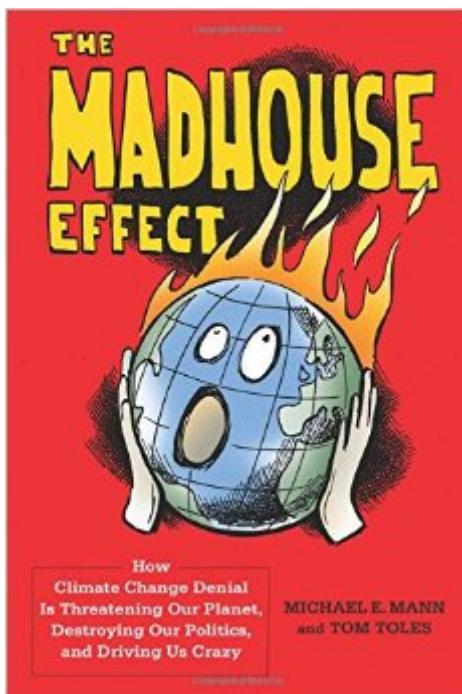


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The Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial Is Threatening Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, And Driving Us Crazy



Synopsis

The award-winning climate scientist Michael E. Mann and the Pulitzer Prizeâ “winning political cartoonist Tom Toles have been on the front lines of the fight against climate denialism for most of their careers. They have witnessed the manipulation of the media by business and political interests and the unconscionable play to partisanship on issues that affect the well-being of billions. The lessons they have learned have been invaluable, inspiring this brilliant, colorful escape hatch from the madhouse of the climate wars. The Madhouse Effect portrays the intellectual pretzels into which denialists must twist logic to explain away the clear evidence that human activity has changed Earth’s climate. Toles’s cartoons collapse counter-scientific strategies into their biased components, helping readers see how to best strike at these fallacies. Mann’s expert skills at science communication aim to restore sanity to a debate that continues to rage against widely acknowledged scientific consensus. The synergy of these two climate science crusaders enlivens the gloom and doom of so many climate-themed booksâ •and may even convert die-hard doubters to the side of sound science.

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Back when the FDA was testing ads to discourage kids from smoking, they tried arguments based on science: smoking will give you cancer, smoking will give you emphysema, smoking will hurt your unborn child. They tried appealing to kidsâ ™ social anxieties: smoking will make your teeth yellow, smoking will give you bad breath. None of these arguments worked very well. What worked was telling kids that the tobacco companies were lying to them, tricking them into smoking so that they

could make money off them for the rest of their lives. The Madhouse Effect serves the same purpose. It makes quite clear that the debate about climate change has nothing to do with science and everything to do with wishful thinking, exploited by vested economic and political interests. As anyone who has ever tried to change the mind of a climate change denier or for that matter an anti-vaxxer or a creationist will know, even the clearest explication of science is unlikely to change minds. Indeed, maddeningly, there is pretty good evidence that the more science you bring to bear, the more entrenched and defensive your science-rejecting audience will become. And that is where The Madhouse Effect is especially effective. In a chapter called "Why should I give a damn?" Mann and Toles describe the psychological hoops that people jump through to avoid coming to terms with a problem that is big and scary and potentially expensive and difficult to solve. In "The War on Climate Science" and "Hypocrisy, Thy Name is Climate Change Denial" they lay out the concerted (and ongoing) effort that has gone into trashing scientists and sowing confusion in an effort to block or delay even the most preliminary civil discussion of how our society might begin to take action.

Michael Mann has a specialty or two. Climate simulation modeling, analysis of proxy data, the study of global teleconnections, Northern Hemisphere surface temperatures over historic time scales, etc. A while back, Mann's research interests and activities converged, I assume by some combination of design and chance (as is often the case in Academia) with a key central question in science. This question is, "What is the pattern of surface warming caused by human effects on the atmosphere, including changes in greenhouse gas concentration and other pollutants?" Mann and his colleagues essentially solved that problem in 1998, with the publication of a study looking at tree ring data, ice cores, and direct measurements of the atmosphere and the ocean surface, to estimate "surface temperature" of the atmosphere in the northern hemisphere. NASA, NOAA, and other agencies already had a temperature record going back into the 19th century, about a century of data. But since human effects started way before that, and since there is a lot of non-human caused variation in the system, the only way the basic pattern of surface warming, and the relative role of human effects, could be ascertained was by extending that record back several more centuries. Mann and his colleagues did that. What they did, ultimately, was to turn a more vague conception of climate change into a much more detailed and nuanced one, extending the record back a thousand years, and demonstrating the importance of rising surface temperatures. So, that should have been about it. A major question was clarified and science marches on. But there were two other things that happened after that. One makes total sense, and is a good thing. The

other is mad. Mad as in madhouse.

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