

9-1-2015

## Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region

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### Custom Citation

Robert Montgomery, Book Note, Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region, 19 U. Denv. Water L. Rev. 121 (2015).

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## BOOK NOTE

**Christopher J. Manganiello, *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC (2015); 204 pp.; ISBN 978-1-4696-2005-3.**

Christopher J. Manganiello is an environmental historian and the Director of Policy at the Georgia River Network. Manganiello studies the development of water resources in the American South and its social and environmental consequences. In *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region*, Manganiello describes the competition between private and public actors to develop cheap energy, build a connected infrastructure, and produce social outcomes. The book refers to two regions: the New South, which includes the old Confederate states after the Civil War; and the Sun Belt, encompassing the southern United States south of the thirty-sixth parallel. Manganiello astutely observes how the economics and politics of water resources and energy development in the New South and the Sun Belt contributed to social norms and shaped public policy.

In chapter one, “Lowell of the South,” Manganiello describes the geographic, ecological, and economic conditions in the southern United States before, and leading up to, the Civil War. He follows John Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club, on Muir’s trip through the South immediately following the Civil War. On Muir’s travels down the Chattahoochee River, he documented the striking beauty of the countryside, but also described an uncivilized rural region where former slaves and plantation owners reminded him that the Civil War had only just ended. Manganiello argues that Muir only observed part of the story. In fact, since the 1700s, residents of the South knew the region’s energy potential, even in the absence of coal and oil. The Savannah River watershed in Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina contains fast rivers flowing from the highlands in the Appalachian Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, local boosters turned water resources into an impressive renewable energy system. Cities like Augusta, Georgia resembled New England mill towns, and by the late 1800s, developers had built a sophisticated transnational energy system that excelled in producing hydroelectric energy. Developers also improved production techniques and became capable of generating and delivering energy to many agricultural and industrial communities.

In chapter two, “Dam Crazy for White Coal in the New South,” Manganiello emphasizes the many successes, but also limitations, of private corporations in energy development in the New South. He explains how those limitations eventually led to conflicts between corporations and government actors.

Coal and oil were scarce in the New South, and freight costs and labor uncertainty made those forms of energy more expensive. In response to the geographic and economic reality, developers took advantage of abundant and renewable water resources to bring cheaper hydroelectric power to the region. The largest companies built dams and developed a massive power grid connecting several urban centers and agricultural communities. Development of cheap energy attracted northern businesses to the region and provided cities like Atlanta the power to thrive. However, even though private industry succeeded in developing this grid, the region's geology made expansion and maintenance more expensive than anyone had anticipated. Companies had no choice but to build on porous limestone. Dams tended to sink and shift on the soft limestone, contributing to leaks that required frequent and expensive repairs. As a result, companies incurred higher expenses in order to ensure the stability of their structures, and increasing infrastructure costs limited the services they could provide to agricultural communities.

Although water resources were apparently abundant in the New South, the region showed it was still susceptible to drought when low rainfall contributed to severe power shortages in the summer of 1925. Corporations learned to transfer energy between regions, but the shortages fostered long term supply concerns. The 1925 drought taught people that the interconnected power grid was beneficial, but companies reverted to coal to ensure energy supply in future droughts. Intrigued by cheap renewable energy, the Tennessee Valley Authority ("TVA") became determined to ensure that hydroelectric power remained a cornerstone in the region. Additionally, progressives and liberals politicized hydroelectric energy because they were weary of monopolization, unregulated actors, and concerned for rural communities. They sought to displace some of the private energy production to ensure that the region would continue to use hydroelectric energy.

The author begins chapter three, "New Deal Big Dam Consensus," by telling the story of Hamburg, South Carolina, a center for African American commerce in the New South. Corporations neglected to build levees in Hamburg, and consequently, floods all but eliminated the city in 1929. The tragedy highlighted social inequalities and selective development that galvanized opposition to private corporations. Next, leading up to and during the Great Depression, energy companies were reluctant to expand to rural and agricultural areas. Their reluctance provided additional momentum to the federal government's vision for energy development. In 1933, Congress authorized the TVA to build twelve major dam facilities in twelve years with the goal of bringing cheap electricity to farmlands. Meanwhile, utility executives opposed the new government projects because they threatened corporate profits, but Southern Democrats rallied behind the TVA because energy companies would not electrify rural communities. Conversely, conservatives and many white Democrats grew skeptical of Roosevelt's New Deal big dam projects. They worried the TVA would target towns like Hamburg, and viewed such projects as a threat to the social and economic order in the region.

