

# Power to the People: How the Coming Energy Revolution will Transform an Industry, Change our Lives, and Maybe Even Save the Planet by Vijay Vaitheeswaran

Matt Brown

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/sdlp>

 Part of the [Energy and Utilities Law Commons](#), and the [Environmental Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Brown, Matt. "Power to the People: How the Coming Energy Revolution will Transform an Industry, Change our Lives, and Maybe Even Save the Planet by Vijay Vaitheeswaran." *Sustainable Development and Policy*, Spring 2004, 49.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Washington College of Law Journals & Law Reviews at Digital Commons @ American University Washington College of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sustainable Development Law & Policy by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ American University Washington College of Law. For more information, please contact [fbrown@wcl.american.edu](mailto:fbrown@wcl.american.edu).

# BOOK REVIEW

## *POWER TO THE PEOPLE:*

*HOW THE COMING ENERGY REVOLUTION WILL TRANSFORM AN INDUSTRY, CHANGE OUR LIVES, AND MAYBE EVEN SAVE THE PLANET*

BY VIJAY VAITHEESWARAN. 327 PP. FARRAR STRAUS AND GIROUX. \$25.

Reviewed by Matt Brown\*

Vijay Vaitheeswaran's *Power to the People* provides a compelling study of the world's energy use in the past, the present and the future. He briefly looks at the past to show us where we have been and what we can learn from previous mistakes. His momentary exploration of the present circumstances of the energy industry point to what ills we must cure and give signs of hope. Vaitheeswaran's focus, however, is clearly on the future of energy. In particular, he examines the development of hydrogen fuel cells and the concept of micro-power for their ability to replace today's power plants as well as their potential to revolutionize the automobile and transportation industries. Yet his searching exploration of the energy industry is not limited to a probing study of budding hydrogen technologies. He also studies the technological advances being made in hydrocarbon discovery, recovery, and pollution control. Vaitheeswaran continues his exploration by delving into the nuclear industry. Without question, Vaitheeswaran takes the reader on an exhaustive and searching journey through the energy industry.

*Power to the People* is full of challenges. That is not to say it is a difficult read. Rather, it challenges many assumptions of environmentalists as well as those of oil barons and coal tycoons. No one is safe from Vaitheeswaran's scathing equal-opportunity critique. ExxonMobil boss, Lee Raymond, is singled out for leading his company in a backward looking way without giving due notice to the future of energy beyond oil. Bill Clinton and Al Gore's poor leadership during the Kyoto climate summit negotiations are also subjected to the author's scorn. The book does not seek to serve as a manifesto for Greens nor does it serve as propaganda for the hydrocarbon industry, rather it separates pure ideology out of the equation and simply tries to convey the author's thoughts surrounding the production of energy and its future.

While his book appears relatively unbiased, there is a bit of prejudice in Vaitheeswaran's writing. He seems more enthralled with unleashing the forces of free market environmentalism than command and control techniques. Vaitheeswaran's com-

mitment to ending market distorting subsidies and regulations combined with his advocacy for taxing emissions is revisited throughout the book. His advocacy, however, does not take away from the value of the book—his words have the power to persuade.

*Power to the People* is not only comprehensive in its examination of the energy industry but also in how energy politics plays out across the world. Vaitheeswaran prescribes solutions to what ails both the developed and developing world. He highlights initiatives to bring power and technology to San Ramon, Honduras and the Maratha colony in India. Vaitheeswaran predicts that, with the right policies and incentives, the world's energy future could be both bright and environmentally sustainable for even the poorest in the world.

In discussing the world's energy future, Vaitheeswaran introduces us to the innovators as well as to the industrial dinosaurs. Of these innovators, he highlights the contributions of Amory Lovins, whom he affectionately refers to as the "Sage of Snowmass." Mr. Lovin's work at the Rocky Mountain Institute in developing a hydrogen fuel cell car is mentioned excitedly throughout the book. In addition, Vaitheeswaran focuses on the research conducted by Ballard Power, United Technologies, and others leading the future of hydrogen fuel cells. Vaitheeswaran explores many other segments of the emerging fuel cell industry, giving names and stories to the scientists and business leaders who are leading the way. *Power to the People* breathes life into industries that were formerly the stuff of brief newspaper articles and campaign speeches.

Vijay Vaitheeswaran's *Power to the People* is an accessible and comprehensive look at a highly technical field. One need not be an engineer or a policy wonk to join Vaitheeswaran's journey—a journey well worth taking. *Power to the People* illuminates the troubles of the past and present in order to articulate a vision of a future with abundant and environmentally sustainable energy supplies.



\*J.D. Candidate, May 2004, American University, Washington College of Law.