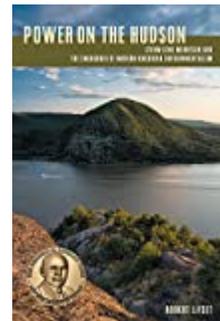


Robert D. Lifset. *Power on the Hudson: Storm King Mountain and the Emergence of Modern American Environmentalism.* History of the Urban Environment Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014. 328 pp. \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-6305-9.



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In 1962, the New York utility company Consolidated Edison (Con Ed) declared its intentions to build a hydroelectric plant on the Hudson River's west bank, fifty miles north of New York City. The installation, which would have been located at the base of Storm King Mountain, alarmed local residents who saw the plan as a monstrous technological intrusion into a bucolic natural landscape (p. xi). Robert D. Lifset's book *Power on the Hudson* recounts the struggles over the Storm King facility, showing how the strategies employed by American environmentalism changed in the 1960s. Using periodicals, legal documents, and interviews, Lifset explores the conflict between environmental protection and energy production in the 1960s and 1970s. His main arguments—that environmental activists' strategy in the Storm King Mountain case shifted from emphasizing aesthetic concerns to foregrounding ecological criticisms, and that this shift allowed them to be included in the regulatory process—enhance our understanding of American environmentalism in the crucial years of the 1960s and 1970s. Until the 1960s, US environmental groups had largely concentrated on preserving the favorable aesthetic qualities of rivers, mountains, and other wilderness land and keeping them free from development, not on curtailing the effects of industrial production on individ-

ual plant and animal species. Environmental protection in this context was a rather top-down affair, carried out by such agencies as the US Forest Service. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other pieces of legislation placed constraints on what businesses could do to the environment based on their effect on individual ecosystems and, equally as important, allowed citizen groups to participate directly in regulatory efforts by taking potential violators to court. Lifset's book explores one case study in which environmental activists became involved in the regulatory process several years before these particular pieces of legislation became law.

The first five chapters of Lifset's book examine the emergence of and activities undertaken by Scenic Hudson, an advocacy group organized to stop the proposed Storm King Mountain plant that was composed of a diverse cross-section of the region's environmental community (p. 37). According to Lifset, Scenic Hudson was initially steamrolled in licensing hearings for the plant (p. 66), mainly because it had appealed to aesthetic issues, which were of little concern to the Federal Power Commission (FPC). Subsequent attempts to take opposition before the legal system also met little success. As Lifset notes, environmental groups had generally lacked

standing in federal courts, as their arguments about natural beauty and splendor did not demonstrate a compelling direct interest in the economic consequences of a proposed project. Scenic Hudson's attempts to stop the plant in 1963 and 1964 were therefore ineffective, as they were largely ignored by the judiciary.

The group was more successful, Lifset argues, when it adopted an ecological basis for its criticisms, pointing to the effect that the plant would have on the fish populations, plant life, and human communities around the proposed site, especially the economic consequences of damaged natural resources. In this way, the shift from aesthetic to ecological concerns allowed Scenic Hudson to achieve the standing in the judicial system that it had theretofore lacked. The investigative journalist Bob Boyle, Lifset notes, found that Con Ed had concealed evidence that the proposed plant would have a deleterious effect on a variety of river life, and his findings were publicized by Scenic Hudson and other plant opponents. In fall 1965, Scenic Hudson argued before the Second Circuit Court of Appeals that Con Ed had inadequately considered the impact the plant would have on fish populations, and also had underestimated the costs of expanding its grid of existing transmission lines, the costs of which would likely be passed on to consumers. It also argued that the Federal Power Commission, in granting Con Ed an operating license, had taken the company's assertions at face value and had not applied adequate critical scrutiny. The court sided with plant critics. The *Scenic Hudson* decision, handed down on November 9, 1965, was, according to Lifset, the first time a federal court had overturned an FPC license and set the important precedent that local groups could succeed in stopping a major energy project (p. 101).

The next three chapters take different perspectives on how the controversy over the Storm King Mountain plant prefigured and connected to some other developments in American environmentalism. Chapter 6 notes that opposition to the plant forced the FPC and Con Ed to produce an environmental impact statement, a document that describes the positive and negative environmental effects of a proposed project, several years before such an activity would be required by the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act. Chapter 7 explores how Scenic Hudson moved beyond mere public protest and lobbied political officials, such as Armand D'Angelo, the commissioner of the Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity in New York City. Chapter 8 documents how the fight over Storm King Mountain began influencing other environmental decisions in the state, including Governor Nelson

Rockefeller's creation of Hudson Highlands State Park.

