

Gathering Clouds over Petropolis: A Prolegomena

Prof. Christopher Sellers (Stony Brook)

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Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg



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Global climate change has spurred notions like the Anthropocene thickening the grasp of worldwide environmental change at least in the Western academy, but often with limited regard for more local and human scales of historical action, where the climate crisis itself was born. Christopher Sellers presents here a prolegomena for a book that seeks to reckon with how multi-scalar as well as political the human making of the climate crisis has been. To do so, it carves out a narrower focus, tightening its lenses on the global and the local as well as more intermediate scales to better illuminate their connections, parallels, and interactions. Sellers teases out a single historical thread within the anthropogenesis of climate change, of that one industry responsible for more greenhouse emissions than any other in human history: oil.

To coherently render the local faces of this industry's more over-arching history, Sellers' narrative centers on two locales: the eastern coast of Texas, around Houston, and the southern coast of Veracruz, in Mexico. Set in very similar landscapes along the Gulf of Mexico shoreline, both became centers for the global oil industry, one in the Global North and the other in the Global South. Their transformations offer a concrete window on how corporations, governments, and other institutions created and sustained the material conduits that have slaked the world's growing thirst for petroleum over the last century. And the tensions and conflicts emerging in or implicating these places, environmental and otherwise, illuminate the politics through which oil's ascent in these two nations was enabled as well as challenged. Probing these challenges at the local as well as the regional, national, and global levels, Christopher Sellers explores where historical precedents for an effective climate politics may lie.



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Historisches Seminar

Forschungskolloquium der Professur für Wirtschafts-, Sozial- und Umweltgeschichte (Prof. Dr. Melanie Arndt)