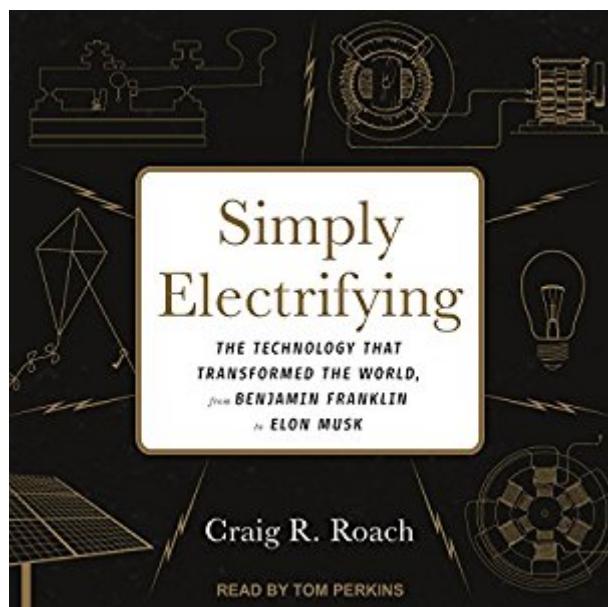


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Simply Electrifying: The Technology That Transformed The World, From Benjamin Franklin To Elon Musk



Synopsis

Simply Electrifying: The Technology That Transformed the World, from Benjamin Franklin to Elon Musk brings to life the 250-year history of electricity through the stories of the men and women who used it to transform our world: Benjamin Franklin, James Watt, Michael Faraday, Samuel F.B. Morse, Thomas Edison, Samuel Insull, Albert Einstein, Rachel Carson, Elon Musk, and more. In the process, it reveals for the first time the complete, thrilling, and often dangerous story of electricity's historic discovery, development, and worldwide application. Electricity plays a fundamental role not only in our everyday lives but in history's most pivotal events, from global climate change and the push for wind- and solar-generated electricity to Japan's nuclear accident at Fukushima and Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Written by electricity expert and four-decade veteran of the industry, Craig R. Roach, Simply Electrifying marshals, in fascinating narrative detail, the full range of factors that shaped the electricity business over time - science, technology, law, politics, government regulation, economics, business strategy, and culture - before looking forward toward the exhilarating prospects for electricity generation and use that will shape our future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

According to the forward, Craig R. Roach spent ten years on this book, and it is easy to see why. It is about as comprehensive a look at the way electricity has been integrated into modern society as you will ever read. In the end, the book was not exactly what I was expecting, but it was, with some

exceptions, worth the read.== The Good Stuff ==* The book is well written. Roach writes in an easy-to-read style, and mostly keeps the topic moving along without getting bogged down in endless detail. The writing is lively, avoids the long paragraphs and arcane vocabulary of the "serious academic," and communicates its points reasonably well.* I will admit that the electric industry in the US is not one of my strong points, but there was a lot of information in the book that I had never come across before, and is relevant to our current and increasing reliance on electric power generation and distribution. For example, Roach points out how electric power generation is a business that relies on large economies-of-scale, and it is impossible to electrify large portions of a country without a large market. But there is always a bit of a chicken-and-egg problem- who buys appliances until the electric lines are in? And who would run electric lines to a house without appliances?* Much of the book concentrates on the government stimulation and regulation of the electric power industry, and its close cousin, the telecommunications industry. Electric utilities are "natural monopolies," at least in their traditional form---meaning it simply doesn't make economic sense to have more than one covering any given area. Roach examines how this fact affected the early growth of the utilities, and how the early monopolies were controlled and in many cases, morphed into modern utilities.== The Not-So-Good Stuff ==* While the regulation side of the electric business was interesting, the discussion tended to get a bit long-winded and overblown. I'll admit that as an engineer, my interests are more drawn to the technical side of the business, but the book seems to overly concentrate on the regulatory and financial aspects. As an example, the Tennessee Valley Authority was responsible for some incredible engineering and technical accomplishments, but most of the discussion of this organization involved legislative and rate-related items.* Especially as the book progressed, the technical details became less and less defined and explained. One small example, in the discussion of nuclear power, the author mentions the "ceiling" on the economies-of-scale of nuclear power plants. Nuclear power certainly has its issues, but as a large fixed-cost technology, I had never heard of such ceilings, and it would have been nice to have the author explain his thoughts.== Summary ==The book is much more about the electric power industry than it is about electricity. There is some content in the beginning of the book on the contributions of Ben Franklin and other scientists, but 80% of the book is about how electric utilities are regulated, controlled, stimulated and influenced. There is plenty of interesting information on how utilities formed in the US, and how their financial structure worked to allow them to put large investments in place. If you are interested in that, you

will enjoy the book.==== Disclaimer ===I was able to read an advance copy through the courtesy of the publisher and NetGalley.

"Simply Electrifying" is a history of electricity for the average person. Anything technical regarding an invention, experiment, or scientific idea was explained in simple terms. It was mostly a collection of biographies of people who made a major impact on the history of electricity and how we use it. The author also talked about how politics, technology choices, and economics have impacted how we use electricity. I'd recommend this book to those who'd watch a documentary on the topic, as it had a similar feel. He covered Benjamin Franklin (how the Leyden Jar worked, lightning experiments), James Watt (invented improved steam engine, which was used for electrical generation), Michael Faraday (link between magnetism and electricity, invented electric motor, electric generator), James Maxwell (electromagnetic waves), Samuel Morse (telegraph) and the transatlantic cable. Thomas Edison (inventions needed for an electricity industry, like electric light bulbs, wall switches, power lines, generators), George Westinghouse and Nikola Tesla (AC/DC current wars, AC electric motor, Tesla coil), Samuel Insull (economy of scale to lower pricing and make electricity affordable). FDR's New Deal for electricity (more hydro power and proposed government action and regulation), the building of Hoover Dam, the Tennessee Valley Authority and David Lilienthal (public versus private utilities), coal mining and use and John L. Lewis (labor strikes), Albert Einstein, nuclear weapons and nuclear power plants, the modern environmental movement, California's electricity crisis and competitive reform, President Obama's Clean Power Plan, climate change, George Mitchell's shale gas revolution (fracking and natural gas usage), and Elon Musk's vision for the future of electricity set against the lessons learned from history. I received an ebook review copy of this book from the publisher through NetGalley.

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