

# Book review: *The Madhouse Effect: How climate change denial is threatening our planet, destroying our politics, and driving us crazy*

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M.E. Mann and T. Toles. *The Madhouse Effect. How climate change is threatening our planet, destroying our politics, and driving us crazy.* Columbia University Press, New York. Paperback edition 2018. \$26.35. Booktopia. ISBN 9780231177870. 222 pages. Also available as an e-book ISBN 978023154817 \$18.50. Hardback (2016) ISBN13 9780231177863, \$33.32

The lead author is best known for two things: he was the author of the ‘hockey stick diagram’ and so started off that controversy, and he was hounded for his part in ‘Climategate’. (Giles, B.D. 2014). The second author is a cartoonist with the Washington Post. The book first appeared in hardback in 2016 but this paperback edition was updated and so includes the effect of the American Presidential election in late 2016.

The book consists of nine chapters which lead the reader from a simple discussion of ‘what science is’ to the ‘age of Trump’ via a discussion of climate change, its denial, and the future. Throughout there are pertinent cartoons provided by Toles. The book is very much northern hemisphere and American based.

The first chapter discusses science in terms of scepticism, the hockey stick controversy and misinformation (via the well known ‘merchants of doubt’). Unfortunately there is no mention of geological changes in CO<sub>2</sub> and temperature – which leads and which follows – yet this is surely pertinent. The second chapter, entitled ‘climate change’ discusses the basics – higher temperatures, drier/wetter conditions, extremes and sea level rises all with examples as well as ocean circulation and possible tipping points.

Chapter 3 asks the question ‘why should we bother?’ in terms of the food-water-energy nexus, ecosystems and ethics. It depends very much on the IPCC3 (2001) rather than the updated IPCC4 (2007). Readers of this review will also know that there were further reports issued 2014 (Fifth) which will be followed by the Sixth (2022) but these are outside the time frame of the book.

The authors next consider the stages of climate change denial: it’s natural, it’s self-correcting, it’s too expensive and finally they introduce the concept of geo-engineering which is further expanded upon two chapters later. The reviewer has a problem with this. Having introduced the concept, it should be followed through but the authors clearly had a book plan so the topic is left hanging for 47 pages. Chapter 5 is a well written and succinct chapter on ‘the war on climate science’ which

*“may well continue as long as there are fossil fuels to be mined and mercenaries to be hired”*

Two well known deniers, Frederick Seitz and Fred Singer (Siegfried) come in for criticism as well those in the Press who deliberately attempt the personal destruction of their opponents by smear campaigns (the authors’ words, not

mine) such as that against Stephen Schneider. The lead author leaves his own experience to the next chapter where he discusses the hypocrisy of climate change denial by politicians such as Cuccinelli (former attorney general of Virginia), Senator Inhofe (Oklahoma), Representative Barton (Texas), and Senator Cruz (Texas). The ‘climategate’ affair is described. It erupted in the weeks before and international climate change conference to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009, Thousands of e-mails were hacked from the Climate Research Unit of Cambridge (England) computer, cherry-picked for relevant phrases and utilised by the denialist press. It resulted in nine different investigations in both the United Kingdom and the United States that found none of the authors had behaved improperly. But this did not prevent the denialist media (Rupert Murdoch, the Saudi-owned Kingdom Holdings, and the Koch Brothers) from having a field day. A detailed account was published by Pearce (2010) and a ‘deniers’ account by Montford (2010)

We then return (without any back reference) to a chapter on geoengineering which is useful given the New Zealand press interest in the subject in the last 12 months, the New Zealand Productivity Commission Final Report (August 2018, released 4 September 2018) and the setting up of the Cambridge (UK)-based Centre for Climate Repair (Daily Mail, 2019). The chapter interestingly begins with the nursery song about the old lady who swallowed a fly which the authors explain is a parable on the risks of geoengineering. They point out that many geoengineering solutions are entirely speculative and may have disastrous results. Nevertheless, they go through four ideas with the for and against arguments: reflective mirrors in space, iron seeding of the oceans, reflective particulates put into the upper atmosphere (emulating volcanoes), removing CO<sub>2</sub> directly from atmosphere (emulating plants), and conclude

*“The fundamental problem of geoengineering solutions is the monumental danger of tinkering with a complex system we don’t fully understand”*

So far, the book has been rather negative and this theme continues in Chapter 8 that is a US-centric and out of date and will not endear itself to the fuel lobby. It was written before the presidential election of 2016 so spends time on the Obama “Clean power plan”, a top down approach and compares it with Greensburg (Kansas) town which has a population of under 1000 people and the co-operation between the states of California, Oregon and Washington, both bottom up approaches. Collaboration between world states, (American) public opinion (The Peoples March of September 2014), Pope Francis’s campaign (April/May, 2015) is discussed in detail and the chapter ends with an exhortation for the reader to get involved by leaving the madhouse, joining a pro-climate change group, vote for pro-climate change politicians, and take on the ethos of environmental sustainability. This was clearly the concluding chapter of the hard-back edition (2016) but a post-Trump chapter is added in the paperback version – ‘Return to the Madhouse, climate denial in the Age of Trump’. Here we are told of the deniers who have been moved into key political roles in the Trump administration: Vice President Mike Pence (who does not accept the scientific consensus that human activity is the primary driver of climate change and hence is a darling of the Koch Brothers), Secretary of State Rex Tillerson (former CEO of ExxonMobil), former attorney general of Oklahoma Scott Pruitt (Environmental Protection Agency), former Texas Governor Rick Perry (Department of Energy), former congressman Jim Bridenstine (NASA, although he reversed his position and had become a climate change believer in May 2018.). The possible (?) Russian connection is picked over and the latest severe weather outbreaks (in America) are laid at the door of the Trump administration – West Coast wild fires, three devastating hurricanes (Harvey, Irma and Maria). The Paris Accord of December 2015 is explained and the Age of Trump is renamed Climate Doomism. This chapter finally ends with a short piece on climate change and cartoons by the second author who contributed 67 of them to the book. The reader should be aware that not

all these appointments lasted: Tillerson lasted a month and was replaced by Mike Pompeo (Director CIA) and Pruitt resigned in July 2018 since he was under 14 federal investigations about his spending habits.

Each Chapter has Notes that are included at the end of the book – there are 345 of them. Many have been accessed via the internet (236) and the lead author quotes his own references (40) in all but two of the chapters. They seem to be authentic but the reviewer only accessed a few of them.

This book is an interesting read, or maybe rant, by a lead author who has suffered at the hands of climate change deniers and is really a plea to the American public to get off the fence of climate change. He is an eminent climatologist and geophysicist who specialised in climate change based on temperature records, both measured and obtained by proxy. It was the latter that brought him into the climate change war following an article (Mann, M.E., Bradley, R.S. and Hughes, M.K.1999) and a book Mann, M. E. (2012). The latter is reviewed in Giles (2014). This current book is rather light-weight and, as has been mentioned before, is very American-centric. However in the light of recent reports both in New Zealand and elsewhere it is a useful background read on the measures that are becoming increasingly necessary if climate change is to be slowed down or averted.

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