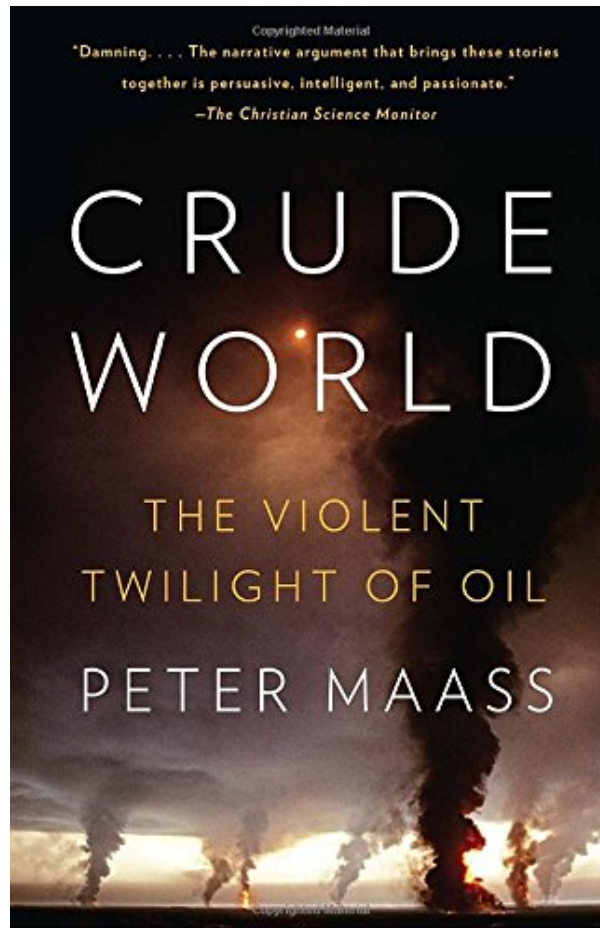


CRUDE WORLD: THE VIOLENT TWILIGHT OF OIL BY PETER MAASS



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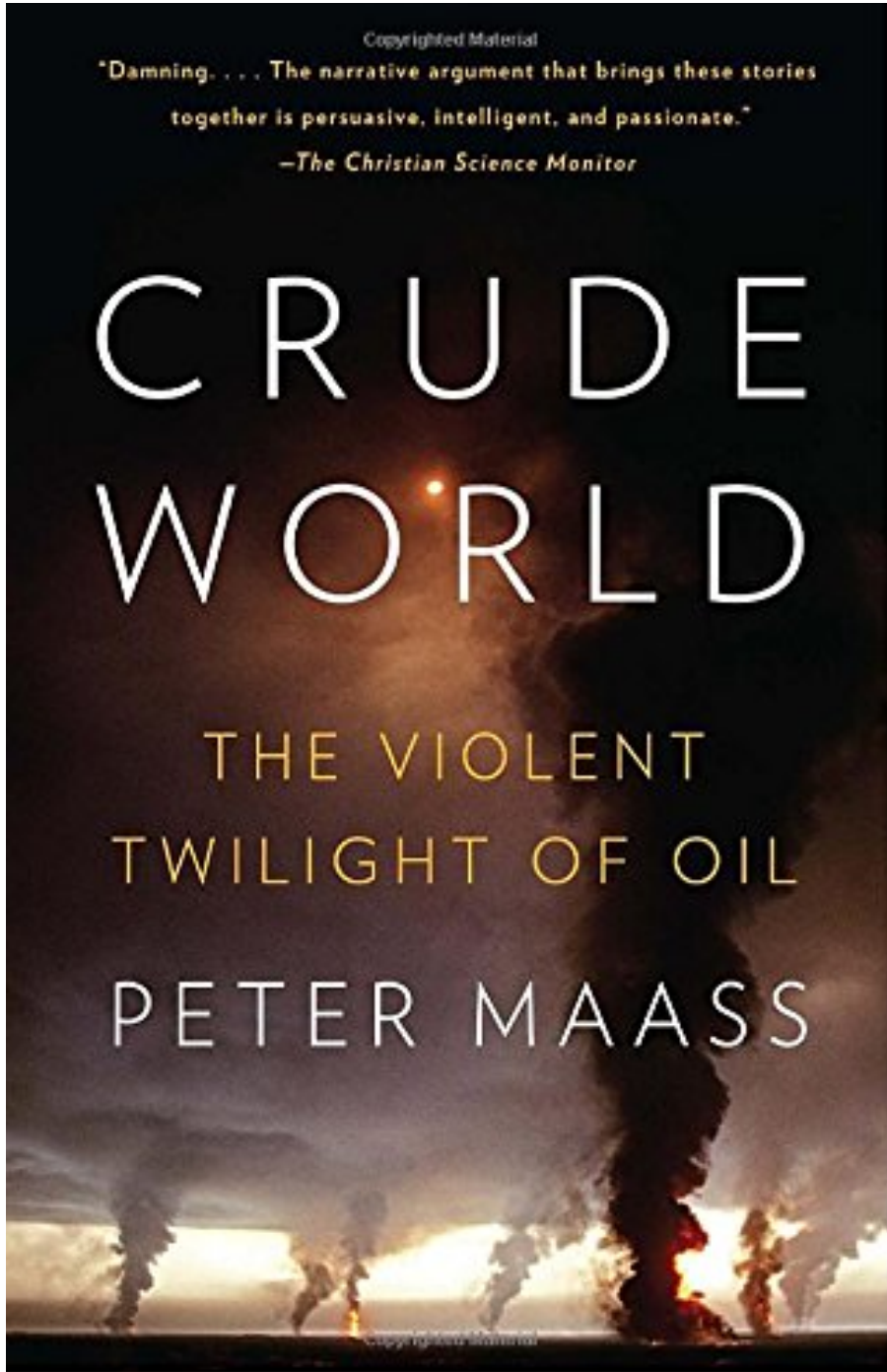
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The catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has brought new attention to the huge costs of our oil dependence. In this stunning and revealing book, Peter Maass examines the social, political, and environmental impact of petroleum on the countries that produce it.

