

The full story behind our fossil-fuel addiction

■ **Author Edwin Black looks to the past for solutions to our dependence on oil and its perilous political, social and economic consequences.**

BY RICHARD PACTHER
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Internal Combustion: How Corporations and Governments Addicted the World to Oil and Derailed the Alternatives. Edwin Black. St. Martin's Press. 396 pages. \$27.95.

This is madness. We are fixed and focused on protecting holes in the ground half a world away because they contain the makings of fuel to power our cars, homes, businesses and nearly everything else. We live in fear of terrorists who want to destroy us because, among other things, they are offended by our defense of the people who run the countries with the holes in the ground.

We think we see a glimmer of hope: Ethanol fuel made from corn and hybrid vehicles that run on gasoline and elec-

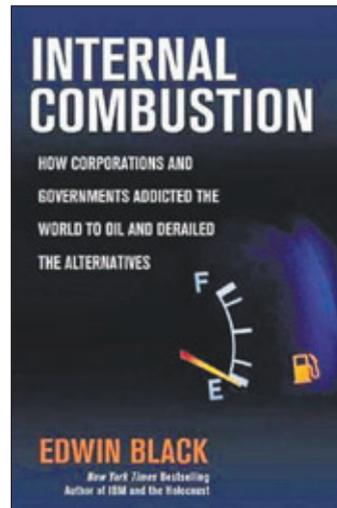
tricity.

The future sure looks bright, doesn't it?

Not as bright as the past, and the future that might have been.

In this new book by the author of the shockingly revealing *IBM and the Holocaust*, Edwin Black writes that 120 years ago, America was on the verge of using electric batteries to power our cars, a project spearheaded by Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. Homes would also run on batteries. We would be wireless and relatively independent. Pollution from burning gas and oil, and its deleterious effects on human health, would have been largely unknown, and principles other than the protection of oil fields would guide most aspects of U.S. foreign policy.

What happened? Black recounts how the forced scarcity and control of resources, abetted and legitimized by governing authorities — whether they ruled by divine right or constitutional decree — is as old as Robin Hood. In fact, the apocryphal outlaw



who stole from the rich and gave to the poor made his mischief in an English forest controlled by the monarchy for hundreds of years, when wood was the world's fuel. As coal superseded its use, the cartel known as "the hostmen" controlled mining and distribution. Their hegemony extended to governments and transportation, and the price of food, goods and services was based

on the resulting inflated energy costs.

Sound familiar? As he threads through history, Black presents a meticulously researched case that leads to the inescapable conclusion that our present energy "crisis" is just the latest chapter of a story as old as civilization itself.

Why did electricity fail to take hold over a century ago, even backed by the revered Ford and Edison? Along with cartels and manufactured scarcity, corruption and collusion among financiers, speculators and government lackeys kept the power from the people. Moreover, these actions thwarted the development and implementation of new technologies. General Motors, in particular, played a pivotal role, according to Black, in subverting and destroying any technology that might undermine the primacy of the gasoline-powered internal combustion engine.

Black's book is compelling and even uplifting, despite its

depressingly serious tone, as his copiously footnoted revelations may bode well for an inevitable emancipation from the tyranny of oil. But he's not a glib prose stylist, and the dense text may prove difficult for short attention spans and superficial reading. He's not an alarmist or conspiracy buff, either, and succeeds in maintaining an apolitical and objective distance from his material.

There's a lot of ground covered, including other shocking allegations of possibly criminal — and treasonous — activity by General Motors and others, but the most pressing reason to read *Internal Combustion* lies in the one-word answer Black offered when asked of his motivation for writing this book.

"Terrorism," he said.

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MEET THE AUTHOR

Terrorism motivated Edwin Black to write about oil

■ **The author discusses why a powerful American company continues to play a pivotal role in keeping the U.S. dependent on oil.**

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BLACK

Author Edwin Black writes difficult books on painful subjects: American companies' collaboration with Nazis during the Holocaust, how "undesirable" people were sterilized for pseudo-scientific social engineering, Iraq, and now the future of energy and how the development of electric cars was thwarted by a criminal conspiracy between automakers and corrupt politicians.

Black began his current tour in support of his new book, *Internal Combustion*, in South Florida, with several days of seminars and events at Nova Southeastern University and Florida Atlantic University in mid-September.

His 2001 blockbuster, *IBM and the Holocaust*, was sparked in 1993, when Black, son of concentration camp survivors, wondered why an IBM card-sorting machine was on display at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. The resulting book contained shocking revelations about the company's long-term collaboration with Adolph Hitler and the Nazis. The U.S. firm's machines made the German government's census possible. It also made the imprisonment and extermination of millions of Jews and other religious, ethnic, social and political minorities in Europe chillingly efficient.

His new book, an exposé of the confluence of corrupt forces that killed the growth of nonfossil transportation fuels, the trolley system and what is now called "alternative energy," is presented in the context of history stretching over a millennium, back when wood was man's primary fuel and horses were the main form of conveyance.

Miami Herald Business Books columnist Richard Pachter interviewed Black, who

lives in Washington, D.C., during a short break in the author's South Florida appearances.

Q: "*Internal Combustion*" begins with the scene of the devastating fire on the eve of Thomas Alva Edison's and Henry Ford's announcement of their electric car project. It essentially killed their plans. You did not say who started the fire, though you seemed to imply it was not an accident and its circumstances were suspicious. Can you speculate who did it?

A: The sabotage and mysterious fire will never be explained. There are those who saw what Edison was doing as the end of internal combustion.

Q: Did it pain you to say nice things about Henry Ford, one of the most virulent anti-Semites in history, in light of your earlier work and the fact that you're the child of Holocaust survivors?

A: The Henry Ford I wrote about was a brilliant man in the decade before he became the greatest anti-Semite in the history of the United States.

Q: Automaker GM plays

quite a role in this book, too.

A: General Motors is probably the most unpatriotic and destructive automotive company in the history of this country. They've done more to adversely affect our transportation than any other company. They continue to hurt this country and, most of all, General Motors went into a staunch alliance with Adolph Hitler that I'll soon be writing a great deal about. We must never forget that the blitzkrieg [was conducted] in a Blitz truck (from GM's Opel division). Alfred Sloan (GM's president) was so antagonistic to this country because of FDR and the New Deal; he sponsored unrest, social obstruction, tried to prolong The Depression while doing everything he could to enhance, strengthen and resurrect the German economy. He himself said that that's what he was doing.

Q: The introductions of all your books admonish prospective buyers that unless they're willing to read every word — in order, without skimming or skipping around — they should walk

away. Why can't I just skim through your new book?

A: It's not an encyclopedia. It's not a travel guide. I'm providing a context and without it, it's easy to misconstrue, exaggerate and twist what I say. And there's even more background material on the website, www.InternalCombustionBook.com.

Q: Your previous books emerged from your life, but where did this come from? How did you decide to do this?

A: Terrorism. The next strike will push us over the brink.

Q: During your last tour, in support of "Banking On Baghdad," I asked what you were working on next, but you refused to go on the record. Will you tell me now what your plans are after this, and what your next book will be about?

A: I'm going to rest and regroup a bit — at least that's my intention, though you never know. But as I told you then, whenever anyone asks about my next project, I always say, "It's a secret."