastern Establishment* (New York: Random House, 1976).

## 7 CONCLUSION

A bizarre alliance formed in 2013. In August of that year, members of the Atlanta Tea Party and the Georgia chapter of the Sierra Club joined forces, calling themselves the Green Tea Coalition. The group's mission was to challenge the Georgia Power Company's monopolistic grip over the state and its "captive ratepayers." According to Tea Party activist and Green Tea spokeswoman Debbie Dooley, Georgia Power's state-sanctioned, federally-subsidized energy cartel operated in a rigged system and imprisoned southern consumers. "A monopoly is slavery, it's servitude, it is not freedom and that's something we need to understand" she said at a September 2013 rally. In particular, the Green Tea Coalition sought to dispute the monthly fees ratepayers faced in order to cover the significant cost overruns for units three and four at Georgia Power's Plant Vogtle—the first nuclear units to be authorized in the United States since the 1970s. "We regard that as an atomic tax that we are forced to pay" by the Georgia Public Service Commission, Dooley railed. "We want a free market system and we want to phase out all subsidies. And here's an idea, let the market and consumers decide which energy they want to use. Not the government or a monopoly."<sup>1</sup>

Resistance to the "atomic tax" was not the Green Tea Coalition's sole purpose. The group also advocated for individuals' liberty to produce renewable energy by installing solar-power panels on their homes and to sell any excess electricity to neighbors or even Georgia Power. For Dooley and the Tea Party faction of the Green Tea Coalition, this was not primarily an environmental matter. Of central concern for Dooley were consumers' rights, free market capitalism, and even national security. As she told *The New Yorker* in 2015, "the regulated monopoly in Georgia had far too much power [and] *had begun* to look out for the best interests

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Shapiro, "Green Tea Coalition Rallies for More Solar, Vogtle Cost Controls," *90.1 WABE* (Atlanta, GA), Sept. 17, 2013 <<http://news.wabe.org/post/green-tea-coalition-rallies-more-solar-vogtle-cost-controls>> (accessed May 17, 2016).

of their stockholders instead of their utility customers.” What was more, “rooftop solar makes it harder for terrorists to render a devastating blow to our power grid.”<sup>2</sup> But still, in agreement with her Sierra Club cohorts, she insisted that “I care about the future of my kids and grandkids. I want them to have a clean environment. You can be conservative and still care about the environment.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite initially rejecting solar panel installation and electrical sales as a strike against its long cherished status as the state-regulated monopoly energy provider in the state, Georgia Power finally capitulated in 2015. It agreed to support a measure that would allow homeowners to install 10-kilowatt generators atop their residences, enough capacity to power about one average home but not enough to mount a significant challenge to the company’s dominance.<sup>4</sup> The utility has been far less flexible with regard to its nuclear proliferation program. In April 2016, Georgia Power filed a petition with the Public Service Commission that, if passed, would enable it add a 6- to 10- percent surcharge to its customers’ monthly bills in order to recover much of the \$9 billion already invested in the two new units at Plant Vogtle. Though the project is already more than three years behind schedule and nearly 60 percent over budget, Georgia Power executives maintain that they “are committed to managing this important project well, and every dollar we have invested has been necessary to complete the new units safely and correctly to best serve our customers.”<sup>5</sup> Sustaining Georgia Power’s efforts to complete Plant Vogtle are the Oglethorpe Power Corporation (which changed its name from Oglethorpe EMC in 1978), a coalition of municipal systems, and, not surprisingly, the federal government. According to US

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<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Kormann, “Greening the Tea Party,” *The New Yorker*, Feb. 17, 2015, emphasis added, <<http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/green-tea-party-solar>> (accessed May 17, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Shapiro, “Green Tea Coalition Aims to Bridge Partisan Divide,” *90.1 WABE* (Atlanta, GA), Aug. 7, 2013 <<http://news.wabe.org/post/green-tea-coalition-aims-bridge-partisan-divide>> (accessed May 17, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Georgia General Assembly, HB 57, Solar Power Free-Market Financing Act of 2015, Jul. 1, 2015, <<http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/en-US/display/20152016/HB/57>> (accessed May 17, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Jones, “Who will Pay for Vogtle Construction Costs?” *Augusta Chronicle*, May 1, 2016.

