The Twentieth Century— The Age of Energy

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Future historians will look back and declare the 20th Century as the **Age of Energy**, in a context similar to the Industrial Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment. Since 1900, the following world growth has taken place, mostly due to the use of energy:

World Population grew from 1.6 billion to 5.7 billion
GNP grew to $30 trillion from around $1 to $2 trillion
Life expectancy increased from 33 years to 66 years
People and goods have centuplicated their mobility this century

The logic for this huge world development might be attributed to many things, but the increasing use of energy will dominate the reasoning. Eventually, historians will formally recognize that the utilization of energy was what made the difference, and will then acknowledge that Houston was at the center of this "Energy Revolution."*

Reliable data for the world energy consumption in 1900 are not available. However, the United States consumed 9 quadrillion Btu in 1900 and today consumes 90 quadrillion Btu, a tenfold increase this century. The U.S. became a superpower during the 20th century, and this is mostly due to the use of abundant, economical energy.

All of this economic and social development came about in spite of some very negative early *official* government energy forecasts:

*Editor's Note: Mr. Steffes refers here to the commercial development of the international oil and gas industry. Until 30 years ago, Houston established, worldwide, the price of oil.

Year	Historical Energy Forecasts by Government Agencies
1866	U.S. Revenue Commission says synthetics available if oil production should end.
1883	Little or no chance of oil in California—U.S. Geological Survey
1891	Little of no chance for oil in Kansas or Texas—U.S. Geological Survey
1908	Maximum future supply of oil—23 billion barrels—U.S. Geological Survey
1914	Total future production only 6 billion barrels—U.S. Bureau of Mines
1920	U.S. needs foreign oil and synthetics, peak domestic production almost reached—Dir. of U.S. Geological Survey
1931	Must import as much foreign oil as possible to save domestic supply—Secretary of Interior
1939	U.S. oil supplies will last only 13 years—U.S. Dept. of Interior
1947	Sufficient oil cannot be found in the U.S.—Department of State
1949	End of U.S. oil supply almost in sight— Secretary of Interior

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Dale W. Steffes, P.E., founder of Planning and Forecasting Consultants, Houston, Texas, is a gifted observer of the international energy scene. He specializes in independent analyses of market opportunities for major energy producers and users. Mr. Steffes' freedom from the strictures which often cause corporate and industry errors in judgment have made his evaluations especially valuable to those executives who understand the merits of a professional outside viewpoint.

Mr. Steffes is a member of *SPEE's* Editorial Review Board.