

WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS  
**SCHOOL PROGRAMS RESOURCES**



**AMERICAN POWER**

# About American Power

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(Overview of the project from: [newmusicusa.com](http://newmusicusa.com))

*American Power* is a new collaborative work by acclaimed cellist/composer Erik Friedlander and photographer Mitch Epstein. Drawn from Epstein's five-year visual investigation into what he calls "our cultural relationship to energy", *American Power* combines live video and performance, large-scale projections of Epstein's evocative images, his engaging narrative of his travels to American power sites, and a full evening of new solo cello compositions created and performed by Friedlander.

Awarded the 2011 Prix Pictet photography prize for his project, Epstein first invited Friedlander to collaborate with him for its presentation at the internationally important *Les Rencontres d'Arles* festival in France. The result was an arresting and dynamic combination. Epstein's images consider how our nation's behemoth power grid functions in our neighborhoods and landscape—West Virginia high school football teams practicing in the shadow of coal stacks; Texas wind turbines spinning next to old pumpjacks; an oil rig mangled by Hurricane Katrina. Friedlander's compositions unlock a dramatic dimension in Epstein's visual narrative, underpinning it with strong melodies and startling improvisations. Rather than providing a score or retelling Epstein's story, Friedlander notes:

"I was led instead to the source, the power itself: electrical power, hydraulic, solar and nuclear power -- the pace, the heat, the flow as I imagined it, drove my composing and created the backbone for the suite."

The Walker's world premiere of *American Power* (November 1, 2013) will be the first public performance of Friedlander's and Epstein's collaborative multidisciplinary work since their preliminary presentation. In addition to its commission and premiere, the Walker is providing a two-day intensive production residency for final lighting and theatrical staging with directors Annie B Parson and Paul Lazar of the highly regarded Big Dance Theater, complete with the full resources (technical crew, equipment, etc.) of its state-of-the-art 385-seat McGuire Theater.

A suite of contextual materials and experiences will help audiences dig deeper into the work. These include a three-minute video [trailer](#) and online [dialogue](#) between Epstein and Minneapolis-based photographer Paul Shambroom; a video interview between the Walker's senior performing arts curator Philip Bither and Friedlander and a two-camera digital video of the performance to be posted to its Walker [Channel](#) and YouTube, and expanded program notes; these resources will serve *American Power* through its expected international tour. Following the premiere, the Walker will host a Q & A for audience members with the artists, as well as a Think and a Drink social learning event with the artists, Walker members, and Walker performing arts curators.

This interdisciplinary project is especially suited for Walker support. Considered “one of America’s foremost experimental spaces” by *The Guardian*, it has long been a catalyst for the creative production of artists and active engagement of audiences. An active commissioner (with 75 new works supported this last decade alone) the Walker additionally provides artists extensive developmental, production, and community-based residencies to spur their creative development. This includes commission and residency support for Friedlander’s 2009 multimedia presentation *Block Ice & Propane*. It welcomes this exciting opportunity to support Friedlander again.

## About Mitch Epstein

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Image (c) Artnet.com



(Bio posted from artist’s website: [mitchepstein.net](http://mitchepstein.net))

Mitch Epstein's photographs are in numerous major museum collections, including New York's Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Whitney Museum of American Art; The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Tate Modern in London.

Recent solo exhibitions include: Fondation A Stichting in Brussels (2013); Sikkema Jenkins & Co., NY (2012); Thomas Zander Gallery, Cologne (2012); Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paris (2011); Kunstmuseum Bonn (2011); and Musee de l'Elysee in Lausanne (2011).

In 2013, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Epstein and cellist Erik Friedlander premiered *American Power*, a live performance (based on Epstein's *American Power* series) that combined projected photographs, music, video and storytelling.

Epstein's nine books include *New York Arbor* (Steidl 2013); *Berlin* (Steidl/The American Academy in Berlin, 2011); *American Power* (Steidl, 2009); *Mitch Epstein: Work* (Steidl, 2006); *Recreation: American Photographs 1973-1988* (Steidl, 2005); and *Family Business* (Steidl, 2003), which won the 2004 Kraszna-Krausz Photography Book Award.