Every unhappy oil-producing nation is unhappy in its own way, but all are touched by the “resource curse”—the power of oil to exacerbate existing problems and create new ones. Peter Maass presents a vivid portrait of the troubled world oil has created. From Saudi Arabia to Equatorial Guinea, from Venezuela to Iraq, the stories of rebels, royalty, middlemen, environmentalists, indigenous activists, and CEOs—all deftly and sensitively presented—come together in this startling and essential account of the consequences of our addiction to oil.

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- Used Book in Good Condition

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The Paradox of Plenty

By Nona

Maass does a great job explaining the Curse of Oil, the Paradox of Plenty, the Dutch Disease, or whatever name you want to call the effect of extractive industries on countries without much economic diversification and even less political transparency. He says little or nothing about Peak Oil, and how recent advances in drilling technology such as fracking, may have moved the doomsday clock of scarcity back a generation.

Maass takes us on a journey from country to country where the oil companies have raped the land while getting rich extracting and selling the black gold found underneath the land. The effects of unsupervised oil production are not pretty. Polluted waterways, birth defects and corruption are just a few of the side effects which happen when oil companies cut costs and corners in production, because they can, because their

competitors do, and because the individual governments allow them to.

Maass describes all of this in an interesting readable style, but he is more of an observer than a problem solver. He does not propose solutions to the curse. Is that solution an end to drilling? Is it better regulation? Is the solution industrial development to provide an economic counterweight to the money the drillers bring to a country? Maass does not really tell us. He describes the problem, but not the solution.

Maass's introductory quote John Paul Getty, however, may give us a hint as to what Maass thinks should be done. According to Getty: "The meek shall inherit the Earth, but not the mineral rights." Maybe Maass is telling us that we bear some responsibility for permitting First World companies to treat Third World nations like the Wild West where First World Rules don't apply and all that matters is power and greed. Maass may also be hinting that a little less meekness from the people who live where oil is found may help turn the Curse into a prayer.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Black Plague: the Enemy is Us

By Keith A. Comess

Oil seems to be bad news. The BP Deep Horizon disaster is a timely illustration of the point: the company, with cavalier disregard of safety issues lobbied strenuously against a variety of blowout containment measures. BP has a long record of disregard for facilities maintenance. BP has had several fatal disasters. BP has a dismal environmental record. BP is unlikely to clean up the mess in the Gulf of Mexico and has consistently and deliberately underestimated the extent of the damage. BP probably will not compensate the fisheries industry, tourism, homeowners and others for their losses assuming irreparable damage to the ecosystem and the Gulf economy has not already occurred. BP is emblematic of the problems inherent in the extraction and marketing of petroleum products and journalist Peter Maas very compellingly and cogently addresses the entire sorry mess in this book.

"Crude World" is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the petroleum industry and its captains: "The Prize" by Peter Yergin best fills that role. Instead, it is a trenchantly argued polemic and indictment: witness the chapter titles ("Scarcity", "Plunder", "Rot", "Contamination", "Fear", "Greed", "Desire", "Alienation", "Empire", "Mirage"). Maas uses copious examples which illustrate the book's premise. The author adroitly places editorial commentary to illustrate the facts which are seemingly self-evident.

