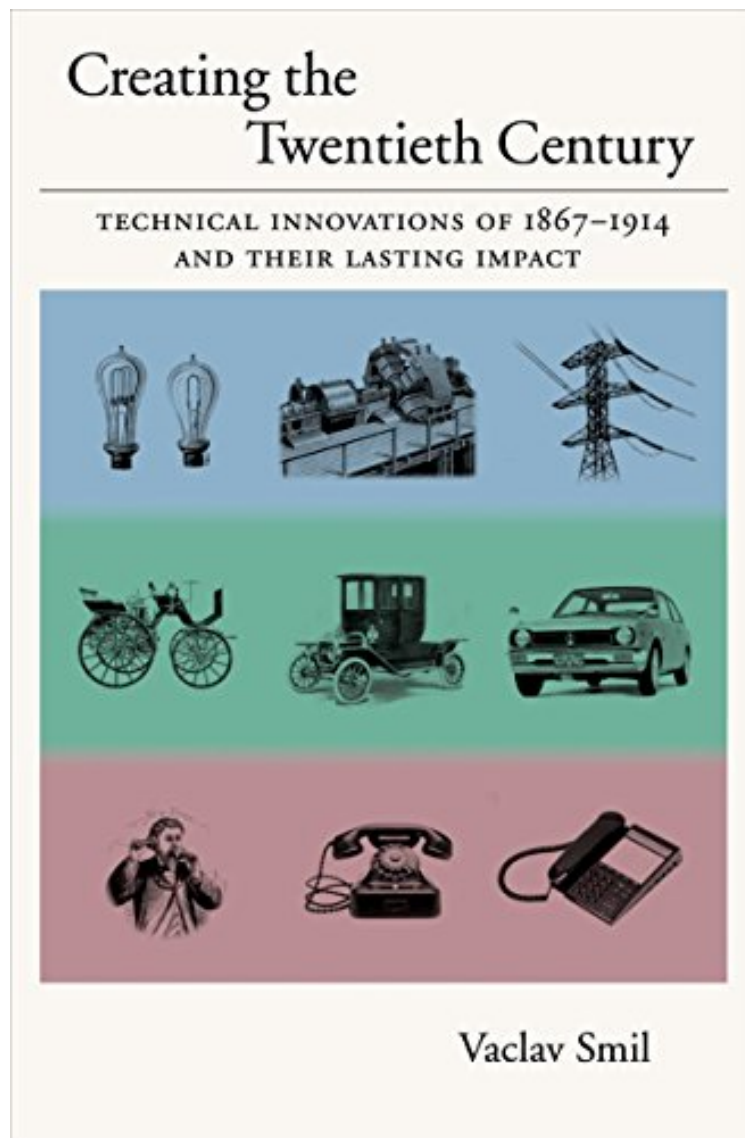


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Creating the Twentieth Century: Technical Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact (Technical Revolutions and Their Lasting Impact)

Vaclav Smil

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Proves his thesis: the period between the Civil War and WWI was the most inventive in history By David C. Casler Good book, easy read. His thesis is that the period from about 1860 to 1915 (give or take) was the most inventive in history, and that many things we take for granted now were invented then and only modified since. I think he proves his point handily, at least in the United States, although he does dip into Europe here and there. What he doesn't cover is why--why was this period so inventive? As an engineer, I noted that occasionally he got his units wrong. The Kindle version that I read almost appears to have been a scan of the hard copy converted to text, because there are occasional missing words and instead of 1.2 there would be i.2 and that sort, but these errors are minor. I do wish he'd used footnotes for references rather than (put the references inline like this). And the index has the page numbers in the hard copy, which are useless on Kindle. I don't think they should charge what they do for the Kindle book given the poor conversion from hardcopy to ebook--oh, well, this is distressingly common these days--no one reformats properly for Kindle. But, all those annoyances aside, I was deeply fascinated with his insights into how modern inventions, from the telephone, light bulb, radio, public transportation, and the automobile (and the airplane) all came out of this period. For the engineer in me, he had lots of satisfying detail. I do recommend this book for the technically-minded--a fascinating tour through technical history.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The content of the book is terrific. The editing of this book by Oxford "University ... By Charles Stokes The content of the book is terrific. The editing of this book by Oxford "University Press" is atrocious! Missing articles, left out words, disagreement of subject and verb, and other gross errors are there by the hundreds. It reads like a rough draft from an author for whom English is not even a second language (probably true, in this case). I don't blame the author, but I expect better from Oxford. Transforming the Twentieth Century by the same author and publisher suffers from the same ills.

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.