



Creating the Twentieth Century: Technical Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact (Technical Revolutions and Their Lasting Impact)

Vaclav Smil

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The period between 1867 and 1914 remains the greatest watershed in human history since the emergence of settled agricultural societies: the time when an expansive civilization based on synergy of fuels, science, and technical innovation was born. At its beginnings in the 1870s were dynamite, the telephone, photographic film, and the first light bulbs. Its peak decade - the astonishing 1880s - brought electricity - generating plants, electric motors, steam turbines, the gramophone, cars, aluminum production, air-filled rubber tires, and prestressed concrete. And its post-1900 period saw the first airplanes, tractors, radio signals and plastics, neon lights and assembly line production. This book is a systematic interdisciplinary account of the history of this outpouring of European and American intellect and of its truly epochal consequences. It takes a close look at four fundamental classes of these epoch-making innovations: formation, diffusion, and standardization of electric systems; invention and rapid adoption of internal combustion engines; the unprecedented pace of new chemical syntheses and material substitutions; and the birth of a new information age. These chapters are followed by an evaluation of the lasting impact these advances had on the 20th century, that is, the creation of high-energy societies engaged in mass production aimed at improving standards of living.

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