

*Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*

by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway

The authors are significant historians of science. The general arc of the story they tell begins when the major tobacco companies banded together and hired a powerful PR company to help them deal with the rising possibility that the federal government was about to regulate tobacco and thus negatively affect their profits. They hired Hill and Knowlton; John Hill advised them to sell doubt about the scientific findings.

They did so and found several eminent scientists willing to carry their banner. Fred Seitz was an atomic scientist who as a young man worked on the Manhattan Project and helped develop the atom bomb. Another eminent physicist eagerly helping was Edward Teller, often called “the father of the hydrogen bomb.” There were others. One issue that united them all was a Cold War fierce anti-communism which saw any move toward government regulation as a huge step toward the loss of capitalism and thus of personal freedom.

The effort was wide and deep and long-lasting. Think tanks were funded, national committees formed, research funded. All of this effort was to promote doubt about the scientific evidence indicting smoking tobacco as addictive and carcinogenic. And it was successful. The tobacco industry knew, *from its own research*, about the dangers of smoking, and its representatives continued to lie and to sow doubt.

The strategies and tactics that worked for so long were soon adopted by industries and political groups to cast doubt about scientific evidence for the dangers of acid rain, asbestos, the hole in the ozone layer, second hand smoke, and now global warming. And many of the culprits are the same. This important, thoroughly researched, and well-written book deserves your full attention

Bob McDonnell