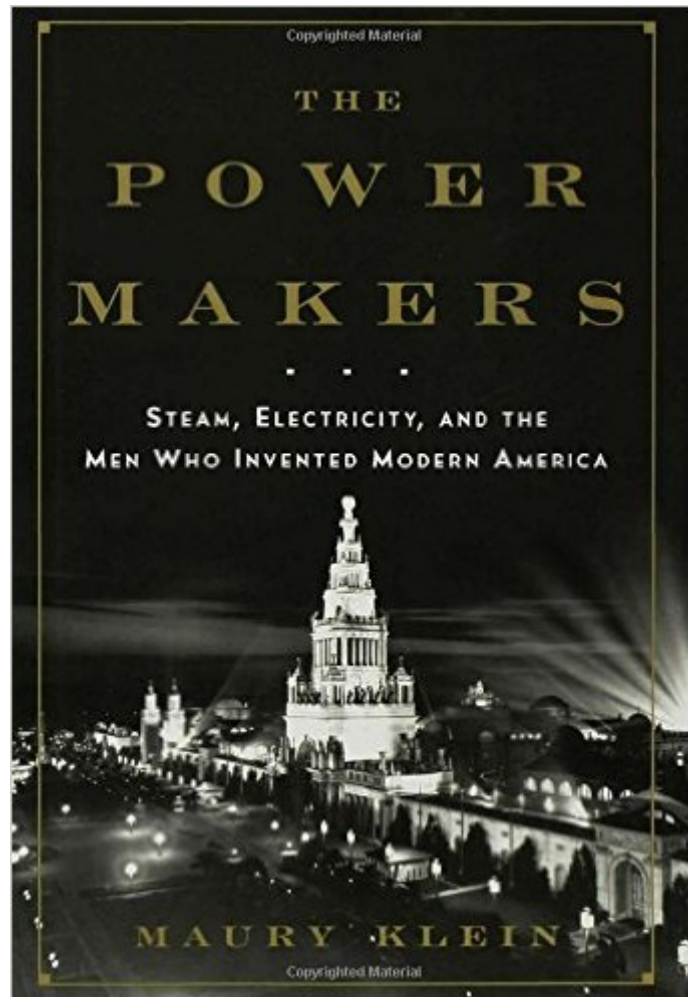


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The Power Makers: Steam, Electricity, And The Men Who Invented Modern America



Synopsis

The dramatic story of the "power revolution" that turned America from an agrarian society into a technological superpower, and the dynamic, fiercely competitive inventors and entrepreneurs who made it happen—a riveting historical saga to rival McCullough's *The Great Bridge* or Larson's *Thunderstruck*. Maury Klein, author of *Rainbow's End: The Crash of 1929*, is one of America's most acclaimed historians of business and industry. In *The Power Makers*, he offers an epic narrative of his greatest subject yet—the "power revolution" that transformed American life in the course of the nineteenth century. The steam engine, the incandescent bulb, the electric motor—inventions such as these replaced backbreaking toil with machine labor and changed every aspect of daily life in the span of a few generations. The power revolution is not a tale of machines, however, but of men: inventors such as James Watt, Elihu Thomson, and Nikola Tesla; entrepreneurs such as George Westinghouse; savvy businessmen such as J.P. Morgan, Samuel Insull, and Charles Coffin of General Electric. Striding among them like a colossus is the figure of Thomas Edison, who was creative genius and business visionary at once. With consummate skill, Klein recreates their discoveries, their stunning triumphs and frequent failures, and their unceasing, tumultuous, and ferocious battles in the marketplace. In Klein's hands, their personalities and discoveries leap off the page. *The Power Makers* is a dazzling saga of inspired invention, dogged persistence, and business competition at its most naked and cutthroat—a tale of America in its most astonishing decades.

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Customer Reviews

I was born and raised in Schenectady, New York, at a time when the locals still proudly, if a bit ruefully, referred to it as "The City That Lights and Hauls the World" because it was home to both the sprawling General Electric Company and the then-diminishing American Locomotive Company. But I didn't realize until reading this superb book that I never really understood how GE came to evolve out of the earlier Edison enterprises nor how and why it became headquartered in my home town. Nor did I realize how most of the giants behind the "energizing" of America, men like Edison, Westinghouse, Tesla, and Insull ended their lives, with the exception of Edison, disassociated from their great innovations, disillusioned with their business undertakings, and in the case of Insull, the unheralded pioneer of electric power distribution, indicted. I do now, thanks to this marvelously well-written survey of the history of steam and electricity in our country. I agree with the other reviewers that the technical discussions get a bit "thick" from time to time, and even perhaps fall somewhat short of how senior MIT and RPI engineering works would set them out, but I reminded myself as I read through them that this is not the story of the devices, but rather the story of the men behind them, and that story could hardly be better told. This distinction brought to mind Kate Colquhoun's delightful, "Taste: The Story of Britain Through Its Cooking:" the reader need not get hung up on the recipes described by the author; their significance lies in their time and place and what they reflected of their preparers and consumers. So it is with "The Power Makers."

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