

The Politics of Air Pollution: Urban Growth, Ecological Modernization, and Symbolic Inclusion. *By George A. Gonzalez.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005. viii + 144 pp. Bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$55.00. ISBN: 0-791-46335-4.

Reviewed by David Stradling

Political scientist George A. Gonzalez begins his study of air-pollution politics with a simple question: why does the United States still suffer from poor air quality? He readily admits that his answer is controversial. Gonzalez argues, “U.S. air pollution abatement policies are driven by landed interests” (p. 2). Purposely distancing himself from scholars who have emphasized the role of middle-class activists in forcing government regulation of air quality, Gonzalez claims that air-pollution abatement has intentionally “contributed to a positive local investment climate” in industrial cities. Gonzalez argues that those most active in addressing air pollution—whom he labels “local growth coalitions” composed of utilities, banks, real-estate agencies, and others concerned with economic expansion in particular localities—have never put economic growth on the table. Instead, they have supported “ecological modernization”—technological solutions, such as the switch from coal to natural gas and the installation of catalytic converters in automobiles. Gonzalez contends that air-pollution solutions that do not address economic growth must be incomplete.

Gonzalez goes further, claiming that environmental groups “have been symbolically included in the clean air policymaking process” and have had no other impact on that process than to add legitimacy (p. 3). He concludes that “the environmental lobbying community should exit the polity and join with their rebellious brethren in civil society,” where they would participate in the creation of a broader discourse on air pollution, one that put the control of economic growth on the table (p. 102). However, Gonzalez must admit that “determining the actual influence of environmental lobbying efforts is complicated” and that “it is uncertain

what environmental activists gain” from their participation (p. 101). So Gonzalez asks us to take it on faith that all they have done is add legitimacy to the process.

Gonzalez relies on secondary works almost exclusively in his discussion of air-pollution control history, with his primary research coming in the form of interviews with current environmental activists. Gonzalez includes a chapter on the efforts to control coal smoke in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in which he emphasizes the role of businessmen—especially those operating through chambers of commerce—in putting smoke on the political agenda and framing the policy discourse in a way that excluded the issue of economic growth. Much of this discussion can work in support of his thesis regarding the importance of landed wealth, though Gonzalez makes no attempt to determine exactly who participated in the antismoke movement. More troubling, he downplays the role of women—apparently thinking of them only as extensions of their wealthy husbands—and he dismisses engineers in a footnote, since they were “shaped politically by corporate firms and economic elites” (p. 112). Gonzalez is prone to this type of sweeping statement—exemplified by his claim that “technological controls on air pollution are also an acceptable solution to air pollution for industrial firms” (p. 19)—and in this very brief book he gives himself too little space to support them.

Gonzalez explores the rise of automobiles and the development of smog in two chapters. In the first, he links real-estate interests to automobile use, focusing on Los Angeles. In the second, Gonzalez describes the development of air-pollution policy in southern California, relying primarily on the works of Marvin Brienes (“The Fight Against Smoke in Los Angeles, 1943–1957,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Davis, 1975) and James Krier and Edmund Ursin (*Pollution and Policy*, 1977). In his discussion of Los Angeles, Gonzalez’s thesis regarding local growth coalitions is perhaps most elucidating.

Theory—specifically economic elite theory—drives Gonzalez’s work, in a way that some historians will find problematic. Undoubtedly Gonzalez assumes that most readers will be interested primarily in his bold thesis and his contributions to, and support of, the economic elite theory, which he compares favorably to the

pluralism and state autonomy/issue-network models, both of which emphasize the importance of diverse voices in the policymaking process.

Gonzalez has indeed proposed a very interesting thesis. Unfortunately, he has not undertaken the research that would allow him to prove it. His selective reading of and within secondary works will be frustrating to some historians. (For example, Gabriel Kolko's forty-year-old work on the conservatism of the progressives makes an appearance here, but the dozen or so better works on the era published since then do not.) More troubling, Gonzalez appears to have begun this project with this interesting idea and allowed it to shape his understanding of environmental activism. Those aspects of the air-pollution-abatement story that do not fit his thesis simply do not make an appearance. Missing is the long struggle for public health, the physicians, working-class folks, and especially mothers who worked so hard in so many places to improve air quality and other aspects of their environment. Clearly many more voices than just those in "local growth coalitions" have struggled for cleaner air. And air pollution has not been just an urban problem, as farmers downwind from rural smelters would quickly point out.

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