

and periodicals, as well as memoirs and testimonials, to support his claims. In his conclusion, Kurt maintains that the emergence of a thriving Turkish-Muslim bourgeoisie in Aintab was predicated on the dispossession of Armenian property. This argument is consistent with the systematic positive association between historical Armenian presence and local economic development in Turkey (Cemal Eren Arbatlı and Gunes Gokmen, “Human Capital Transfers and Sub-national Development: Armenian and Greek Legacy in Post-expulsion Turkey,” *Journal of Economic Growth* [2022]).

Kurt deserves praise for distilling a wide range of hitherto untapped historical sources into a coherent and compelling narrative of the local dynamics in Aintab. I wholeheartedly recommend this book not only to scholars of the Armenian genocide but also to anyone interested in regional perspectives on state-sponsored mass violence episodes in history.

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**Powering American Farms: The Overlooked Origins of Rural Electrification.** *By Richard F. Hirsh.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022. 400 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Hardcover, \$60.00. ISBN: 978-1-42144-362-1.

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Reviewed by Leah S. Glaser

Scholarly attention to electrical distribution does not match the pervasiveness of electricity in our economy and culture. Historical literature on rural electrification is likewise sparse in light of its significance in exacerbating and alleviating America’s historic rural-urban divide. A welcome addition is *Powering American Farms*, in which historian Richard F. Hirsh challenges the popular—and, he argues, overly romantic—narrative that through the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the federal government was solely responsible for electrifying the nation’s farms because private utilities were doing nothing. Rather, Hirsch argues that the government merely exploited the groundwork laid by private utilities and

land grant universities with its vast financial resources and loan programs. With this important study, Hirsh broadens the timeline and the key historical actors involved in rural electrification, adding much-needed context, continuity, and nuance.

Few historians have delved as thoroughly into private efforts to deliver power to the farms on a national scale or reached back into the nineteenth century to document rural interest in electricity. Hirsh follows historian Thomas Hughes's "sociotechnical" system-building model from the classic *Networks of Power* (1983) to explore the considerable contribution of private utilities to providing farms with electrical power. Like Hughes, Hirsh places electrical technology in the context of politics, commerce, and society, largely filtered through strong archival sources: corporate archives of utilities, agricultural newsletters, and trade journals, not just TVA and REA literature. Hirsh impressively documents not only that utilities, and other stakeholders, engaged rural markets within the norms of the 1920s laissez-faire economy but also that pricey central-station electricity was not the only option for farmers to mechanize.

Hirsh constructs his argument in three parts: an overview of the historical context, a discussion of stakeholders who were working on electrifying farms before the government took over rural electrification, and a revised interpretation of the New Deal's REA. The first part provides context with a historiographical review of sources that propagated the romantic narrative of the REA as savior and an examination of why businesses in the free-market/laissez-faire economy did not see rural electrification as an economically savvy option. Chapter 3, which examines business attitudes toward farmers in the 1920s, is interesting for demonstrating how the rural-urban divide continued to play out even as the power of Populism waned. The federal government continued to adhere to the idea of the noble yeoman farmer as the cornerstone of American equality, while the corporations of capitalism viewed the city as America's future. Chapter 4 allows farmers agency in demanding electricity and recognizes the progressive desires of many farmers.

In Part II ("Stakeholders"), Hirsch shows how much the industry, partners, and farmers themselves created momentum for New Deal programs by contributing to the rural electrification process. Utility managers and agricultural engineers at land grant universities researched and educated people about the potential of an electrified farm. They analyzed the benefits of electricity to farming practice to build electrical load, and state regulatory commissions cooperated to make power affordable. The final part of the book revises the popular history of the REA that, according to Hirsh, takes all the credit for rural electrification. Rural advocates had made headway in the 1920s, Hirsh argues, but only the public

desperation of the Great Depression allowed the government to co-opt the movement and the narrative. “Government agencies took advantage of special conditions that permitted them to pursue a different objective than utilities” and to privilege social goals over economic ones (p. 226). The last chapter explores the way that utilities and the REA competed, thus benefiting customers.

Hirsch articulates a larger purpose for the study, noting the danger of uncontextualized, popular histories that read as “presentist.” Context provides a more nuanced narrative that, in this case, undermines the government as savior. Hirsh criticizes historians for ignoring the efforts of utility managers, farmers, and agricultural engineers without identifying them. The state of the historical literature, however, is not quite as dire as he implies. A number of works over the last thirty years have addressed rural electrification, including my own, Andrew Needham’s *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (2015), Paul Hirt’s *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s–1970s* (2012), and Casey Cater’s *Regenerating Dixie: Electric Energy and the Modern South* (2019). Robert Righter (*Wind Energy in America: A History* [1996]) detailed farmers’ use of wind power prior to the 1930s. Closer reading of those works would have actually strengthened Hirsch’s arguments that rural electrification went beyond the REA. Furthermore, Hirsh frames rural electrification almost exclusively around farmers, but those living in company towns and on Indian reservations also demanded central-station/high-line electrical power, and they did not rely on the REA for it.

While the book opens with an anecdote about an individual, Hirsh’s analysis of electrification based primarily on the sociotechnical system model pays less attention to the grassroots perspective. It seems like an oversight only because part of the reason that the “REA as savior” narrative has been so compelling is that it invokes the voices of farmers who benefited from government intervention. The voices of farmers served by private utilities could have helped to combat that narrative. Hirsch cites works that explore consumption, such as those by David Nye and Robert Kline, which support the idea that rural customers were active in determining how electricity would benefit their lives and livelihoods. Still, the REA actively marketed and promoted electrical use through print media and in cooperation with Agricultural Experiment Stations and 4-H clubs. Lastly, since this study focuses on the prequel to the New Deal programs, it implies that utilities ceded the market; however, private utilities used red-baiting tactics to attack and discredit the REA and its cooperatives during the Cold War era.

*Powering American Farms* compellingly argues that the efforts of private industry and universities delivered electricity to more of rural

America than they have received credit for. It provides an important economic and political perspective on the rural electrification process. While it alone may not disrupt the popular narrative, this book has great value in creating a longer, contextual, and therefore more nuanced narrative around the public *and* private efforts that electrified rural America.

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Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas. *By Amy Offner*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. xv + 381 pp. Figures, notes, index. Cloth, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-19093-8.

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#### Reviewed by Marcelo Bucheli

What role should the government play in the economy for a society to achieve prosperity? This question returned to the political debate in the early twenty-first century after years of neglect during the brief period between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. During the Cold War period, however, this question was at the center of deliberations among economists, sociologists, and policymakers when economic development was considered to be a way for the Western world to stop the spread of Communism. Among the different ideas under discussion, one that eventually became dominant was the one holding that governments could best promote economic development by decentralizing the decision-making process at the regional and community levels while involving the private sector in development programs. For this to succeed, the decision regarding which economic development projects to prioritize should be guided by technical analyses conducted by individuals trained in economics. In the long term, those defending this model argued, the combination of these factors would inevitably lead to a steady growth in output, bringing a general prosperity that would reduce the allure of Communism.

In the impressively researched book *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in*