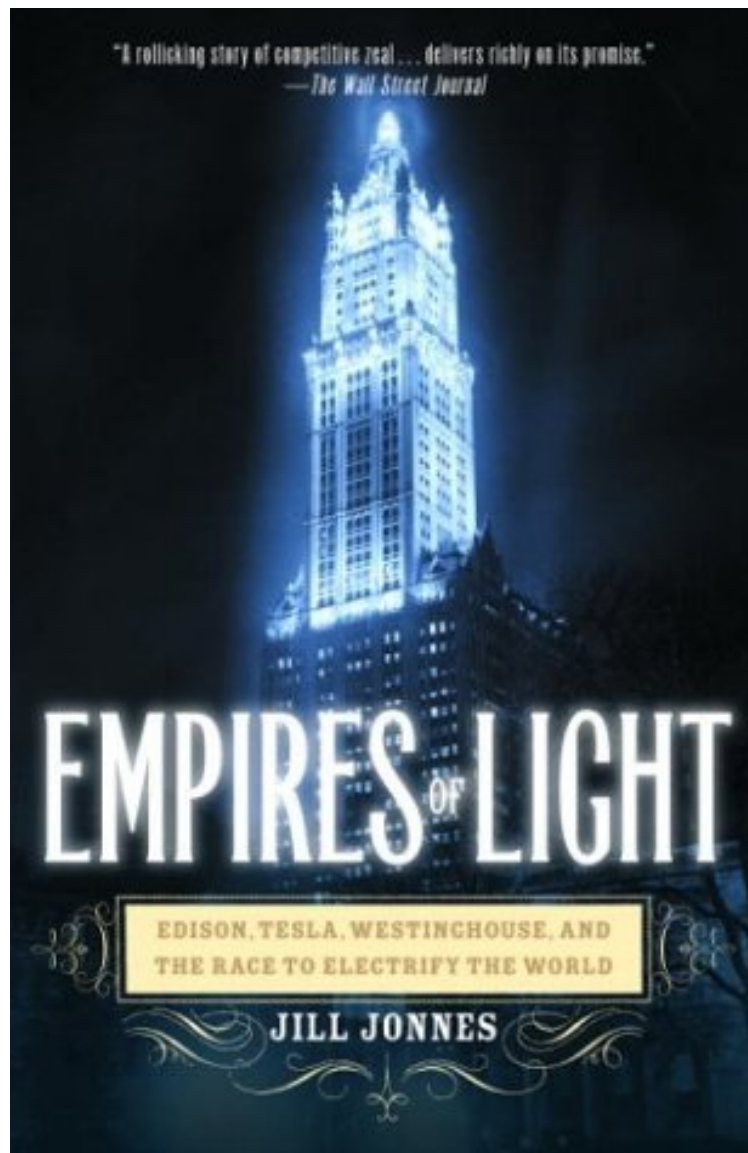


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Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World

Jill Jonnes

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#42511 in Books Jill Jonnes 2004-10-12 2004-10-12 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.99 x 1.00 x 5.16l, .75 #File Name: 0375758844464 pages Empires of Light Edison Tesla Westinghouse and the Race to Electrify the World | File size: 27.Mb

Jill Jonnes : Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Illuminating. By Customer
Illuminating history of three men who moved us into a brighter world, and the dark side of history in this account that never reached American history classes. The author attempts to spice up what could be a dry subject with too many adjectives, which tends to undermine the credibility of the historical interpretation in places, but overall a very worthwhile read. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Electricity and the Giants who presented us with it! By B. Stahr
I love books on history and the advances of man. This book presents the abbreviated biographies of three great inventive pioneers woven together with the story of the use and advancement of electricity. While we take the use of electricity and the many instruments that function because of electricity for granted, this book presents in a well organized fashion the difficulties overcome in its development. From DC to AC. From Arc lighting to the famous incandescent bulbs. Wow, how the developments of these men and their ideas of what electricity could give to the world such a remarkable power harnessed to make man's life a little easier. Tracing the ideas to fruition of these great men, interweaves the capitalist mentality required to make a dream live. There is so much written in such a short book, and yet I found difficulty in putting the book down as it was an enjoyable read. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Three American Pioneers By Old Sailor
This book gives an individual account of these three great electrical pioneers and inventors, but also shows how their work and their lives were interconnected. Both Tesla and Westinghouse started at university but did not complete, and Thomas Edison did not even complete grade school. As well as their electrical inventions, they all branched out into associated fields. Tesla made radio transmissions before Marconi; Edison invented the phonograph and also a way of extracting iron ore by magnetism, and George Westinghouse pioneered the steam turbine for marine propulsion in USA. Long after his death in 1914, Westinghouse steam turbines were installed in the world's fastest liner, ss United States, in 1952. On a personal level the three men were courteous and approachable; Westinghouse treated his employees very well but Edison was not so generous to his. Westinghouse had a long and happy marriage and Edison was married twice, with six children who saw very little of their workaholic father. Nikola Tesla lived into his eighties, but remained unmarried, and was said to have lived a celibate life. He died alone in a New York hotel room in 1943. At the end of the book, the author reminds us that electric light has changed the true meaning of 'night'; we have lost the character and the poetry of the night that earlier generations knew. Before his death, Tesla said he had 'an inexpressible satisfaction that my polyphase system has lightened the burdens of mankind and increased their comfort and happiness'