Winner of the 2011 Prix Pictet for his series *American Power*, Epstein was also awarded the 2008 Berlin Prize in Arts and Letters by the American Academy in Berlin, and a 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship.

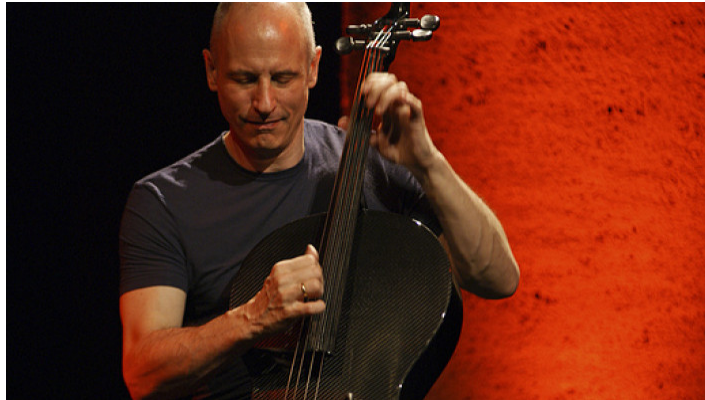
Epstein has worked as a director, cinematographer, and production designer on several films, including Dad, Salaam Bombay!, and Mississippi Masala.

He lives in New York City with his wife and daughter.

## About Erik Friedlander

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Image (c) Newmusicusa.org



(Bio posted from artist's website: [erikfriedlander.com](http://erikfriedlander.com) )

Cellist Erik Friedlander is a composer, an improviser, and a veteran of NYC's Downtown scene. Friedlander started studying music at an early age, beginning at 5 with guitar, and then at 8, cello lessons. He grew up in a house filled with music, as his father, the photographer Lee Friedlander is an avid music lover, and made countless mixtapes which played daily in their home. Erik spent his twenties honing his skills as a player and an improviser and quickly became a sought after studio musician, performing with The Mountain Goats, John Zorn, Dave Douglas and Courtney Love. Erik's desire to actively participate in the swirl of music styles he was surrounded by led him to find new ways to play the cello and drives his solo work which is varied and unusual.

Friedlander's recent projects include Nighthawks, a new cd that was conceived during the blackout in lower Manhattan caused by Hurricane Sandy. The cd features his Bonebridge Band, a slide-guitar, cello, bass and drums quartet; Claws & Wings, the elegiac work dedicated to Erik's late wife, featuring laptop percussionist Ikue Mori and pianist Sylvie Courvoisier; and a limited edition LP with photographer Mitch Epstein entitled American Power. The New Yorker Magazine called his solo cello reinterpretation of American roots music (Block Ice & Propane) "...a magnificent new solo album.." and The New York Times said Friedlander's Broken Arm Trio, a tribute to bassist Oscar Pettiford, was "...effervescent small-group jazz executed with wit and soul."

Friedlander has composed music for ads, dance works, documentaries and, most recently completed the score for Nothing on Earth, a documentary about the work of landscape



photographer Murray Fredericks's dangerous visits to the Greenland icecap. Erik scored the feature film *Future Weather*, released in 2013. Nate Chinen of *The New York Times* wrote: “Mr. Friedlander, an ingenious cellist who makes an art of soulful rusticity.”

## Related Links

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[Mitch Epstein and Erik Friedlander talk about American Power](#)

In this video photographer Mitch Epstein and cellist Erik Friedlander discuss their Walker commission *American Power* with Walker Art Center’s senior curator Philip Bither.

[Mitch Epstein talks about American Power](#)

Mitch Epstein talks to noted photographer Paul Shambroom about visualizing *American Power*.

[Interview with Erik Friedman](#)

Erik Friedman talks to Lydia Brosnahan about *American Power*

## Arts for Social Commentary

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[Photography as Social Commentary](#)

Photography can be an impactful medium for social commentary. This resource provided by the Columbus Museum of Arts provides a lesson plan where students can explore and understand how photographs can be a way to capture the socio-cultural environment around them.

