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Crude World: The Violent Twilight of Oil

By Peter Maass



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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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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Q&A with Peter Maass

Question: You write about BP's problematic safety record in *Crude World*. Were you surprised by the Deepwater Horizon disaster?

Peter Maass: Unfortunately not. Within the past decade, BP has been responsible for disasters in other locations, such as an explosion at a Texas refinery that took 15 lives, as well as major spills from its pipelines in Alaska. Taking risks and cutting corners appear to be the norm. But BP succeeded in the domain that counts the most in any industry--it was highly profitable. Tony Hayward, the firm's chief executive, and John Browne, his predecessor, were highly regarded by their peers and their shareholders.



Question: What do you think of BP's response so far?

Peter Maass: It has been miserable, and predictably so. Due to its cost-cutting and its hubris, BP did not have an adequate response plan. Whether from mendacity or ineptitude, it underestimated the spill in the early days and refused to make public the video feeds it had of the underwater gusher (the government eventually forced it to share the video). But it's important to understand that BP is not a tremendous exception; blowouts and spills and secrecy are consistent features of oil extraction. Although a handful of companies are better-run than BP, a larger number are far worse.

Question: In *Crude World* you discuss major spills in Ecuador and Nigeria. How do you think the Deepwater Horizon spill will compare?

Peter Maass: It's unlikely the amount leaking into the Gulf of Mexico will come close to what's happened in Nigeria. For Nigeria, a drip-drip scenario over the course of decades has all but destroyed the Niger Delta wetlands. In Ecuador, spilled oil isn't the only problem because billions of gallons of toxic wastewater have been poured into rivers. We need to understand that oil extraction poses a range of hazards--including the burning of natural gas--and spills are just one.

Question: What initially got you interested in the story of oil?

Peter Maass: Much of my writing life involved wars, and oil was often mentioned. "It's all about oil," I was 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*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ruth Beasley:

Reading a guide can be one of a lot of task that everyone in the world adores. Do you like reading book so. There are a lot of reasons why people enjoy it. First reading a e-book will give you a lot of new info. When you read a guide you will get new information simply because book is one of a number of ways to share the information or their idea. Second, looking at a book will make an individual more imaginative. When you reading through a book especially fictional book the author will bring you to definitely imagine the story how the personas do it anything. Third, you may share your knowledge to other people. When you read this *Crude World: The Violent Twilight of Oil*, you could tells your family, friends and soon about yours publication. Your knowledge can inspire the others, make them reading a reserve.

Doreen Harry:

A lot of people always spent all their free time to vacation as well as go to the outside with them loved ones or their friend. Did you know? Many a lot of people spent they will free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. If you wish to try to find a new activity here is look different you can read some sort of book. It is really fun for you personally. If you enjoy the book that you read you can spent all day long to reading a e-book. The book *Crude World: The Violent Twilight of Oil* it is very good to read. There are a lot of people who recommended this book. These people were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to deliver this book you can buy the particular e-book. You can m0ore very easily to read this book from a smart phone. The price is not too expensive but this book has high quality.

Stephanie Sellers:

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Kenneth Garrison:

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