Department of Energy secretary Ernest Moniz, “the construction of new nuclear power facilities like this one [Vogtle]—which will provide carbon-free electricity to well over a million American energy consumers—is not only a major milestone in the Administration’s commitment to jumpstart the US nuclear power industry, it is also an important part of our all-of-the-above approach to American energy as we move toward a low-carbon energy future.” That commitment was far more than a political talking point; it came with low-cost federal loan guarantees totaling \$8.3 billion.<sup>6</sup> As the strange bedfellows in the Green Tea Coalition would certainly claim, the model of state- and federal-level protection of powerful monopoly corporations following the “grow-and-build” maxim still reigns in Georgia, largely crowding out democratic governance over energy choices as well as the possibility of a cleaner, more sustainable energy future.

Though emanating from erstwhile political enemies who saw their movement as a new departure, the Green Tea Coalition’s critique was not altogether novel. It revived a tradition of protest that seemed to have finally collapsed in the 1970s and rehashed many of the issues raised in this dissertation. From the turn of the twentieth century, as the foregoing pages demonstrate, ordinary electrical consumers in the South often voiced their displeasure (and sometimes approval) at the fuel sources and corporate organizations behind the energy that powered everyday life. Indeed, it has been a central goal of this study to consider both the production side and myriad cultural effects of electric power in an examination of the rise of utility the industry in the South across a century. Few of the scholars have who have studied electrification have joined production together with use, and fewer still have offered this sort of analysis of the

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<sup>6</sup> US Department of Energy, “Sec. Moniz to Georgia, Energy Department Scheduled to Close on Loan Guarantees to Construct New Nuclear Power Plant Reactors,” *Energy.gov*, Feb. 19, 2014 <<http://energy.gov/articles/sec-moniz-georgia-energy-department-scheduled-close-loan-guarantees-construct-new-nuclear>> (accessed May 17, 2016); also see US Department of Energy, “Vogtle,” Loan Programs Office, n.d., *Energy.gov* <<http://energy.gov/lpo/vogtle>> (accessed May 17, 2016).

South's electrification.<sup>7</sup> We gain a fuller understanding of the electric business not only when we consider the interactions between corporate elites and average consumers, but when we think through the ways that relationship has operated within and affected the broader contexts of political, environmental, and cultural change.

Perhaps more prominent than any other concept, a key theme in this study is that ordinary people mattered to southern energy history. The point is not to idealize “The People” as a pure and unified force fighting the good fight. Many southerners disagreed with and acted violently against one another. White southerners often characterized their anti-monopoly crusades as means, at least in part, to protect or recover a chimerical sense of racial supremacy and their movements and interests rarely included African Americans. Moreover, average people in the South almost universally shared with corporate leaders the arrogant belief that humans enjoy the unlimited right to manipulate and conquer nature for broad social improvement. This is not to cast corporations as “evil.” Hubristic? Perhaps. Driven by the self-interest of their managers? Certainly. Much like the citizens' groups with whom they did battle and to whom they sold electricity, corporations and their leaders, to paraphrase Karl Marx, operated within and tried to alter historical contexts not wholly of their own making.

In highlighting the place and influence—the agency—of the people in the creation of what became an indispensable industry, the point is to show that the first century of the utility business's career was marked by a long chain of struggles on the one hand to defend the concept

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<sup>7</sup> See Thomas P. Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); and David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990). Recent historical works have begun to consider both the corporations that generated and the consumers who used electric power. See Paul W. Hirt, *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s-1970s* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2012); Christopher F. Jones, *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); and Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). The one study of which I am aware that attempts to link electrical production and use in the South is Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped A Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

of electricity as a commodity that should be produced, shipped, and distributed by private entities, and, on the other hand, to define electric power as a public service. Against such foes as municipal ownership activists, the Tallulah Falls Conservation Association, the Municipal League of Georgia, the Georgia Electric Membership Corporation, and the Georgia Power Project, the Georgia Power Company and its predecessors faced near constant conflict. Though the ordinary southerners who resisted monopoly control over electricity rarely achieved their stated ends, all of these groups argued the public should exercise at least some control over the provision of electric energy and nearly all of them believed that electric power should be a social benefit available to all citizens. As a result of everyday people's activities, the Georgia Power Company, no less than its counterparts across the nation, consistently sought shelter under the increasingly large and protective umbrella of governmental power—whether local, state, or federal—even as it offered howling protests against the state's interference in its affairs.