Maas argues that petroleum corrupts and defiles the countries from which it is extracted. For example, he asserts that the government of Equatorial Guinea, with its inherent corruption and maniacal violence has been materially worsened by the presence of copious amounts of petroleum and the oceans of cash that it has garnered. He further claims that the brutality, inefficiency, avarice, disregard for the welfare of the population and the environment are all further exacerbated by petroleum-related wealth regardless of the country of origin, with the apparent exceptions of the UK and Norway. While Maas is doubtlessly correct in that assertion (witness the corruption and coziness between governments in the "developed countries" like the U.S. and major oil companies), he tacitly notes that its human nature to serve one's self-interest first: his explanation for the Norwegian phenomenon is that Norway is an advanced democracy. It seems to me that, were the principals of good government and rule of law already part of the social compact, petroleum would advance rather than retard development in other countries, as well. Prior to the discovery of oil, Norway already had a diversified economy and an intelligent, well-educated and cohesive electorate. Other countries, in contradistinction, repeatedly fall prey to oil company machinations. Perhaps it is because most lack a diversified economy, many have ideologically motivated governments and fearful, atomized populations. So, oil lubricates not only machinery, but corruption and other bad traits, as well. Not terribly surprising.

There are other looming problems for a fossil-fuel dependent world. In general, oil is located in ever more remote and inaccessible regions. Of equal importance, it seems to be concentrated in politically unstable areas. Alternative fossil-fuel sources (coal, oil shale, tar sands) are environmentally devastating, both in their extraction and in their combustion byproducts. Climate change is upon us and, at this stage can hardly be reversed. So, what does Maas advocate? Promotion of "social values", "Publish What You Pay" (transparency in government and corporations), enforcement of current laws are some proposed solutions. Education and incentives for developing alternatives are others.

Maas draws appropriate attention to the fact that petroleum extraction, while it provides money does not provide many jobs nor does it serve as an adequate basis for a self-sustaining economy. Witness, for example, the economic dead zone that exists in Iran and Saudi Arabia: minus petroleum revenue, there isn't much there. Maas also notes (but does not concentrate on) the environmental depredation caused by oil drilling, citing, for example, the debacle caused by Chevron in South America. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, when Chevron departed, the Equadoran national petroleum company simply perpetuated and ignored the matter.

In "Crude World", Maas makes a compelling and readable argument against the petroleum industry and its "Black Plaque". I see the matter somewhat differently: rather than creating a dichotomy ("us vs. them"), the problems associated with oil are more like Walt Kelly in "Pogo" characterized it: "We have met the enemy and he is us". Its time to do something. Maybe reading this book will help convince the "unconverted".

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

I liked the book but it is highly emotional

By Amazon Customer

Curiously this book starts out discussing the issue of how much oil is left, specifically in Saudi Arabia but then switches gears to document a whole series of cases studies in which oil has been a negative influence rather than a positive one on many of the countries where it has been found. Examples include Equatorial Guinea, Ecuador, Venezuela, Russia, Some of the Former Soviet Republics, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and others. Books like this that required field research by authors often produce very interesting anecdotes and stories about places many people never hear about, and in that sense, this book definitely doesn't disappoint. Sadly, many of the stories about graft, despotism, theft of national resources, bribes and accidents in the oil industry will probably not be much of a revelation to most readers. It is at the same time a triumph of the book and a shortcoming that the author has managed to present such an emotional view on the evils of oil. It certainly helps personalize it for many people who probably fill up their car without any thought or knowledge of where the oil comes from. On the other hand, his characterization tends to present a gloomy, almost dystopian view of many of these countries. I think the book is most definitely a useful primer on the seedier sides of oil production, but I would hope that readers of it would not take the vignettes presented here as a general characterization of the countries in question. In some cases, such as Equatorial Guinea, oil may actually be more or less the only show in town. In others, such as Venezuela or Russia, oil is only a part of multifaceted and complex cultures and economies. Overall, I really liked this book and found it to be a real page turner as well as one of those books that points out a lot of clever ways of viewing things. Oil production is a topic that is starting to get a bit saturated in the book industry, but this one still manages to be fairly fresh.

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told. Or, "It's not about oil at all." Oil is central to our world, but what role does it play in violent conflicts and the divide between rich and poor? Some excellent books had been published, of course, but mainly for academic or expert readers. I had found my subject--a book that would explain in compelling ways what we do for oil and what oil does to us.

Question: What surprised you most as you were reporting the story?

Peter Maass: Oil, as the topic of a book, defied the norms of interrogation. It doesn't have a voice, body, army or dogma of its own. How do you coax secrets from a liquid? I had to travel around the world and talk to all sorts of people--oilmen, warlords, politicians, economists, geologists, environmentalists, sheikhs, lobbyists, and roughnecks. The subjects we discussed ranged from history to law, corruption, engineering, culture, psychology, and justice. I was journeying through an intellectual as much as a physical world.

Question: What do you see as the most necessary change that needs to be made to begin to curtail the problems associated with oil?

