



Putting Peak Oil In Perspective

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Every so often it's a good idea to get a little perspective on your world view, since it is very easy to slip into an ever narrowing point of view on a subject. This applies especially to the more apocalyptic visions of a post oil world that many of those in the vanguard of spreading awareness of peak oil to the public.

We've had two recent conferences in New York City that have sparked a healthy conversation within the community that is aware of peak oil on just what kind of world we should work toward and what we should expect. The [Petrocollapse Conference](#) sponsored by [Culture Change](#) featured classic outsiders like Jan Lundberg, James Howard Kunstler and Michael Ruppert. Then there was the NYU conference "Winning the Oil End Game", which had ultimate insiders like former CIA director James Woolsey, Mississippi Governor and former Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour, former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Robert Altman and Amory Lovins, CEO of the Rocky Mountain Institute.

As peak oil goes mainstream, I expect that many of the original advocates of peak oil awareness will be overtaken by more pragmatic and constructive people who don't revel in the idea of economic collapse or advocate policies that will result in a "Last Man Standing" scenario where humanity engages in an unending war for the remaining supplies of energy.

There are two recent articles written by local observers that add some needed perspective to some of the more narrow and extreme views on both the left and right sides of the political divide that have emerged in those conferences.

Of the two, [Aaron Naparstek's](#) article in [Freezerbox](#) called "[Peak Freaks](#)" is a somewhat more thoughtful and in-depth piece which takes on the complacent "There's nothing you can do" attitude that in particular Ruppert and Lundberg preached at the Petrocollapse conference:

If Peak Oil theory is now mainstream, splashed across the front page of USA Today and the theme of Chevron and BP ad campaigns, then Petrocollapse is a secular, left-wing, non-fiction version of Tim LaHaye's Christian Apocalyptic "Left Behind" series. The gospel according to Petrocollapse is that Peak Oil is coming, and it's coming soon. The transition to the post-carbon world will not be gradual, it will be sudden and massive. And when it comes, the sinners--those profligate American consumers and the corporate whores who oversee them--will all be swept away in violent social turmoil, starvation and environmental disaster. But there's good news too. After the tumultuous mass die-off, a new society will arise from the burned out SUV hulks and melted plastic detritus. In this post-carbon world, humans will have no choice but to live sustainably, in cooperation with each other and in harmony with nature. Those who get religion and accept Peak Oil into their hearts soon enough--they may be among the lucky survivors whose children grow to live in this new and better world.

In Grant Causwell's cover article for the NY Press, "[The Coming Petrocollapse](#)" he discusses the nature of a movement that is continually preaching the "The End is Near":

The peak oil movement is, right now, no matter how many write-ups it receives in the New York Times Magazine, a movement of people who have already lost, just as all survivalists' movements are. (I suspect Jan Lundberg would have done well for himself giving speeches about the need for fallout shelters 50 years ago.) Those who have the least worry most about losing it. In this case, it's those least tethered to the hectic crash and race of motorized life, those who not only despise it, but tremble with anticipation of the glorious day when the ones tethered to it and secure in their place are similarly lost, who drive the movement. They're the ones who buy books like "When Technology Fails: A Manual for Self-Reliance & Planetary Survival" or "Strategic Relocation: North American Guide to Safe Places" (hint: you want "a climate which can sustain life in an energy crisis but won't attract marauders"), and pay Michael Ruppert \$50 a year to read his lurid fantasies about crack-dealing spooks and economic collapses that are always, from what I can tell, just a few weeks off.

The public will not follow someone who continuously preaches doomsday scenarios - nor will they donate money to them.

We need to stay grounded in all realities. We need to continuously evaluate and re-evaluate all the evidence in front of us and act on hard information. There should be no place for "beliefs" in peak oil - it's about science and geology, it's not a religion. It does not require "faith", but rather a skeptical nature that is willing to ask for hard evidence when others say that the faster we eat the cake, the more will appear in front of us.

Personally I think we are headed for a pretty rough time ahead starting sometime in the next 2-10 years, but I think **how** we react to it will make all the difference. There are many possible paths ahead of us and we collectively have a large degree of control over which path we go down. The easiest ways to squander that opportunity to adapt is to do nothing about it.



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