

## Seminar on Environmental and Agricultural History

# Who Gets to Have an Environmental History, and What Kind? Energy, Property, and the Making of Legible Landscapes in the American South

Building on my forthcoming book on a New Deal rural electrification program that funded hundreds of community-owned electric cooperatives across the United States, this talk will be a contemplation on how large scale networked infrastructures continue to shape people's relationships to land over decades. The talk will focus on two electric co-op territories in the American South, where members who felt excluded from their co-ops' decision-making processes organized to "redemocratize" their utilities. I will explore how these co-op member movements faced major opposition locally – due to entrenched racism, corporate influence, and a range of exclusionary co-op policies – and ultimately turned to other forms of activism beyond co-op democracy. While celebrating the broader influence of these activists, I also want to consider the limits of their ability to engage in local environmental change. I will use these case studies to ask who gets to participate, and under what circumstances, in the path dependent, landscape scale environment-making of networked infrastructures like electricity. In the process, I will highlight some of the alternative land ethics underlying these social movements, as electric landscapes that could have been.

## October 6, 2023

## 2:30 - 4 PM



**ABBY SPINAK**

LECTURER IN LANDSCAPE  
ARCHITECTURE AT HARVARD



**MIT Campus E51-095**



**Hybrid Event**

**Registration Required**

Event co-sponsored by MIT's History Faculty & Programs in Science, Technology & Society