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## Review/Television; The Epic Of Oil, Catalyst Of Conflict

By WALTER GOODMAN

Admirers of "The Prize," Daniel Yergin's rich history of oil, take note. The television version that occupies much of prime time on PBS this week is a gusher. It is eight hours' worth of big deals and big dealers, high risks and low machinations, tough competition and imperialist adventures, technological achievements and social transformations, played out across the world.

A lucid narration, delivered by Donald Sutherland, is enhanced by the observations of Mr. Yergin, a continuing presence through the series. He is joined by historians, biographers and people who knew or worked with the industry's creators, to produce an absorbing account of what is justifiably billed as "The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power."

The first hour focuses on John D. Rockefeller, the churchgoing, charity-giving Sunday school-teaching symbol of 19th-century capitalism, who became the richest and possibly the best-hated man in the world by creating Standard Oil, a multi-national corporation long before the era of multi-nationals. An off-camera voice reads the succinct and comforting Rockefeller philosophy: "I believe the power to make money is a gift of God."

Ida M. Tarbell, whose muckraking magazine articles helped break up Standard Oil, describes her first sight of him -- "a blank eye, looking through and through things and telling nothing" -- and there is the expressionless face looking out at us from the tube.

Newsreel film, photographs, magazine illustrations and cartoons -- hail to the researchers! -- are used in exciting montages to power the story. Many of the pictures are remarkable in their own right, like the priceless scene of old John D., amid greenery and wearing an odd hat, leading an admiring group in a vigorously rendered hymn. Even the settings for the interviews are revealing, and the musical score adds vigor.

As tonight's opener relates, it all began with the discovery that a peculiar product called rock oil could be turned into something called kerosene and used to light houses. Turn-of-the-century photographs capture the rough conditions of life near the fields, bringing home Tarbell's recollection of her childhood in a western Pennsylvania boom town where "every tree, every shrub, every bit of grass in the vicinity was coated with black grease and left to die."

How Rockefeller, who established a powerful position by developing the first oil refinery, pressured railroads for rebates and squeezed out independent producers makes an instructive piece of American business history. David Rockefeller appears now and then to offer a more benign view of his grandpa's activities: "Certainly Grandfather knew the way his business should be done. As far as I know he did not break any laws." Mr. Yergin does not exactly disagree. In the post-Civil War era of unfettered capitalism, he notes, "If you could get away with it, you got away with it."

The first hour ends with events that would transform American society: the invention of the internal-combustion engine, the discovery of oil in Texas and Theodore Roosevelt's antitrust campaign that broke Rockefeller's hold on the industry.

Tonight's second hour sweeps from Baku to Sumatra, on the track of the European powers that moved forcefully into the worldwide oil competition. It concentrates especially on the unlikely partnership, out of which was born Royal Dutch Shell, between Marcus Samuel, the Jew from the East End of London who became the Lord Mayor of London, and Henri Deterding, the dashing Dutch oil man who turned into a Nazi supporter in his old age.

Portents of commotions to come are seen in the building of the world's first fleet of oil tankers, the first war (in Sumatra) fought and won for the sake of oil, the first deliberately set oil-field fire (by revolutionaries in Baku), which, Mr. Sutherland notes, was "the first time that world oil supplies were

interrupted for political reasons," and the discovery of oil in the Middle East.

Tonight, too, you will hear an enduring principle, phrased by the young Winston Churchill referring to the use of oil instead of coal on British warships: "Mastery itself is the prize." What he meant is laid out through the week as the documentary makes vivid the geopolitical consequences of the discovery of oil in Arabia, the critical part oil played in World War II, the establishment of OPEC and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The series ends with an analysis of the conflict between energy and the environment.

On the subject of prizes Mr. Yergin has already won a Pulitzer for his book, and there is every prospect that the producers of this ambitious work -- William Cran and his colleagues -- will be granted their share of honors for mastery of the television documentary.

("The Prize: Journey Through America's Oil Age," an exhibition pegged to the documentary, can be seen at the PaineWebber Art Gallery in Manhattan through Feb. 5.) 'Relentless' 'Mind of a Killer' Tonight at 9 on NBC (Channel 4 in New York) To turn from what television can do to what it mostly does:

Clip a few fatal-attraction and sex-abuse headlines from yesterday's tabloid; add a psychoanalyst's couch and a courtroom set from innumerable dramas and deliver with the flashbacks, slow-motion passages, peculiar lighting and overwrought music beloved of television directors, and you have the main elements of "Relentless: Mind of a Killer."

Tonight's NBC time-killer has to do with a criminal psychologist (Tim Matheson) whose lamentable past has earned him the title of "doctor of desire" and who becomes involved in the defense of a woman ("the butcheress of Bayview Terrace") accused of stabbing her husband 27 times.

The narration by the conscientious psychologist may remind you, by turns, of "Dragnet" and "Get Smart" ("There was only one card left to play"), and the point of view shifts inexplicably as the plot requires, not that it matters. 'The Prize' 'The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power' PBS at 9 P.M. The first two hours of an eight-hour documentary based on the book of the same title by Daniel Yergin; music composed by Paul Foss; series producer, for WGBH Boston, William Cran; historical adviser, Mr. Yergin; Jonathan Taplin and Ruth Jackson, executive producers; Donald Sutherland, narrator.