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Drilling Down: The Gulf Oil Debacle and Our Energy Dilemma

Joseph A. Tainter, T.W. Patzek

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For more than a century, oil has been the engine of growth for a society that delivers an unprecedented standard of living to many. We now take for granted that economic growth is good, necessary, and even inevitable, but also feel a sense of unease about the simultaneous growth of complexity in the processes and institutions that generate and manage that growth. As societies grow more complex through the bounty of cheap energy, they also confront problems that seem to increase in number and severity. In this era of fossil fuels, cheap energy and increasing complexity have been in a mutually-reinforcing spiral. The more energy we have and the more problems our societies confront, the more we grow complex and require still more energy. How did our demand for energy, our technological prowess, the resulting need for complex problem solving, and the end of easy oil conspire to make the Deepwater Horizon oil spill increasingly likely, if not inevitable? This book explains the real causal factors leading up to the worst environmental catastrophe in U.S. history, a disaster from which it will take decades to recover.

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