

THE MADHOUSE EFFECT

BOOK REVIEW

Felicia Bergfast

N1008151@my.ntu.ac.uk

Nottingham Trent University, Student,
English (BA) Hons

Climate scientist, Michel E. Mann, and cartoonist, Tom Toles, have teamed up to present us with a witty, creative, and unique attempt at averting the near-future catastrophe that is climate change with their book: *The Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial Is Threatening Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, and Driving Us Crazy*.

Michael E. Mann is a Presidential Distinguished Professor of Earth & Environmental Science at the University of Pennsylvania and the author of numerous climate activist books, including his newest addition, *The New Climate War*¹.

Tom Toles is a now retired, Pulitzer-Prize winning political cartoonist who used to work for the Washington Post. He is largely known for his 'biting sociopolitical commentary.'²

The preface explaining why they decided to come together, sets the tone and style for the rest of the book. They highlight the continuous battle of trying to get the public to recognize the possibility of the permanent damage we are doing to the Earth and every living organism on it. They explain the reason for climate change denial in the words of Upton Sinclair: 'It is difficult to get a man to understand something, when his salary depends on his not understanding it.'³ They continue by explaining that the battle to preserve the forests, lakes, mountains, and the ocean of the planet is not like any other battle, meaning that time is no longer on our side: 'time will not be healing wounds but instead will be inflicting more and more of them if we don't stop shambling around like confused zombies.'⁴

The book consists of nine chapters guiding the reader through chapter one: 'Science: Hot It Works', where they discuss science in terms of scepticism, all the way to the last chapter: 'Return to the Madhouse: Climate Change Denial in the Age of Trump'. They lighten the mood with Toles' applicable cartoons strategically placed throughout the book. The first half of the book discusses the basics of climate change, such as the change in temperatures, sea-levels, and weather conditions, 'why should we bother', where they bring up many valid reasons, such as security, food, water, land, health, etc, and the stages of climate change denial. Whereas the other half of the book focuses on the more complicated aspects, such as the hypocrisy of climate change

¹ 'Home', Michael E. Mann
<<https://michaelmann.net>> [Accessed 11 November 2022]

² Michael E. Mann and Tom Toles, *The Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial Is Threatening*

Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, and Driving Us Crazy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) p. x.

³ Mann and Toles, *The Madhouse Effect*, p. xi.

⁴ Mann and Toles, *The Madhouse Effect*, p. xi.

denial by politicians, geoengineering, and finishes with some politics.

There is a very thin line between oversimplification and an explanation written in a way the average person can understand when addressing scientific subjects such as climate change. However, the two succeed in creating informative and convincing arguments for non-specialist readers, with admirable writing, and cartoons with a satirical attitude.

However, the book possesses some small shortcomings. For readers outside the US, the biggest issue would be that the book is focused on lies in American politics. Nonetheless, the leadership of the US, with the world's largest economy and the second-largest emitter, are an essential part when it comes to solving the climate crisis. Furthermore, in chapter four where they take on the stages of climate change denial, they introduce a concept, most likely foreign to many, which is geo-engineering. The problem does not lie in the concept, but in the decision to not further expand on it until two chapters later. Having introduced this concept, they should have followed it through directly but, they left the readers confused for 47 pages.

Nevertheless, this is a well-made and educative book. Addressing a subject this heavy but still being able to create a hopeful narrative is quite impressive. Despite all the political discussion and the dire consequences presented if we do not strive for change, the two have succeeded in creating a crucial, informative, and hopeful view of the science, politics, and solutions

to the climate crisis, all while still being able to make it entertaining.

They continue to highlight the urgency of the situation and finish off by illuminating the beautiful aspects of this world, and what we will lose if we continue this path. The book closes with the inspiring line, 'our attention to climate calamity can be the beginning of a new era in which people once again not only notice nature and protect it but also treasure it. We are coming to understand at a late hour what a magnificent natural home we have on this planet. It's time to save our inheritance.'⁵

⁵ Mann and Toles, *The Madhouse Effect*, p. 175.