

Book review: The new climate war

Our present world is the culmination of all of humanity's past actions; to understand the present is to understand the past so we can move toward building a better future. To this end, Michael Mann aims to educate readers on the historical power dynamics that have enabled the current climate crisis through his book, "The New Climate War," published in January 2021. Mann frames the crisis as a war between fossil fuel interests and humanity, creating both a sense of **urgency—to take action now—and agency—that we are capable of the meaningful change** required to win. In doing so, Mann created a balanced narrative that recognizes the importance of individual action without downplaying the role of corporations and governments in creating green societies.

Through nine chapters, Mann chronologically documents battles in the climate war. Each chapter homes in on a specific development that influenced the war, either toward science-based action or toward fossil fuel interests. These can be further divided between the *old war*, that sets the foundation for the *new war*, that is the namesake of this book.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork of the war and its origins. The fossil fuel side's arsenal is best summarized in the quote, **"doubt is our product."** Doubt, at best, demotivates individuals and at its worst turns them into climate deniers and/or inactivists. Chapter 2 delves into the targeted attacks on the scientific community, uncovering the political and financial forces behind climate inaction. The conflict at IPCC 1995, the sabotage of Copenhagen 2009 through "Climategate," and the altered testimony of Dr. Hansen are discussed as well as the author's own experience being the target of attack due to his publication of the "hockey stick" that clearly connected rising emissions and human activity. Chapter 3 shifts to the historical use of **deflection campaigns**, such as the Crying Indian commercials; this particularly effective campaign successfully created a generation of litter-picker-uppers to thwart efforts at passing laws that would hold bottling companies responsible for their waste. Building off this, Chapter 4 discusses climate-specific deflection campaigns in detail as well as the role of social media and bots in altering online discussion about climate change.

Chapter 5 begins the discussion about climate action solutions, focusing mainly on cap and trade/carbon pricing and the ensuing pushback from fossil fuel interests. A key takeaway is that demand side protests must be combined with policy measures targeting the supply side to achieve the desired results, mirroring how **both individual action and collective economic and political forces must work in tandem as well**. Chapter 6 provides more possible avenues toward a green economy, such as ending fossil fuel subsidies (including both explicit and implicit costs, totalling \$5 trillion). Smart grid and battery technology is capable of powering 80% of the global energy demand by 2030, and 100% by 2050, but it will require the political and economic willpower to be implemented.

In response to the growing number of viable solutions, fossil fuel interests have attempted to make renewable energy seem more harmful than fossil fuel and deflected attention by promoting their own "solutions" that maintain the status quo. Chapter 7 discusses these "nonsolution solutions," which include the myth of "clean coal," making natural gas a "bridge fuel," carbon sequestration, and geoengineering. This marks the point where the old war of climate denial is all but over as climate change becomes increasingly visible. The **new war is based on delaying action**. "Doubt is our product" shifts into "helplessness is the new message" in Chapter 8. Inactivists have sought to make climate change seem to be an insurmountable challenge, despite the existence of viable solutions. The increased use of social media bots and doomist messages that attract media attention have sown division in environmental communities and prevented a unified response. However, Chapter 9 displays cautious optimism for climate action, support for which has increased through several channels: the visible effects of climate change occurring in the last few

years, republicans softening their stance on climate change, superfund managers and other major investors divesting from fossil fuel, and the rise of youth climate activists. “The stone age didn’t end for want of stones”; fossil fuel’s era is at its close as there are better technologies at our disposal should we collectively decide to use them.

To build a better future, it is necessary to understand the past and the underlying forces that have created our present. To this end, Mann has analyzed the events creating the current climate crisis, giving special emphasis to those who masterminded it, how to recognize their strategies, and viable avenues for action.

The framing of the climate crisis as a war between fossil fuel interests and humanity enables the reader to understand both the gravity of the situation, and their place in it. It enables the reader to understand how their own thoughts and actions on climate change have been influenced by competing interests, and for what purpose, to decide for themselves which side they will support.

While the author criticizes the climate inactivists and deniers, he draws a line between those who knowingly make false claims for monetary or political purposes and those who have been misled or are ignorant of the stakes at hand. The overall language of the book motivates the reader to further educate themselves on the events and individuals discussed and take action for greener policies.

While the book ends on a positive note, it is not an overly optimistic outlook, but rather a grounded, realistic standpoint. All the lessons the book holds are now in the readers hands, and it is up to them to decide what to do with them. The ending recognizes this, that it is up to individuals to put pressure on politicians and corporations to make greener choices and to talk about climate change, not letting it be a taboo topic.

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