Peter Maass: We need to curtail our appetite for oil. We need to understand--and I hope my book provides some help on this--that our dependence on oil harms the countries that produce it. Violence, poverty, corruption, pollution—these are linked to oil. The Deepwater Horizon disaster reminds us of what has been happening. We need to become more conservation-minded and efficient, and we need to develop renewable energy on a broad scale. For all of us, consumers and suppliers, it will be a long and painful process. But it can be done.

(Photo © Erinn Hartman)

From Publishers Weekly

Maass (*Love Thy Neighbor*) brings fresh detail to a familiar topic in this worrying but never sensationalistic look at the murky world of oil. Supplies of the resource may already have entered a period of rapid decline, with Saudi Arabia, long the world's largest oil producer, possibly passing the peak point of production just as demand from China surges. Maass exposes the staggering destruction oil has wrought in countries less well-known as energy suppliers. The author recounts how the greed of Western oil companies, governments and consumers have propped up such vicious and corrupt dictatorships as that in Equatorial Guinea, where flights run nonstop from the destitute capital to Texas. The author's Toxic Tour of Ecuador uncovers more cause for concern, like the fact that more oil has been spilled into that country's rain forests and stretch of Amazon than were spilled by the Exxon Valdez in Alaska. Reported from countries ranging from Russia to Nigeria, Maass's heartfelt and beautifully crafted book reveals how one of oil's darkly magical properties is that it erases inconvenient memories. (Sept. 23)

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Review

“Powerfully written. . . . Evocative. . . . Despite much hue and cry today, Maass argues, we seem unable to move beyond an oil-based global economy, and we are going to hit a wall soon.”

—The New York Times Book Review

“Perpetually informative. . . . Maass’s book is in a class by itself, as he constructs his relentless indictment on a foundation of first-rate reporting and superb writing.”

—USA Today

“Maass is a keen observer, a fine storyteller and forceful writer, and his book is a readable gem for anyone

seeking a primer on the history of oil and its geopolitical ramifications.”

—San Francisco Chronicle

“Authentic, persuasive, and damning. . . . The narrative argument that brings these stories together is persuasive, intelligent, and passionate.”

—The Christian Science Monitor

“Sharp. . . . Maass succeeds in portraying an energy crisis mostly ignored or misunderstood in the developed world.”

—Financial Times

“Riveting and illuminating. . . . The book is not about oil policy or the energy crisis, at least not primarily; it is a moral reckoning with basic instincts.”

—The Nation

“A nice primer on the history of oil and its geopolitical ramifications.”

—The Houston Chronicle

“A fascinating, nightmarish journey to the far end of the pipeline. If you want to know the true cost of America’s oil addiction—and if even you don’t—you should read this book.”

—Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*

“A spare, engaging work of reporting.”

—Robert D. Kaplan, *The Wall Street Journal*

“A disturbing catalogue of the underside of the international oil industry. . . . This is not a dispassionate exploration of sticky business issues; it’s an indictment and a conviction wrapped in one.”

—The Washington Post

“The strength of *Crude World*, filled with vivid reporting, is that it leaves you no option but to care.”

—The Observer (London)

“A fascinating if alarming book. . . . Nightmare scenarios and grim reality checks are scary stuff, but Maass delivers the bad news in prose that teems with keen observations and well-reported, unforgettable details.”

—Richmond Times-Dispatch

“*Crude World* gets its energy from Peter Maass’s exhaustive investigation and first-hand experience and results in an illuminating narrative of the true impact of the global dependence on oil. . . . Essential reading for these times and for anyone interested in making the right decisions about our energy future.”

—Robert Redford

“What’s compelling [about *Crude World*] is the reporting Maass has done from places ruined by dependence on a substance that, he argues convincingly, kills more than it liberates.”

—The Boston Globe

“Unflinching. . . . Engrossing. . . . Equal parts *Heart of Darkness* and *Mad Max*.”

—Washington Monthly

“With the clarity of a hard-boiled investigator and the grace of a fine writer, Peter Maass reveals how oil has

cursed the countries that possess it, corrupted those who want it, and wrought havoc on a world addicted to it. Brilliant and compelling.”

—Robert B. Reich, author of Supercapitalism

“A lucid account that places readers in the big picture. . . . [Maass’s] truths are painful and unavoidable. . . . He has written a very brave book.”

—Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star

“Well argued and illustrated. . . . [Maass’s] descriptions of the rape of countries as diverse as Nigeria and Ecuador are all the more devastating for being unpreachy.”

—The Telegraph (London)

“Getting off oil is a great idea for a lot of reasons, like saving the planet’s climate. But Peter Maass gives us another set of bonuses. If you think drug dealing is a dirty business, then meet the biggest drug of all.”

—Bill McKibben, author Deep Economy

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