As noted throughout much of this study, both ordinary southerners and corporate leaders were keenly interested in the natural resources that underwrote electric power. Their thoughts and actions thus open questions as to the environmental matters associated with southern electrification. Of course, this dissertation cannot pretend to speak to all of these issues. The specific impacts of hydroelectric dams, coal-fired plants, nuclear generation, and transmission and distribution systems on southern ecologies, air and water quality, and human health, for example, are left for further research to explore. "Regenerating Dixie" does, however, address one of the key elements of what historian Donald Worster calls "doing environmental history." It investigates the ways competing interests in the South imagined their relationships to the natural world as well as how those perceptions inspired action on (or against, as it was sometimes cast)



the material world.<sup>8</sup> In addition, my work joins a burgeoning historical literature that insists on the primacy of corporations in rearranging flows of natural resources. With sources of capital and technical expertise from across the globe, and at times with the critical aid of the government, southern utilities such as Georgia Power built production infrastructures far from sites of consumption and constructed energy transportation networks—exemplified by the wires from Tallulah Falls and the coal trains to Plant Branch—that made the abundance of the hinterland available to populations in dense urban cores and, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, suburban settlements.<sup>9</sup> In short, energy corporations acted as the primary agents of southern environmental change from the late-nineteenth century to the late-twentieth century.

The project of electrification, which was fundamentally a project that included the inputs of ordinary folks and brought remarkable environmental changes, also made dramatic impacts on everyday life in the South. What first appeared in the late 1870s as a mystical energy source behind awe-inspiring lighting spectacles on city streets and in circus acts and regional expositions quickly—by the 1890s—became the driving force behind public transportation. Electric streetcars helped rearrange city life, making suburban living available to a relative few wealthy southerners. And though it appeared in few homes and a negligible number of farms by the early 1910s, many southerners saw electricity as a key requirement for industrial production and a modern domestic life in both urban and rural areas by the end of the First World War. Although everyday people fought to gain access to affordable electrical abundance across much of the middle of the twentieth century, notions of electrical consumption as the basis of full

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Worster, “Doing Environmental History,” in Donald Worster, ed., *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 289-308.

<sup>9</sup> See Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: The Making of Coca-Cola Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015). Also see Jones, *Routes of Power*; and Needham, *Power Lines*.

membership in a prosperous United States had won out by the late 1950s and 1960s. In many ways, the triumph of consumerism reflected the efforts of utilities to launch full-on assaults on the public's consciousness through advertisements, sales campaigns, and public relations. But average people consistently displayed a desire for the benefits of electric power—often on their own terms—and since the 1970s, not only have central air conditioning and a range of other electric appliances in the home become *de rigueur*, but the domestic realm has overtaken the industrial sector as the most voracious consumer of electric power in the South.

Significant as electricity was to changing the practices of everyday life, it must be acknowledged at the same time that southern culture had deep impacts on electrification's path. As this study demonstrates, the rise of electricity did not affect matters such as race and class (often in environmental and energy history literature assumed to be stable categories) only in the final analysis; they worked as front-end inputs that in many ways guided both producers' and consumers' thoughts as to electricity's possibilities and helped (re)make race and class. Early-twentieth-century municipal ownership activists' rhetoric, and violent action, on the intertwined issues of race and class played a key role in the rise of state-level regulation and informed the post-World War I public power movement in Georgia as well. Power companies, too, plugged their attempts to build dams into ideas of race, class, and the southern past in order to provide palatable ideological justifications for their massive alterations of waterscapes and growing corporate monopolies. Georgia Power's leaders furthermore called on the twin fears of race and socialism to resist federal incursions into the South in the New Deal years and in large measure extended those discourses into the post-World War II years, helping to forge the ultimately victorious model that rested on coal, consumerism, and corporate monopoly capitalism.

The social, political, environmental, and cultural aspects of electrification provide a productive way not only to examine the rise of the electric utility industry but to rethink what might be called the long New South Era. Certainly many things changed dramatically from the 1870s to the 1970s, but many of the central questions of Henry Grady's and Henry Atkinson's era remained core issues in Jimmy Carter's and Robert Scherer's heyday—and perhaps even in Debbie Dooley's time. How would elites bent on creating an modern, urban-industrial South relate and react to ordinary southerners who often had strikingly different ideas about Dixie's future? How would the circulation of global and national-level capital and social trends operate in the South? What role would corporations and governments—as well as common people—play in attempting to make a New South? How would southerners go about extracting and distributing the region's wealth of natural resources? How would African Americans fit into a rapidly changing South? What would be the relationship of urban-industrial modernization to the benighted farm? The foregoing discussion of the electric industry's intimate involvement in the ongoing efforts to regenerate Dixie offer useful lessons in our attempts to answer these questions.

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