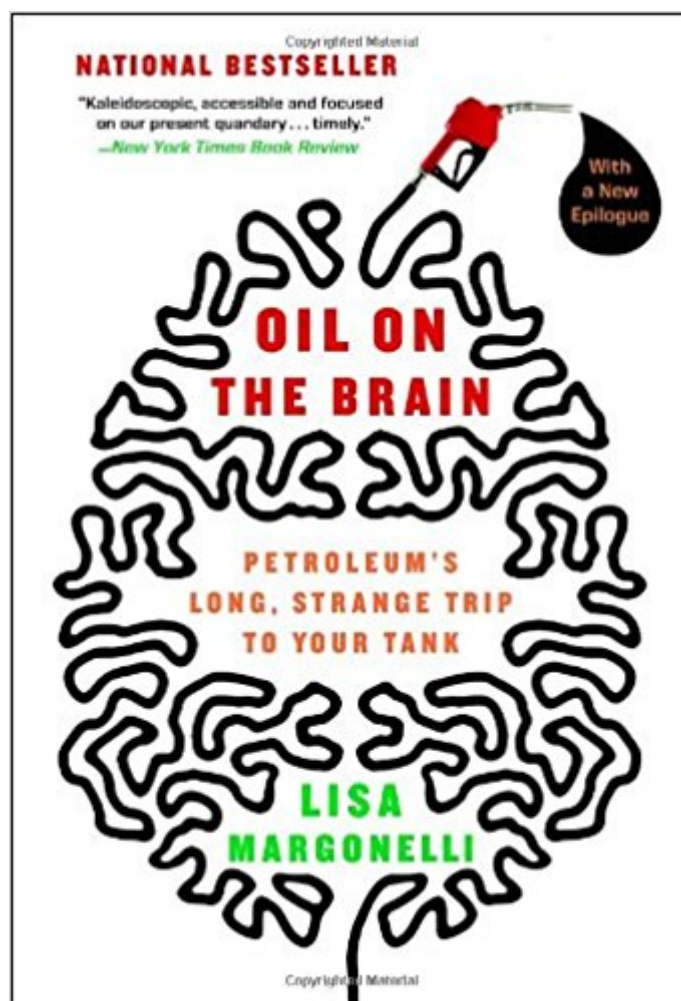


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# Oil On The Brain: Petroleum's Long, Strange Trip To Your Tank



## Synopsis

Oil on the Brain is a smart, surprisingly funny account of the oil industry—the people, economies, and pipelines that bring us petroleum, brilliantly illuminating a world we encounter every day. Americans buy ten thousand gallons of gasoline a second, without giving it much of a thought. Where does all this gas come from? Lisa Margonelli's desire to learn took her on a one-hundred thousand mile journey from her local gas station to oil fields half a world away. In search of the truth behind the myths, she wriggled her way into some of the most off-limits places on earth: the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the New York Mercantile Exchange's crude oil market, oil fields from Venezuela, to Texas, to Chad, and even an Iranian oil platform where the United States fought a forgotten one-day battle. In a story by turns surreal and alarming, Margonelli meets lonely workers on a Texas drilling rig, an oil analyst who almost gave birth on the NYMEX trading floor, Chadian villagers who are said to wander the oil fields in the guise of lions, a Nigerian warlord who changed the world price of oil with a single cell phone call, and Shanghai bureaucrats who dream of creating a new Detroit. Deftly piecing together the mammoth economy of oil, Margonelli finds a series of stark warning signs for American drivers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In the last few years, just about everyone has had "oil on the brain" at some point, as record gas prices and a disastrous war have called our dependency into question. But though the U.S. burns 10,000 gallons of gasoline a second, few of us know how oil is created and drilled,

