

[PDF] Empires Of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, And The Race To Electrify The World

Jill Jonnes - pdf download free book



Books Details:

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Description:

Jill Jonnes's compelling *Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World* offers a multi-sided tale of America's turn-of-the-20th-century quest for cheap, reliable

electrical power. Along the way, the book profiles key personalities in both the science and industry of electrification and dramatizes the transformation of American society that accompanied the technological revolution. As her sub-title suggests, Jonnes's focus is on the three great personalities behind the building of the electricity industry. But, as she makes clear, the electrification of America was much more than a pathbreaking scientific quest. The genius of such poet-scientists as Nikola Tesla depended on the more finely tuned business skills of George Westinghouse and the towering capital of J.P. Morgan to achieve actualization. And even Thomas Edison and Westinghouse--innovative industrial combatants in the war between AC and DC current--were victims of the far more powerful and conservative financial forces of Wall Street. Indeed, for Jonnes, the story of electricity is as much about the legions of patent attorneys and bankers who controlled the flow of industry as it is about the circulation of current. Her sophisticated portrait of Gilded Age science, business, and society brings new light to the forces that underlie technological revolutions. As she reveals, it is not so much the great public men of science who directed the destiny of America's eventual empire of light; rather, the path was solidified by those men behind the scenes who were wise enough (and perhaps ruthless enough) to impose their legal, financial, and political dominance onto the scientific innovation--a valuable message for all eras. --*Patrick O'Kelley* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly Jonnes, a historian at Johns Hopkins (*We're Still Here; Hep-Cats, Narcs and Pipe Dreams*), details the rise and fall of the three visionaries who harnessed electricity, while also offering a critique of corporate greed. Her tale emphasizes the "War of the Electric Currents," in which Thomas Edison sought to defend the primacy of his direct current electrical system against George Westinghouse's higher-voltage and more broadly applicable alternating current system. Nikola Tesla, the somewhat kooky Serbian genius (and former Edison man), joined the fray on Westinghouse's side with his AC induction motor. Jonnes serves up plenty of color in an engaging and relaxed style, detailing how Edison capitalized on the "deaths by wire," or accidental electrocutions, from the AC system, sensationalized in the newspapers of the time. As she shows, Edison's "holy war" led to Westinghouse's AC being used in the first prison execution by electric chair, in 1890-which proved considerably more grisly and less humane than originally billed. For Jonnes, this history culminates neatly in a rather trite moral lesson: that corporate greed is bad. She contrasts it with the three public-minded men sketched here, who embody what Jonnes believes capitalism ought to be. Edison wanted only "the perfect workshop"; Westinghouse was interested "in helping the world" and giving his workers disability benefits; Tesla wanted to "liberate the world from drudgery." Jonnes's titans loom as monumentally as the allegorical Good Capitalists in an Ayn Rand melodrama. For those who view history as less tidy, this may strain the patience at times. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW.

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