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, three brilliant and visionary titans of America's Gilded Age—Thomas Edison, Nikola Tesla, and George Westinghouse—battled bitterly as each vied to create a vast and powerful electrical empire. In *Empires of Light*, historian Jill Jonnes portrays this extraordinary trio and their riveting and ruthless world of cutting-edge science, invention, intrigue, money, death, and hard-eyed Wall Street millionaires. At the heart of the story are Thomas Alva Edison, the nation's most famous and folksy inventor, creator of the incandescent light bulb and mastermind of the world's first direct current electrical light networks; the Serbian wizard of invention Nikola Tesla, elegant, highly eccentric, a dreamer who revolutionized the generation and delivery of electricity; and the charismatic George Westinghouse, Pittsburgh inventor and tough corporate entrepreneur, an industrial idealist who in the era of gaslight imagined a world powered by cheap and plentiful electricity and worked heart and soul to create it. Edison struggled to introduce his radical new direct current (DC) technology into the hurly-burly of New York City as Tesla and Westinghouse challenged his dominance with their alternating current (AC), thus setting the stage for one of the eeriest feuds in American corporate history, the War of the Electric Currents. The battlegrounds: Wall Street, the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Niagara Falls, and, finally, the death chamber. Jonnes takes us on the tense walk down a prison hallway and into the sunlit room where William Kemmler, convicted axe murderer, became the first man to die in the electric chair. *Empires of Light* is the gripping history of electricity, the mysterious fluid, and how the fateful collision of Edison, Tesla, and Westinghouse left the world utterly transformed. From the Hardcover edition.

.com Jill Jonnes's compelling *Empires of Light: Edison, Tesla, Westinghouse, and the Race to Electrify the World* offers a multi-sided tale of America's turn-of-the-20th-century quest for cheap, reliable electrical power. Along the way, the book profiles key personalities in both the science and industry of electrification and dramatizes the transformation of American society that accompanied the technological revolution. As her sub-title suggests, Jonnes's focus is on the three great personalities behind the building of the electricity industry. But, as she makes clear, the electrification of America was much more than a pathbreaking scientific quest. The genius of such poet-scientists as Nikola Tesla depended on the more finely tuned business skills of George Westinghouse and the towering capital of J.P. Morgan to achieve actualization. And even Thomas Edison and Westinghouse—innovative industrial combatants in the war between AC and DC current—were victims of the far more powerful and conservative financial forces of Wall Street. Indeed, for Jonnes, the story of electricity is as much about the legions of patent attorneys and bankers who controlled the flow of industry as it is about the circulation of current. Her sophisticated portrait of Gilded Age science, business, and society brings new light to the forces that underlie technological revolutions. As she reveals, it is not so much the great public men of science who directed the destiny of America's eventual empire of light; rather,

the path was solidified by those men behind the scenes who were wise enough (and perhaps ruthless enough) to impose their legal, financial, and political dominance onto the scientific innovation--a valuable message for all eras. --Patrick O'Kelley

From Publishers Weekly

Jonnes, a historian at Johns Hopkins (*We're Still Here; Hep-Cats, Narcs and Pipe Dreams*), details the rise and fall of the three visionaries who harnessed electricity, while also offering a critique of corporate greed. Her tale emphasizes the "War of the Electric Currents," in which Thomas Edison sought to defend the primacy of his direct current electrical system against George Westinghouse's higher-voltage and more broadly applicable alternating current system. Nikola Tesla, the somewhat kooky Serbian genius (and former Edison man), joined the fray on Westinghouse's side with his AC induction motor. Jonnes serves up plenty of color in an engaging and relaxed style, detailing how Edison capitalized on the "deaths by wire," or accidental electrocutions, from the AC system, sensationalized in the newspapers of the time. As she shows, Edison's "holy war" led to Westinghouse's AC being used in the first prison execution by electric chair, in 1890--which proved considerably more grisly and less humane than originally billed. For Jonnes, this history culminates neatly in a rather trite moral lesson: that corporate greed is bad. She contrasts it with the three public-minded men sketched here, who embody what Jonnes believes capitalism ought to be. Edison wanted only "the perfect workshop"; Westinghouse was interested "in helping the world" and giving his workers disability benefits; Tesla wanted to "liberate the world from drudgery." Jonnes's titans loom as monumentally as the allegorical Good Capitalists in an Ayn Rand melodrama. For those who view history as less tidy, this may strain the patience at times. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW.

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From Booklist

The study and awareness of electricity is not new, but the successful control and use of it is relatively recent. Jonnes begins by detailing the study of electrical phenomena from ancient times up through the Enlightenment. Audiences who are familiar mostly with Thomas Edison and the lightbulb will find the earlier, less-told part of the story a welcome addition to their knowledge. Naturally, Edison has his place, too, and Jonnes fills a number of pages with the accomplishments of the three major inventors (Tesla, Westinghouse, and Edison), starting with their early research and progressing into the practical application of their work. The last part of the book deals with the slow process of bringing electricity to the rest of the country, the industrial wars between the rival electric firms, and the fates of those who played a role in the electric revolution. A very accessible and informative historical account that will be fascinating reading for a general audience as well as those with a more specialized interest. Gavin Quinn

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