how gas stations compete or what actually goes on in a refinery—let alone what happens in the mysterious Strategic Petroleum Reserve, where the U.S. government stores roughly 700 million barrels of oil in underground salt caverns on the Gulf Coast of Texas. Margonelli answers these questions and more, before examining some of the key patches in the oil industry's geopolitical quilt: source countries like Chad, where promises of real local growth fall hopelessly short, or China, which, "by 2025, perhaps, will import as much crude oil as the U.S. does now." Writing in a witty, first-person voice, Margonelli criticizes corruption in places like Nigeria, while expressing her "love of hydrocarbons" for the unlikeliness of their formation and the ingenuity required to extricate them. This is an original, open-minded look at a subject about which everyone has an opinion. (Feb. 6) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Margonelli has written about the culture and economy of energy for publications such as *Wired*, *Discover*, *Salon*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In the summer of 2003, she started hanging out at independent gas stations, where owners might clear pennies per gallon of gas, surviving on impulse sales of junk food and soda. Her journey takes us up the delivery chain, spending a typical day with a tanker truck driver, hanging out with suppliers, touring refineries, and seeing what life is like at an oil rig. Whether visiting "wildcatters" in Texas, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in the Gulf of Mexico, or the oil pit at the New York Mercantile Exchange, Margonelli charms her way into the good graces of insiders to report on the vast petroleum network. Her voyage takes us to Venezuela, Chad, Nigeria, and ultimately the Persian Gulf, where she spends time at the Salmon oil fields in Iran. Filled with rich history, industry anecdotes, and politics, Margonelli's book brings a deeper appreciation of the complicated and often tenuous process that we take for granted. David Siegfried Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An interesting read from the layman's perspective of how oil travels from the ground to ultimately your gas tank. I think the better parts were on downstream operations (what happens at the refinery and afterward), while the upstream (drilling) and midstream (pipeline/transportation to refinery) sections didn't have as much depth as I'd hope, even for a layman. That said, it's well written for an author who's not in-industry, and provides some unique insights and presents questions you wouldn't hear from a more seasoned veteran, which is a great perspective.

"Oil on the Brain: Adventures from the Pump to the Pipeline" is the story, from beginning to end, of how oil is pumped, traded, refined, distributed and sold to the public. In addition, the book covers the conditions, both political and cultural, in a number of oil producing countries. The book is divided roughly in half. The first half follows the flow of fuel from its start in the ground through the various handlers until it is pumped into your car. The author, however, doesn't just recite a litany of facts. She narrates well and adds information about the processes that are not common knowledge. The second half of the book is a look at where oil originates and the conditions in those countries as they relate to oil. And, the reality is that there is a socio-economic result of discovering and pumping oil from the earth. The author does a wonderful job of weaving a story out of a number of rather dull facts and makes the book interesting, as well as informative. Her writing style reminded me of the books by Eric Schlosser or Barbara Ehrenreich. After reading the book I found myself looking at gas stations in a new light and thinking about what I was doing every time I pulled up to the pump. I also noticed I was taking a few extra steps to try to cut my consumption a little. I think this book has a powerful message that needs to be read by the oil consuming public which may help to change their purchasing habits.

Like countless Americans, you pull up to a pump and begin the drudgery of filling your car up with gas (while watching the numbers tick higher and ever higher). As you leave, you can't help but shake your fist at the station. Under your breath you damn the brazen oil companies and their obscene profits. Lisa Margonelli takes the reader on a long journey through the serpentine infrastructure of mighty oil. Along the way, Margonelli describes and uncovers the irony, the blood politics, the sheer oppressive scope of what it takes to get oil from point A to point B: A sort of reverse engineering to dispirited communities, hopeful venues, nations on the brink of crippling crisis and even great fortunes. From somewhere far, far away and remote to your swollen gas tank. Aside from spending time in New York, California and Texas, Margonelli treks her way to Chad, Venezuela, Niger, Iran, and China. You can't have your oil and the price of that fill-up without some history; most of it is boom and bust, bloody, contentious and conniving. The price of gas reflects all these things and more: A convoluted national infrastructure, involvement with petty warlords, a dubious foreign policy, and environmental impact. We love our cars and our roads to somewhere. The price to get to that "somewhere" is something to contemplate in more ways than one. There is a chapter on the SPR (Strategic Petroleum Reserve) which I will admit I knew some of. Margonelli goes into greater detail and I did learn a thing or two. I found it to be very interesting. A chapter on the New York Mercantile Exchange, where oil is traded, is also very informative and

revealing. Overall, I appreciated Margonelli's balanced and vivid writing style. I found her to be fair and straight-forward. This book is highly recommended.

Don't be put off by the frivolous title. This is a really well-written account of a young lady's travels and adventures as she (and we) learn about nearly every aspect of the oil industry. Ms. Margonelli somehow managed to charm her way into interviews (lasting in some cases days and weeks) with figures including Nigerian warlords, Iranian oil engineers, and even the legendary Michel Halbouty. These are intermingled with accounts of exploding electricity boxes, death-defying rides on Nigerian motorbike taxis, fearless walks in Tehran narrowly avoiding maniac car drivers, etc. But there are also clear explanations of the economics and engineering of oil, from the NYMEX to an oil field in Chad, with a huge number of footnotes referencing sources like the WSJ, NY Times, and UN and World Bank reports. I would roughly categorize the book as "Maureen Dowd meets Daniel Yergin" (with apologies to both of whom I am a big fan...)

Worked in the upstream oil market for some time. This book gives an interesting insight into the downstream market. Still think the corruption and cartel business is being downplayed.

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