



Image Credit: *Earth at Night*, NASA/NOAA 2009

International Workshop “Electrifying the World: Towards a Global History of Light and Power”

**26-27 March 2018
New Orleans, Courtyard Marriot Downtown/Iberville**

With the looming threat of climate change and scarcity of resources energy issues have attracted increasing attention in recent years. Policies for securing sufficient energy supply differ widely – from notions of a “green energy transition” to the construction of new nuclear power stations or efforts to exploit (unconventional) fossil fuels. While in the Global North, many countries aim to reduce emissions and achieve more sustainable lifestyles (at least in theory), energy consumption in the Global South – far below the global average and still often dominated by biomass – is expanding rapidly to reach higher standards of living. In both these efforts, electricity production – as a main transformer of primary energy sources as well as linchpin and symbol of modern society – occupies center stage. Historical research has explored in detail how electricity contributed to the shaping of new (post)industrial lifestyles, focusing on the emergence (and power-dynamics) of large sociotechnical systems as well as its effects on everyday life and its interrelation with the environment. However, most of this research has centered on Western societies and – to a lesser extent – the former Eastern Bloc. There is very little known about the history of electricity in the non-Western regions of the world. Transnational perspectives are rare as well – and often concentrate on global energy supply chains for Western societies.

The international workshop “Electrifying the World” aims to broaden this restricted view. By bringing together an interdisciplinary group of international scholars, the workshop aims to take the first step towards a truly global history of light and power. The workshop will consider such topics as theories and approaches to the global history of electrification, global networks and agents of transfer, global electrification and the environment, the intersection of ethnicity, race, class, and gender in global electrification, resistance to electrification, and electricity and (post)colonialism.

The workshop has been organized to allow for maximum exchange and to make most efficient use of available time. The core of the workshop will consist of the presentation and discussion of individual papers. This will take place in the context of five separate topical panels. At the beginning of each panel, a commenter will discuss the individual papers (ca. 10 minutes per paper). Authors will then be given the opportunity to respond, and to add their own input. Roughly an hour should be available for general discussion. All authors are asked to provide papers of approximately **3000 words** in advance of the workshop (**by end of February 2018**). We will circulate papers two weeks prior to the conference. Selected papers and contributions will be published as part of a special issue or edited volume.

Additionally, a roundtable of participants with significant experience researching in the history of electrification will provide an opportunity to consider questions of theory and methodology in global perspectives. Instead of papers, roundtable participants will prepare remarks (to last roughly 10 minutes) on these four prompts:

1. Author’s own approaches to the history of electrification
2. Challenges to doing global history of electrification
3. Promising potential approaches

Besides the workshop session, we will also take a guided tour of New Orleans’ historic French Quarter on the afternoon of the first day of the workshop. Later that evening Martin Melosi will provide the conference keynote address.

Conveners

Marc Landry, University of New Orleans (mlandr1@uno.edu)

Patrick Kupper, University of Innsbruck (Patrick.kupper@uibk.ac.at)

Ute Hasenöhr, University of Innsbruck (ute.hasenoehrl@uibk.ac.at)

Monday, 26 March 2018

- 09:00–09:30 **Welcome and Introduction**
Günter Bischof (University of New Orleans)
- 09:30–11:00 **Panel 1: “Global Networks and Agents of Transfer”**
Jonas Van der Straeten (TU Darmstadt): Transmitting power and capital – Global actor networks in the electrification of British colonial Africa and Asia, 1900-1950

Odinn Melsted (University of Innsbruck): Electricity Production for Aluminum Smelting: Effects and Conflicts in Peripheral Regions

Chair: *Andrea Mosterman* (University of New Orleans)
Commentary: *Matthew Evenden* (University of British Columbia)
- 11:00–11:30 **Break**
- 11:30–13:00 **Panel 2: “Energy Environments and Landscapes”**
Marc Landry (University of New Orleans): Peak Power: The Alps and Electrification, 1880-1930

Ute Hasenöhrl (University of Innsbruck): (Post)Colonial Energy Landscapes: The Indian Case, 1858-2018

Chair: *Craig Colten* (Louisiana State University)
Commentary: *Sara B. Pritchard* (Cornell University)
- 13:00–14:00 **Break**
- 14:00–16:00 **Excursion: Guided walking tour of the French Quarter**
- 16:00–17:30 Roundtable: “Global Electrification – Theories and Approaches”
(Moderation: *Patrick Kupper*, University of Innsbruck)

Matthew Evenden (University of British Columbia)
Sara B. Pritchard (Cornell University)
Sunila S. Kale (University of Washington)
- 17:30–20:00 **Break**
- 20:00–21:30 Public Keynote Address: *Martin Melosi* (University of Houston): Nuclear Power, the Rise of Environmentalism, and the Energy Crisis
- 21:30–22:30 Drinks Reception

Tuesday, 27 March 2018

- 09:15–09:30 Welcome Address by UNO *President Dr. John Nicklow*
- 09:30–11:00 **Panel 3: “Ethnicity – Race – Gender – Class”**
Casey Cater (Georgia State University): A Slave in Every Stream and Socket: Race, Class, and Hydroelectricity in the 1920s US South

Rachel Taylor (University of Washington): Radiating Risk: The Tennessee Valley Authority’s Uranium Procurement Program, 1965-1980

Chair: *Nikki Brown* (University of New Orleans)
Commentary: *Martin Melosi* (University of Houston)
- 11:00–11:30 **Break**
- 11:30–13:00 **Panel 4: “Reluctant Electrification”**
Animesh Chatterjee (Leeds Trinity University): The Cultural Resistance to Domestic Electrification in Urban Colonial India, c. 1880-1925

Michael Christopher Low (Iowa State University): Who’s Afraid of Mr. Electric?: Despotism, Modernization, and the Short Circuits of Ottoman Electrification

Chair:
Commentary: *Sunila S. Kale* (University of Washington)
- 13:00–15:00 **Break**
- 15:00–16:30 **Panel 5: “Energy, (Post)Colonialism, and Development”**
Junaidu Danladi (Bayero University, Kano): Electrifying Kano: A History of Electricity Supply in Kano, Nigeria, 1931-1967

Owain Lawson (Columbia University): Inequality Materialized: Developing Lebanon’s Litani River, 1955-1965

Chair: Robert Dupont (University of New Orleans)
Commentary: *Patrick Kupper* (University of Innsbruck)
- 16:30–17:30 Concluding Discussion (Moderation: Kupper, Hasenöhrl, Landry)
- 17:30–19:00 **Break**
- 19:00–21:00 **Workshop Dinner at Deanie’s Seafood Restaurant**