Chapter four, "A Keystone Dam and Georgia's New Ocean," chronicles the development of the Clarks Hill dam on the Savannah River. The Savannah River establishes part of the Georgia and South Carolina border, and the dam would become the largest hydroelectric project south of Tennessee and east of

the Mississippi River. Private corporations, state governments, and the federal government disputed how to develop the project, and who would control the final product. These disagreements embodied the economic and social tensions in the region. The Army Corps of Engineers (the "Corps") had gained increasing support throughout the 1930s by emphasizing the need to provide cheap hydroelectric energy to both urban centers and agricultural communities. With this growing support, the Corps displaced private corporations as the largest developer of hydroelectric power in the New South by the 1940s. Consequently, the Corps won the job at Clarks Hill. Its goal there was to render the Savannah River navigable year round, provide a stable energy supply, and pacify flooding in the Savannah River watershed.

The eventual reservoir at Clarks Hill would cover seventy-one thousand acres and create twelve hundred miles of shoreline, but it would also displace at least two hundred area residents. The Corps also intended Clarks Hill to yield recreation areas for residents of the region; however, the prospect of recreation created additional tension over whether to segregate those areas. Opponents of Clarks Hill claimed the project was socialist in nature, and was government intrusion on private property. Southern Democrats like Senator Strom Thurmond favored the project, but not at the expense of white supremacy and segregation in the South. Ultimately, Clarks Hill began producing energy in 1953, but rivals lobbied hard enough that many of the planned recreation areas never manifested. Eventually consensus developed that big dam developments were valuable, but race, class, recreation, and inclusiveness became themes in negotiations for other dam projects across the region.

In Chapter five, "Big Dam Backlash Rising in the Sun Belt," Manganiello describes the breakdown of the New Deal big dam consensus. Georgia experienced massive water shortages in the 1950s caused by severe drought. In response, Georgia enacted plans to balance water and energy supply. However, despite the growing skepticism of New Deal big dam developments, the federal government approved and funded another massive project called the Hartwell dam. The federal government argued that the energy it would produce was necessary for national security during the Cold War. Although the federal government completed Hartwell, major energy companies like Duke Energy, private property holders (including Clemson College), and states' rights advocates drew concessions from the federal government. For example, the original plan at Hartwell would not have afforded many towns or private citizens' water rights in the new reservoir. The federal government agreed to expand access to Hartwell when Georgia politicians threatened to enact new water laws that would allow for more liberal water use. Georgia received funding to establish programs that helped build irrigation lines and ponds for farmers. Eventually, several communities gained water rights at Hartwell, the Corps built levees for Clemson and other towns, and the federal government paid millions to private property holders who lost land due to the new reservoir.

In chapter six, "Countryside Conservatism and Conservation," the author relates how the Corps sought to develop the final undammed stretch of the Savannah River at Trotter Shoals. Rather than promote the traditional trio of benefits—hydroelectric power, navigation, and flood control—the Corps promoted the project as an energy producer and recreation area. Corporations,

once again, opposed the project. More notably, however, countryside conservationists concerned with preserving water supply, and environmentalists promoting water quality added their unique voices to the opposition. This movement spawned the enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 that stalled Trotter Shoals and other projects. The projects stalled because the new law required developers to perform environmental impact reports before proceeding. Additionally, Trotter Shoals moved forward in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, prompting activists to insist on desegregating all recreation areas. Southern Democrats like Thurmond typically supported large dams, but they refused to support projects if it meant supporting recreation and civil rights. They used the opportunity to change political parties and voice opposition.

The final chapter, "Taken and Delivered: The Chattooga River," chronicles a power struggle between local citizens and the federal government over the regulation of free flowing rivers. Unlike the dam projects, the conflict did not include debate over whether to develop a river, but rather who should manage the river and how. Congress passed The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 in response to a national movement against dam construction. Activists insisted that free flowing rivers were good for the environment. The Chattooga River was the last undammed river in the Savannah River watershed, and it was a perfect candidate for protection under the new law. The movie *Deliverance* made the Chattooga River famous. After the movie came out, recreation traffic on the Chattooga surged, along with accidents and casualties. The federal government deployed the National Forest Service to create a national recreation center in which people needed permits to ride the river. The Forest Service went so far as buying roads from local governments and then closing them to reduce traffic in the area. Locals had known the area as a quiet place of enjoyment before *Deliverance* made it famous, and the federal government exacerbated tensions by excluding locals from the planning process. When the government condemned land, cut down trees, closed roads, and impeded access to the river, local protesters set several forest fires over a period of years. The author articulates that, ultimately, the "process maintained a wild and free-flowing river, but some local users lost a perceived freedom to access the river."

In conclusion, *Southern Water, Southern Power* does not necessarily provide helpful tools for law practitioners, but the author provides a compelling narrative on the development of public policy and social dynamics. Readers interested in history and the relationship between the public and private sector in particular will enjoy Manganiello's writing. The author utilizes water rights, energy development, and politics to provide a unique perspective of the Reconstruction era after the Civil War, the Great Depression, the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights movement, and the genesis of environmentalism in the 1970s. The book educates readers on the relationships and interplay between private citizens and institutions, as well as all levels of government. Energy development and water resources are paramount to a successful society, and Manganiello aids his readers in synthesizing how all stakeholders play a role in the outcome of producing and distributing those resources.

*Robert Montgomery*