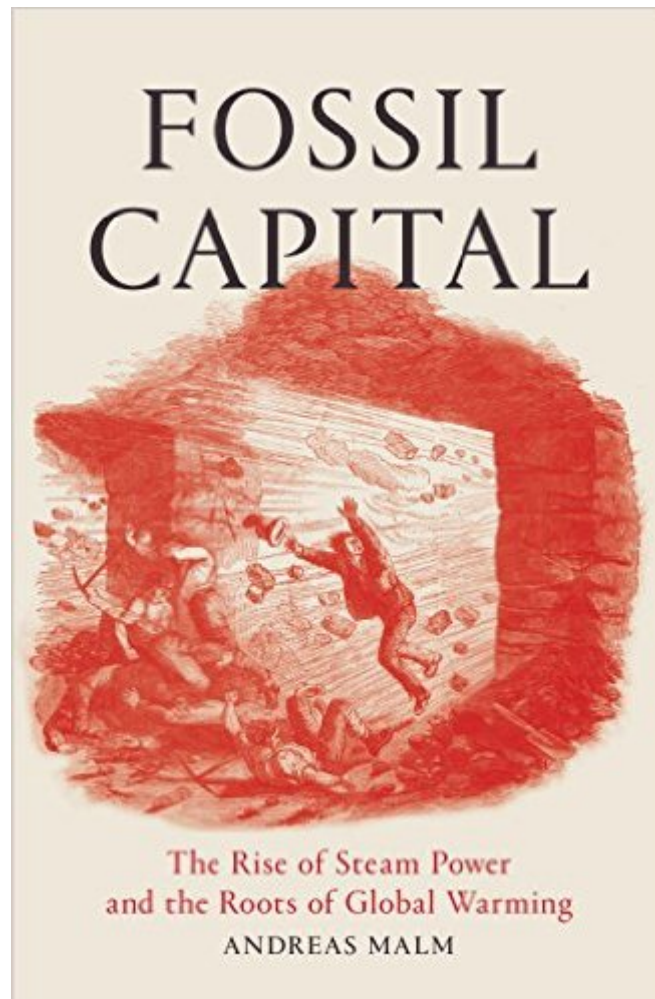


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Fossil Capital: The Rise Of Steam Power And The Roots Of Global Warming



Synopsis

How capitalism first promoted fossil fuels with the rise of steam power? The more we know about the catastrophic implications of climate change, the more fossil fuels we burn. How did we end up in this mess? In this masterful new history, Andreas Malm claims it all began in Britain with the rise of steam power. But why did manufacturers turn from traditional sources of power, notably water mills, to an engine fired by coal? Contrary to established views, steam offered neither cheaper nor more abundant energy—but rather superior control of subordinate labour. Animated by fossil fuels, capital could concentrate production at the most profitable sites and during the most convenient hours, as it continues to do today. Sweeping from nineteenth-century Manchester to the emissions explosion in China, from the original triumph of coal to the stalled shift to renewables, this study hones in on the burning heart of capital and demonstrates, in unprecedented depth, that turning down the heat will mean a radical overthrow of the current economic order.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a thorough, well-structured, and lively account of the social and spatial complexity that led to a dependence on carbon fuels. The negative reviewers seem not to have read the book. They seem, rather, to have determined from reading the description and blurbs (paying special attention to the names of the blurb-writers) what its content MUST be and have "reviewed" what they figure that content MUST be. The book is a complex account of a contradictory history. It is a wonderful accomplishment that opens up many new questions and possibilities.

This is a good account of the transition to fossil fuel industrialization with a prime focus on England where the potential of steam technology first burst on the scene. In the view here one of the prime drivers here was the issue of superior control of labor rather than the simple economics of coal. The accelerated process of factory production has developed so rapidly in two centuries even as we take for granted a transformation that is beckoning to be undone or replaced and whose social implications derive the logic of a revolutionary endgame. The tragic nature of the capitalist consolidation of labor and industry is reaching its concluding act five and the outcome is thwarted by the ideological hypnosis of the Industrial Revolution and its consequences for finance, labor, class, and...the health of a planet threatened with ecocide.

Very good treatise of the tension between capitalism and fossil fuel caused greenhouse gas emission debacle. I subtracted one star due to the very tedious chapters in the middle of the book, which really do not add much to the narrative and you can skip them once you get the gist of the author's argument. Being a mechanical engineer in power generation, I cannot see a way to a "zero fossil fuel" 100% renewable electric power generation status any time soon while preserving our Western way of life intact (i.e., power at the turn of a switch 365/24/7). A full coverage of this in a technically well-rounded manner is well beyond the author's expertise (in fact, many people who call themselves "engineers" cannot grasp the severity of the problem in full detail - simply many esoteric nitty-gritty is involved - so this is not an accusation at all) and the book's scope. Thus, I have no gripe with his last few chapters either. In any event, his suggestion is spot on: this problem cannot be solved by the capitalist system without strong government mandates in a supranatural framework (the US government response in WWII was a good example), which is highly unlikely. I'm pretty sure that we're headed to the next catastrophe in human history within the next few decades.

A brilliant Marxist critique of capitalism and the origins of the fossil fuel economy that avoids the technological-determinism of most histories, showing how class and class struggle in nineteenth century led to a system whose addiction to fossil fuels has brought the world to the brink of disaster. Essential

Great book! New way of looking at the history of fossil energy.

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