



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

By Vaclav Smil

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

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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### Review

"[Smil's] scholarship mocks the boundaries that separate history from economics, geography from technology studies. He is unusually adept at combining his knowledge of how techniques actually work with his ability to illustrate their overall effects on society and the human condition.

The amount of pure learning and erudition that Smil brings to these 700 pages has to be experienced to be believed. In telling the story of modern technology since 1870 in a coherent way these 700 pages totally eclipse the competition."--Joel Mokyr, Departments of Economics and History, Northwestern University

"For readers interested in a good summary of the key technical developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they will find much to value in Smil's book."--*American Historical Review*

### About the Author

**Vaclav Smil** is Distinguished Professor at the University of Manitoba, and the author of 19 books, including *Feeding the World* (MIT Press, 2000), *Enriching the Earth: Transformation of World Food Production* (MIT Press 2001), and *Energy at the Crossroads* (MIT Press 2003).

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