[Hip Hop Identity and Place](#)

While *American Power* explores the concept of “power” in America, various other art forms can be similarly used to explore social issues. This lesson plan allows students to explore issues of social or cultural identity using hip hop music.

[Poetry and Social Studies](#)

This article talks about how teachers can blend poetry and social studies. The article talks about how poetry can be useful to understand social issues, as well as an effective medium for social commentary.

# Related Activities & Lesson Plans

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## [Making Radiation Photographs](#)

An interesting project that involves autoradiography to create photographs. The lesson plan provides detailed instructions about the supplies you will need.

## [No Impact Project](#)

The No Impact Project is an international, environmental, nonprofit project, founded in the spring of 2009. It was inspired by the No Impact Man book, film, and blog. The No Impact Project uses entertainment; education and group action to engage new people in the quest for ways of living that connect individual happiness with service to community and habitat.

## [No Impact Project Lesson Plan](#)

This lesson plan features the film and book from the project, No Impact Man, which follows a family in New York City as they examine how they live, exchange old habits for more environmentally-friendly ones, and discover in the process that such changes actually make them happier and healthier. The lesson also incorporates Web site resources that build on themes that emerge from the family's experiences. Educators can use this lesson to help students explore how they can reduce their daily energy consumption and speak out on the need to have long-term, sustainable energy solutions

## [Energy Haiku](#)

A collection of haikus about energy production and conservation.

## [Secondary Energy Infobook](#)

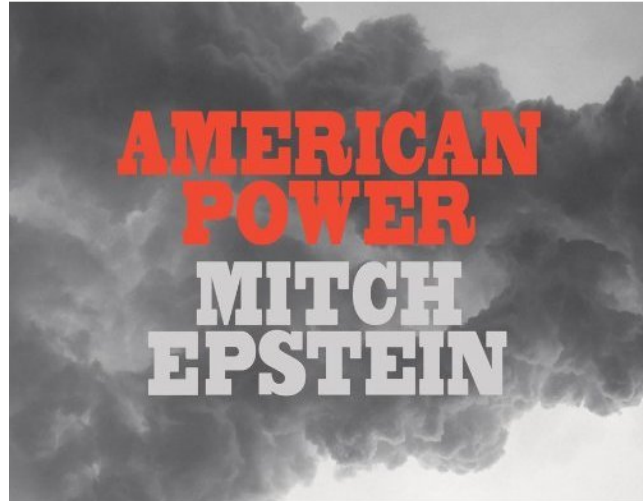
A comprehensive classroom resource containing fact sheets that introduce students to energy and describe energy sources, electricity consumption, efficiency, conservation, transportation, climate change, and emerging technologies. Infobooks can be used as a resource for many energy activities

# Recommended Books

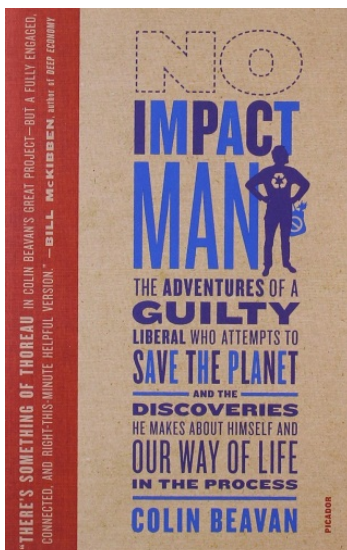
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## [American Power](#)

In *American Power*, Mitch Epstein investigates notions of power, both electrical and political. His focus is on energy - how it gets made, how it gets used, and the ramifications of both. From 2003 to 2008, he photographed at and around sites where fossil fuel, nuclear, hydroelectric, wind, and solar power are produced in the United States. The resulting photographs contain Epstein's signature complex wit, surprising detail, and formal rigor. These pictures illuminate the intersection between American society and American landscape. Here is a portrait of early 21st century America, as it clings to past comforts and gropes for a more sensible future. In an accompanying essay, Epstein discusses his method, and how making these photographs led him to think harder about the artist's role in a country teetering between collapse and transformation.



