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Research Report
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Generating a New South: Hydroelectricity and the Making of Modern Georgia, 1900-1930

My dissertation explores the centrality of energy development to the processes through which the long-impooverished, supposedly backward US South became the basis of the model for late-twentieth-century American economic growth: the Sunbelt—the most energy intensive, fossil-fuel dependent section of the United States. Before it depended on fossil fuels, however, much of the South relied heavily on hydroelectricity to power its factories, streetcars, streetlights, and, eventually, homes and farms. Yet, waterpower did not simply descend on Dixie as a technological miracle that drew universal praise as a tool that would unproblematically pave the way toward progress. Utilities had to invest great amounts of effort in fitting hydroelectricity into southern social structures. The ever increasing use of waterpower, they claimed, would scrub clean the city, decentralize industry, ease white laborers' burdens, subordinate African Americans to the margins, and purify politics.

With the generous support of the History Project and the Institute for New Economic Thinking, I conducted research for my dissertation in New York, New York in the spring of 2013 and in Chapel Hill and Durham, North Carolina in the fall of 2013. In New York, I consulted the records of the League for Industrial Democracy at New York University's Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. In Chapel Hill, I reviewed several collections related to southern electrification at the University of North Carolina's Southern Historical Collection. While in Durham, North Carolina, I read the papers of North Carolina Senator Josiah Bailey in the Rubenstein Library at Duke University.

For my research trips to both New York and North Carolina, my goals were to further investigate issues of race and class as they related to early efforts to construct hydroelectric systems in the South so that I will be better able to contextualize Georgia experiences with electrification within the larger southern and national story of electrification. More particularly, my aim for the records of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) was to gain a deeper understanding of southern workers' perspectives on and hopes for electrification. The records the Committee on Coal and Giant Power, an interest group working under the larger LID umbrella,

primarily reflected the process behind the publication of a 1928 book titled *Power Control*. Written by journalist and author HS Rauschenbush, the book argued that the private utilities' practices in the late-1910s and 1920s focused on the consolidation of their control over coal supplies and the grid. *Power Control* also detailed the power companies' efforts to defeat publically owned electric power systems, to deny workers and farmers adequate or affordable electric power, to use meager domestic electrical service revenues to subsidize industrial power supplies, and to obscure these practices with sophisticated propaganda campaigns.

Even more germane to my study were LID holdings that discussed labor and farming organizations' desires, beginning in the early 1920s, to establish riverine energy as the basis for public power networks that would equitably furnish all American homes and farms with reliable electric service. LID leaders and members showed strong support for the creation of the paragon of public power in the United States, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). After the establishment of the TVA in 1933, the LID worked closely with TVA leadership well into the 1950s to attempt to expand the authority's operations and to establish similar valley authorities elsewhere in the United States. Somewhat surprisingly—especially considering the organization's socialist orientation—the LID collection contained very little information on racial issues as related to electrification. The LID documents related to the TVA did, however, push me to consider an expanded chronology—well beyond the beginning of the New Deal—for class-based struggles over electric power in the US South.

The papers of George Baldwin, housed at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, illuminated the thinking and business strategies of a Stone and Webster executive and leading developer of electric networks in the early-twentieth-century South. Documents related to Baldwin's management of utilities in Georgia, Florida, and Texas spoke to a corporate perspective on questions surrounding the expansion of hydroelectric facilities and on the electric industry's attempts to deal with segregation and labor. Correspondence among civic leaders, law makers, and businesspeople in cities such as Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia and Jacksonville and Pensacola, Florida demonstrate that as a corporate leader, Baldwin was most interested in keeping revenues flowing for his companies. For Baldwin and the many other electric company executives with whom he corresponded, racial issues—specifically those surrounding the early-twentieth-century proliferation of municipal ordinances mandating racial segregation on streetcars and the resultant African American boycotts—interrupted normal business, thinned out

the bottom line, and thus for him served primarily as annoyances. Yet at the same time, Baldwin and other utility managers responded to calls for segregated streetcars in ways that seemed to suit the desires of the majority of white southerners. He took great care to negotiate settlements that kept money flowing and at the same time fell in line with local desires concerning the separation of the African American and white southerners.

At the University of North Carolina, I also consulted the Charles Waddell papers. Waddell was an engineer who advised southern power companies in the World War I years that more hydroelectric development would be better not only for national security and defense production but for the utilities' business plans. I reviewed the John C. Campbell and Olive D. Campbell Papers at UNC as well. The Campbell papers contained dozens of documents on the establishment of the Electric Home and Farm Authority, a TVA sub-agency devoted to extending the benefits of electricity and appliance to even the most impoverished residents of the Tennessee River Valley.

At Duke University, the papers of Senator Josiah Bailey revealed less about a politician who was long friendly with private utilities and more about the business-political groups behind opposition to the Tennessee Valley Authority. In Bailey's papers, I expected to find countless documents containing the thoughts and words of an early- to mid-twentieth-century southern politician who railed against (what many white southerners believed were) the interrelated scourges of racial mixing, labor unionizing, and the expansion of publically owned power systems. What I found much more of, and much more useful for my project, was a broad range of 1930s correspondence, literature, and pamphlets from coal-mining industry associations. Groups such as the National Coal Association (NCA) argued that the TVA's focus on the development of hydroelectric power would do irreparable harm to one of the fundamental sources of energy production and economic growth in the South and in the nation. Castigating the TVA as a malignant bureaucracy modeled on Soviet-style rural electrification programs, the NCA and other organizations claimed that the TVA would cost jobs, harm the economy, and lead the way to the nationalization of the entire American electric system. This discovery was significant as it reveals the early formation of a coal industry-electric utility coalition that worked successfully in the years after World War II to thwart the expansion of public power in the US South.

The research I conducted on these trips, which was made possible by the generous support of the History Project and the Institute for New Economic thinking, has provided me with a broad and firm grounding on which to base much of my dissertation. My hope is that this work will help us gain a deeper understanding of the southern processes of hydroelectric development and the centrality of energy development to larger economic development models.