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## The Origins of Fossil Capital: From Water to Steam in the British Cotton Industry

historical

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AbstractThe process commonly referred to as business-as-usual has given rise to dangerous climate change, but its onset remains largely unexplored. A key moment in its onset was the transition to steam power as a source of rotary motion in commodity production, first and foremost in its cotton industry. This article tries to approach the dynamics of the fossil economy by examining the causal role of steam in the British cotton industry in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Common perceptions of the transition to steam are refuted, and it is shown that the choice of steam was motivated by a rather different concern: power over labour. In light of different interpretations of the role of energy in the industrial revolution, this article opens a dialogue with Marx on matters

of fossil capital, better suited for understanding the drivers of business-as-usual as it continues to this day.

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