

Natural Resources Video Collection

The Prize

PBS (January 1993)

4 segments, 335 minutes, VHS

This documentary covers the history of the oil and petroleum industry with 4 different segments. Each segment is recorded off the air from PBS, each on a different videocassette. The videos are in color with a lot of black and white historical footage. They are not high quality recordings as there are a lot of static and tracking problems with the tapes. The tape for Part I is the poorest, but the other 3 tapes are of slightly better quality.

Part I is only 22 minutes long, as most of the beginning was not recorded. It starts toward the end of the segment and discusses the oil industry in the late 1800's and the 2 leaders of the industry. The video discusses the merger of oil giants Shell and Royal Dutch and how the industry was affected. Only a brief part of this segment discusses the Middle East. This is a brief discussion of the oil found in Persia, which was the first oil found in the Middle East. Next the video examines the role of oil and the internal combustion engine in WWI, and the expansion of Shell due to the war.

Part II (101 min) is called "The Black Giant" and picks up where Part I left off: WWI. The video goes into great detail about an Armenian named Gulbenkian who controlled the oil supply in the Middle East, and the struggle between him and Walter Teagle, president of Standard Oil, for these foreign oil reserves. This struggle was due to the predicted shortage of oil reserves in the U.S. in the early postwar years. The video then shows how the industry changed as oil reserves were discovered within the U.S., especially East Texas, and how a predicted shortage turned into a great surplus in a short time. Then comes the Great Depression with the decrease in demand for oil, and WWII and an examination of oil's role in this conflict.

Part III (105 min)

Although oil's role in WWII was addressed in the previous segment, it is discussed further in Part III, entitled "Crude Diplomacy." Part III examines the role of oil in world politics during WWII. The role of Saudi Arabia in the oil industry and its transformation from a Bedouin state to a modernized nation is explained to a great extent in the first part of this tape. Later, Iran's role in the industry is discussed, including the presence of the British and the nationalization of Iran's oil in 1951. With the newfound oil in the Middle East, the region became more politically significant in global politics. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, along with the idea of beginning OPEC are both discussed. The end of this video discusses Libya's role in the oil industry and how this country's situation ushered in a new era of oil production.

Part IV (107 min)

Part IV, “The Tinderbox” discusses more modern issues in the oil industry. The segment begins with scenes of the Gulf War, which are discussed in greater detail later in the segment. Conflict over oil from the past few decades is discussed, including the Iran-Iraq war, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Gulf War. The reasons for the West’s presence in the Middle East are discussed along with its relations to several of the region’s countries. The end of this segment focuses on the environmental consequences of relying heavily on oil. From the devastating fires in Kuwait resulting from the Gulf War, to the air pollution in the modern world, it is evident that the dependency on oil may come with a heavy price for the future.

Rivers of Fire

Landmark Films

40 minutes, color

This video focuses on water as the most important resource, as well as an important source of conflict, in the Middle East. The story begins with an explanation of how Turkey has the upper hand in the struggle for the water of the Tigris and Euphrates because both originate there. Turkey has built one of the world’s largest dams, the Ataturk dam, which controls the Euphrates river. However, this river also runs into Syria and Iraq, and the video explains the tensions between Turkey, Iraq, and Syria over the rights to the water in this river. Also discussed are the struggles for control of even small rivers and tributaries that run through the region. The water crisis in the countries of Jordan and Lebanon is also covered. The end of the video focuses on the struggle within Israel and the Palestinian territories. Although Israel’s policy has been to have equal drinking water for all, the video shows disparity among many villages. And some Palestinians interviewed also claim that water was used as a sanctioning device during the Intifada. This video is very informational and contains many interviews with local citizens. The footage shot in these countries gives any viewer a good idea of the growing water crisis in the area.
