



Carbon Nation: Fossil Fuels in the Making of American Culture (Culture America (Hardcover))

Bob Johnson

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Fossil fuels don't simply impact our ability to commute to and from work.

They condition our sensory lives, our erotic experiences, and our aesthetics; they structure what we assume to be normal and healthy; and they prop up a distinctly modern bargain with nature that allows populations and economies to grow wildly beyond the older and more clearly understood limits of the organic economy.

Carbon Nation ranges across film and literary studies, ecology, politics, journalism, and art history to chart the course by which prehistoric carbon calories entered into the American economy and body. It reveals how fossil fuels remade our ways of being, knowing, and sensing in the world while examining how different classes, races, sexes, and conditions learned to embrace and navigate the material manifestations and cultural potential of these new prehistoric carbons.

The ecological roots of modern America are introduced in the first half of the book where the author shows how fossil fuels revolutionized the nation's material wealth and carrying capacity. The book then demonstrates how this eager embrace of fossil fuels went hand in hand with both a deliberate and an unconscious suppression of that dependency across social, spatial, symbolic, and psychic domains. In the works of Eugene O'Neill, Upton Sinclair, Sherwood Anderson, and Stephen Crane, the author reveals how Americans' material dependencies on prehistoric carbon were systematically buried within modernist narratives of progress, consumption, and unbridled growth; while in films like Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* and George Stevens's *Giant* he uncovers cinematic expressions of our own deep-seated anxieties about living in a dizzying new world wrought by fossil fuels.

Any discussion of fossil fuels must go beyond energy policy and technology. In *Carbon Nation*, Bob Johnson reminds us that what we take to be natural in the modern world is, in fact, historical, and that our history and culture arise from this relatively recent embrace of the coal mine, the stoke hole, and the oil derrick.

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