

Blowout: Corrupted Democracy, Rogue State Russia, and the Richest, Most Destructive Industry on Earth by Rachel Maddow: A Review

Despite one minor flaw, this is an important book. The subtitle pretty well captures the gist of this history and critical analysis of the oil and gas industry, nationally and internationally. Rachel traces the industry from its birth at the discovery of that first oil well in Pennsylvania in 1859 to our current dependence on oil and our feeding that dependence through horizontal drilling and fracking.

Along the way she traces Vladimir Putin's rise to power and his consolidation of his power by dominating the oil and gas industries of Russia, his making them the basis of his political power in Russia and the rest of the world. She covers his crimes in Crimea and the Ukraine, his hosting the Olympic Games, his nurturing of oligarchs dependent on him and thus subservient to him, his malign meddling in our election in 2016.

Rachel introduces us to the Resource Curse, which explains the manner in which rich natural resources in an undeveloped region lead not to a better life for the ordinary people there, but to vast wealth for the kleptocratic authoritarians who rise to power and the increasing poverty and decreasing quality of life and political freedom of the people. Rachel's prime example is Equatorial Guinea, where the oil industry is directly involved in propping up a disgusting (no other word will quite do the job) president and his disgusting family.

In this connection ExxonMobil and its then CEO Rex Tillerson are exposed as facilitators-in-chief, as they are exposed as working hand-in-glove with Putin.

Rachel also covers the Oklahoma saga, in which the oil barons enrich themselves, impoverish the state, filch the NBA Supersonics team from Seattle to Oklahoma City, and treat Oklahoma to a swarm of earthquakes. Indeed Rachel's book is filled with fascinating stories to spice the sordid history of oil extraction, environmental pollution locally and globally, driven by a greed that might embarrass Gordon Gecko, the hero of the movie *Greed*.

The minor flaw? Rachel affects an informality of style that does not serve her or her topic well. . . . Still, you will be the wiser in many ways when you have finished this wonderful and powerful book.

Bob McDonnell