



Natural Built Social Environment Health

ISSN 3085-461X

www.nbseh.org



BOOK REVIEW

Subjects of the Sun: Solar Energy in the Shadows of Racial Capitalism, by Myles Lennon, Duke University Press, Durham, 2025, xii + 324 pages, US\$28.95, pbk (ISBN: 978-1-4780-3178-9).

As many businesses, communities, and homeowners research and plan their implementation of solar power, this book can help. The author examines how well-meaning intentions can overlook the racial capitalism ensnaring solar energy. Lennon reflects on and analyses interactions with ‘community organizers and white-collar technologists, Black anticapitalists and white neoliberals, environmental justice nonprofits and cleantech corporations – an array of differently positioned actors united by their commitment to clean energy futures’ (p. ix). Throughout, Lennon highlights the fact that solar energy is different from many other social and environmental issues because it is generally discussed and understood through data metrics, rather than through one’s physical senses. Goals for solarizing often focus on the number of kilowatts of solar installed or committed to being installed; but, most people doing this work cannot articulate what a kilowatt is. There is a physical detachment from the goal.

Although Lennon expounds on the work of numerous environmental justice activists to bring solar microgrids to low- and moderate-income communities of colour in order to bring affordable and sustainable energy to these marginalized communities, he also highlights that the work ‘often unintentionally reproduces the intersectional hierarchies and modes of exploitation it is supposed to supplant’ (p. 9). When viewing images of solar panels glistening in the sun, one can easily believe that the sun is doing all the work and myopically exclude the work of ‘engineers, transnational supply chains, permits, installers, contractors, plastics, chemicals, fossil fuels, enslaved workers, or anything else involved in the production of a solar farm’ (p. 51). Racial capitalism is at play, but it is difficult to recognize when one views an idyllic image of shiny solar panels in a pastoral landscape.

Lennon's strength is in portraying the people he has met, worked with, and interviewed for this book. The reader meets the people who are making the transition to solar power possible. These people include Selena (Introduction), a policy coordinator for Environmental Quality for All (EQUAL), an

environmental justice nonprofit; Randall (Chapter 1), a housing activist working for an organization working to bring solar energy to one of New York City's 'poorest, Blackest communities' (p. 50); Sean (Chapter 1), 'the vice president of engineering at a large solar and clean energy technology corporation in the Financial District' (p. 55); Celeste (Chapter 2), 'a white solar professional' (p. 77) and 'self-identified Marxist, ecofeminist, and intersectional activist' (p.79); Sean (Chapter 2), 'a millennial white male vice president' (p. 86) at SunLight, a solar energy efficiency and renewable energy (EERE) corporation; Samir (Chapter 3), a community organizer with EQUAL; and Ron (Chapter 4), 'the only Black employee in a senior position at SunLight at the time' (p. 239) and a former union electrician. Lennon weaves these individuals' stories, ideas, and motivations throughout the book.

This thought-provoking book pushes the reader to consider more critically the entire solar-energy industry. Uncomfortable truths are discussed and probed. This work should be read by anyone in the solar industry, as well as those who want to transition to solar power. It is not a 'quick read', but it is a necessary read.

© Jacqueline Stagner , 2026

stagner@uwindsor.ca

How to cite this article

Stagner, J., 2026, *Subjects of the Sun: Solar Energy in the Shadows of Racial Capitalism*, Myles Lennon, Duke University Press, Durham, 2025, xii + 324 pages, US\$28.95, pbk (ISBN: 978-1-4780-3178-9). *Natural Built Social Environment Health* 2(2), 244-245. DOI: [10.63095/NBSEH.26.881665](https://doi.org/10.63095/NBSEH.26.881665)