The final three chapters describe how the Storm King Mountain project met its eventual end. As Lifset notes, despite Con Ed's attempts to produce an environmental impact statement, lawsuits about the plant's effect on fish populations continued to proliferate. In the early 1970s, Con Ed found itself in a fiscal crisis, as technological limits and other factors made the company unable to produce enough capacity to keep up with rising consumer demand. Then, as Lifset notes, the oil embargo of 1973 tripled the cost of a barrel of crude oil, and Con Ed passed the increased cost of operating its oil-burning utility plants directly to consumers, who were understandably enraged at the utility. Finally, in 1980, Con Ed agreed to abandon the Storm King plant in exchange for not having to build cooling towers at its two nuclear power plants at Indian Point, which would have potentially been required to comply with the Clean Water Act.

Lifset's book will be of greatest value to specialists. The detail put into some aspects of the story, such as the politics of Representative Richard Ottinger's Hudson scenic riverways bill in chapter 7, may be too narrow for general readers. Lifset also mentions figures in the Storm King story without providing crucial information. For example, he mentions New York City mayor John Lindsay without noting that Lindsay famously closed a major section of Fifth Avenue during the first Earth Day protest in 1970, information that would have helped readers unfamiliar with the environmental history of the period.

Lifset also misses a couple of opportunities to connect the Storm King Mountain to other important developments in American environmental and energy politics, which would have enhanced the value of the analysis. He says virtually nothing about how the Storm King Mountain fight prefigured or connected to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, even though the act was later invoked by local environmentalists in other localities in opposition to other hydroelectric projects, especially the well-known Tellico Dam in East Tennessee, which was delayed by the discovery of the snail darter, a tiny fish found in the Little Tennessee River. Was the Storm King Mountain case influential in the shaping of later endangered species law, which more explicitly allowed local groups to take their opposition before the judicial system? If not, how truly important was Storm King in terms of setting precedent? The Tellico Dam, unlike the Storm King installation, was eventually constructed and completed, so how lastingly reliable was this new concern with ecology in terms of its ability to stop large con-

struction projects? Without much connection to national developments, the broader significance of the Storm King Mountain case is hard to assess; the reader is left to guess. The epilogue contains a few thoughts on environmentalistsâ continuing efforts to gain standing in federal courts, but more would have been helpful for placing the Storm King case in context.

Furthermore, especially in terms of ecological concerns, the bookâs chronology is unnecessarily compressed. The Progressive Era of the early twentieth century is mainly mentioned in the book as the era in which the FPC was created, but it was also the period in which scientific concern with species loss first became a major issue. Readers of Lifsetâs book might assume that biologists first became concerned about species loss after World War II, but this was emphatically not the case. Rachel Carsonâs 1962 *Silent Spring* may have alerted the broad American public about the dangers of the chemicals that were entering the air and water, but the possibility of catastrophic habitat destructionâand the need to take direct action to protect endangered speciesâwas not news to biological scientists. (Peter S. Alagonaâs recent book *After the Grizzly: Endangered Species and the Politics of Place in California* [2013], for example, which begins with the Progressive Era and goes into the 1970s, is a good analysis of how ecological concerns played out in a broader historical context.)

Lifset also does not comment on Jimmy Carterâs energy policies in the late 1970s, which grew out of the shock caused by the 1973 oil embargo. Carter, seeing the United Statesâ insatiable demand for energy as a moral failing that needed to be addressed, as well as a threat to national security, instituted a number of incentives designed to compel individuals and businesses to decrease

their energy consumption. The resulting effects on aggregate energy demand were an enormous problem for American utility companies, which operate on construction schedules that span decades; sudden declines in energy consumption left them unable to fund planned current and future construction. These proceedings almost certainly affected Con Edâs financial position in the late 1970s and therefore the decision to abandon the Storm King plan. The epilogue, which is split between a discussion of later episodes in the environmental history of the Hudson River Valley on one hand and a scattered survey of developments in federal jurisprudence related to environmentalism on the other, also feels somewhat unfocused.

Nevertheless, the tension between environmentalism and energy production is one of the more compelling elements of the political history of the post-World War II United States, and Lifsetâs book provides an interesting case study that illuminates how broad national developments played out at a local level. It also offers valuable comment on how the strategies employed by environmentalist groups advanced beyond popular protest and played a significant role in the resolution of policy outcomes, employing the scientific language of ecology in order to achieve its goals. It is best read alongside Christopher J. Manganielloâs *Southern Water, Southern Power: How the Politics of Cheap Energy and Water Scarcity Shaped a Region* (2015), which examines the tension between energy production and the protection of shared natural resources in the US Southeast, as well as Paul Charles Milazzoâs *Unlikely Environmentalists: Congress and Clean Water, 1945-1972* (2006), which explores the development of clean water policy in the US Congress from 1945 to 1972.

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