

Book Reviews

Moving Violations: Automobiles, Experts, and Regulations in the United States. By Lee Vinsel. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019. 424 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$64.95. ISBN: 978-1-4214-2965-6.

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Reviewed by Sarah Frohardt-Lane

Lee Vinsel sets out to alter the way that Americans think about regulation. His book, *Moving Violations: Automobiles, Experts, and Regulations in the United States*, makes a clear and significant argument that regulations “have fostered and even generated” technological change, using the history of the automobile in the United States from the 1890s to the present as a case study (p. 3). With sections on the creation of standards in the auto industry, safety, pollution, and bureaucracy, the author challenges two schools of thought: first, that to encourage innovation, regulation should be minimized; and second, that government can best spawn technological change by sponsoring research. To Vinsel, “regulation acts as a kind of *focusing device* that—through enticement, coercion, or some combination thereof—persuades expert communities to focus on specific problems” (p. 304). Some of the most successful legislation is that which creates an incentive for industry to make, for instance, a new vehicle that is safer, less polluting, or more fuel efficient.

Moving Violations is detailed, engaging, and insightful. It begins with the description of a staged crash between a 1959 Chevrolet and a 2009 Chevrolet that showcased half a century of safety improvements in automobiles. This opening vignette highlights advances in auto safety, emission control, and fuel economy that the author attributes primarily to federal regulation. Whether the reader views these as impressive gains or wonders why the gains have not been greater, Vinsel’s book explains how these developments came to be. The first part explores early efforts to reduce auto hazards, through standardizing aspects of automobiles (such as headlights), the world around the automobile (such as traffic lights), and driver behavior (such as local speed limits and driver education).

In the second part, Vinsel explores new scientific understandings that emerged in the 1950s about how to keep people safer in car collisions

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and the federal legislation that built on this knowledge. Unlike earlier safety campaigns that had primarily seen the driver as the cause of accidents, the safety movement of the 1950s and 1960s centered on reducing the dangers of the car itself when a crash occurred. Claiming that it would increase production costs, the car companies sought to prevent federal legislation that would mandate safety specifications. Once the 1966 National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act created a federal agency to regulate safety standards, the auto industry switched from fighting the enactment of regulations to ensuring that the standards created by the new act were as watered down as possible. This legislation represented an important departure from earlier attempts to improve auto safety, which had been largely state and local efforts, but as Vinsel convincingly demonstrates, automobile companies successfully challenged many of the new safety agency's efforts.

The contrast between this history of federal safety legislation and the history of smog and pollution controls, highlighted in the third part of the book, provides the clearest support for Vinsel's main argument about regulations shaping technological knowledge as well as his specific points about what types of regulations are most successful. Vinsel uses the example of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970 and the government-industry hearings over feasibility of the standards that the law enacted as a case study of how regulation "works as an engine of knowledge production of all sorts" (p. 196). In contrast to the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act that created an agency charged with setting safety standards, the Clean Air Act Amendments embedded emissions standards in the law itself. With the former, the auto industry had been able to weaken standards that the new safety agency proposed, while under the latter the Environmental Protection Agency held government-industry hearings that ultimately generated the knowledge to create the catalytic converter, a new technology that made possible compliance with the emissions standards set forth in the 1970 law.

Framed as a book about the impacts of regulation on technological change, *Moving Violations* is equally persuasive in documenting the ways in which without regulation, auto companies repeatedly avoided addressing environmental and safety concerns. Only when regulations were imposed, or the threat of regulation was imminent, did car companies create safety standards. Automakers resisted voluntarily incorporating emission controls on vehicles and attempted to turn public opinion against requiring more fuel-efficient cars. In part four, Vinsel demonstrates the slide in advances in safety and environmental technologies following the deregulation turn that began in the late 1970s.

Vinsel carefully analyzes the history of efforts to improve automobiles through regulation to see which types of regulations have been

most successful. In the book's conclusion, the author crystallizes these findings into a theory of how regulations foster technological change. With "limited optimism," he draws lessons from the book's historical examples to suggest that creating performance standards can be an effective type of regulation to address continuing and future problems of automobiles, including such a massive and intractable problem as climate change, if only there were political will to pursue such legislation (p. 317).

A fascinating read, particularly for those interested in the histories of regulation, the automobile, science and technology, and the creation of environmental policy, *Moving Violations* builds on a wealth of research to offer a thought-provoking interpretation of the interplay between regulation and the production of new technologies.

Sarah Frohardt-Lane is associate professor of history and director of environmental studies at Ripon College.

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The Labor Board Crew: Remaking Worker-Employer Relations from Pearl Harbor to the Reagan Era. *By Ronald W. Schatz.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021. 344 pp. Photographs, bibliography, index. Paperback, \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-252-08559-8.

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Reviewed by Samir Sonti

The first question I had upon starting Ronald Schatz's masterful new book, *The Labor Board Crew: Remaking Worker-Employer Relations from Pearl Harbor to the Reagan Era*, was how he settled on the topic. By the end, I had a good answer. Schatz's first book, published in 1983, was a study of electrical workers in the mid-twentieth-century United States. It was a textured story of the radicalism and repression of the Communist-led United Electrical Workers (UE), the civil wars within the labor movement, and the rise and decline of a great industry. These were questions one could expect from a scholar who had come of intellectual age in the era the New Left, and the result was a work of labor history that belongs on the syllabus that any student of the field must read to this day. But it was not a book that I thought would lead to another that celebrates—albeit not uncritically—the gray-suited industrial relations professionals that many historians of that generational cohort had once scorned.

The Labor Board Crew is not about rank-and-file militancy or employer reaction, but rather the efforts by that "small group of