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Every human activity entails the conversion of energy. Changes in the fundamental sources of energy, and in the use of energy sources, are a basic dimension of the evolution of society. Our appreciation of the significance of these processes is essential to a fuller understanding of world history. Vaclav Smil offers a comprehensive look at the role of energy in world history, ranging from human muscle-power in foraging societies and animal-power in traditional farming to preindustrial hydraulic techniques and modern fossil-fueled civilization. The book combines a vast historical sweep with cross-cultural comparisons and is enhanced by illustrations and accessible quantitative material. Students and general readers alike will gain an understanding of energy's fundamental role in human progress. Smil illuminates the role played by various means of harnessing energy in different societies and provides new insights by explaining the impact and limitations of these fundamental physical inputs whether it is in the cultivation of crops, smelting of metals, waging of war, or the mass production of goods. While examining the energetic foundations of historical changes, *Energy in World History* avoids simplistic, deterministic views of energy needs and recognizes the complex interplay of physical and social realities.

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