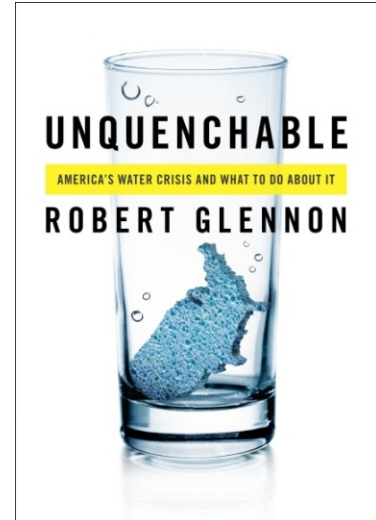
## [No Impact Man](#)



What does it really take to live eco-effectively? For one year, Colin Beavan swore off plastic and toxins, turned off his electricity, went organic, became a bicycle nut, and tried to save the planet from environmental catastrophe while dragging his young daughter and his Prada-wearing wife along for the ride. Together they attempted to make zero impact on the environment while living right in the heart of Manhattan, and this is the sensational, funny, and consciousness-raising story of how they did it. With *No Impact Man*, Beavan found that no-impact living is worthwhile--and richer, fuller, and more satisfying in the bargain.

## [Unquenchable](#)

In the middle of the Mojave Desert, Las Vegas casinos use billions of gallons of water for fountains, pirate lagoons, wave machines, and indoor canals. Meanwhile, the town of Orme, Tennessee, must truck in water from Alabama because it has literally run out. Robert Glennon captures the irony—and tragedy—of America's water crisis in a book that is both frightening and wickedly comical. From manufactured snow for tourists in Atlanta to trillions of gallons of water flushed down the toilet each year, *Unquenchable* reveals the heady extravagances and everyday inefficiencies that are sucking the nation dry.



## [Petrochemical America](#)



*Petrochemical America* offers an in-depth analysis of the causes of sustained environmental abuse along the largest river system in North America. It combines Richard Misrach's haunting photographs of Louisiana's "Chemical Corridor" with landscape architect Kate Orff's "Ecological Atlas"—a series of speculative drawings developed through intensive research and mapping of data from the region. Misrach and Orff's joint effort depicts and unpacks the complex cultural, physical and economic ecologies of a particular region along 150 miles of the Mississippi River, from Baton Rouge to New Orleans—an area of intense chemical production that became known as "Cancer Alley" when unusually high occurrences of the disease were discovered in the region. This revelatory collaboration has resulted in a complex document and an extensively researched guidebook to the ways in which the petrochemical industry has permeated every facet of contemporary life. However complicated by the region's own histories and particularities, "Cancer Alley" may well be an apt metaphor for the global impact of petrochemicals on the human landscape as a whole.

## [Alexis Rockman: Manifest Destiny](#)

Alexis Rockman's *Manifest Destiny* translates into haunting yet inspiring simplicity the environmental crisis of global warming. In conjunction with the opening of the Brooklyn Museum's new entrance pavilion in April 2004, the distinguished American artist Rockman (born 1962) was commissioned to paint a visionary 8-by-24-foot mural about the distant future boroughs. Rockman's project suggests what geological, botanical, and zoological changes might transpire in the ecosystem of the area thousands or even millions of years ahead.



# Energy Production & Consumption

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## [The US Department of Energy](#)

The US department of energy website has some useful educational resources to address basic questions about how electricity is produced and consumed in the United States.

## [Center for Nuclear Science and Technology Information](#)

We conduct various educational events like workshops for teachers, seminars for congressional staff, and webinars for journalists. The Center provides e-newsletters for those interested in learning more and staying current with nuclear science and nuclear technology. We offer teaching materials for educators and activities for students as well as access to nuclear experts.

## [National Energy Education Development \(NEED Project\)](#)

NEED Project website provides a wide variety of resources for teachers and students who are interested in exploring topics related to comprehensive energy education.