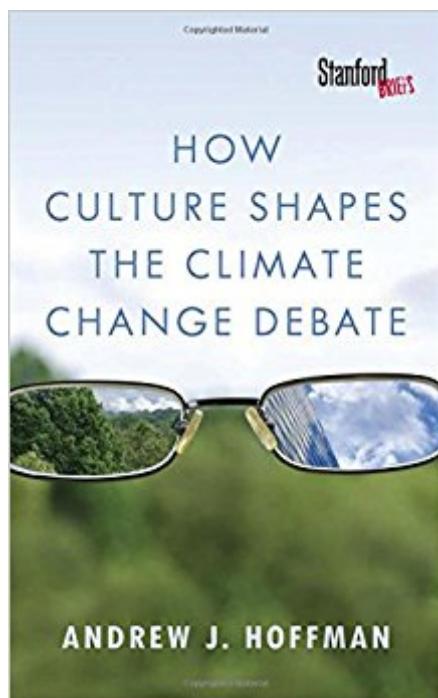


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# How Culture Shapes The Climate Change Debate



## **Synopsis**

Though the scientific community largely agrees that climate change is underway, debates about this issue remain fiercely polarized. These conversations have become a rhetorical contest, one where opposing sides try to achieve victory through playing on fear, distrust, and intolerance. At its heart, this split no longer concerns carbon dioxide, greenhouse gases, or climate modeling; rather, it is the product of contrasting, deeply entrenched worldviews. This brief examines what causes people to reject or accept the scientific consensus on climate change. Synthesizing evidence from sociology, psychology, and political science, Andrew J. Hoffman lays bare the opposing cultural lenses through which science is interpreted. He then extracts lessons from major cultural shifts in the past to engender a better understanding of the problem and motivate the public to take action. *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* makes a powerful case for a more scientifically literate public, a more socially engaged scientific community, and a more thoughtful mode of public discourse.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"Climate change has become a culture war issue and Andrew Hoffman has pointed the way towards a ceasefire. In this compelling discussion, Hoffman offers intriguing, commonsense guidance on how people of all political stripes can move from mudslinging to real, constructive solutions." (Eli Lehrer, President The R Street Institute)"Andrew Hoffman's central message is that more scientific information, while necessary, is insufficient to persuade those who dismiss the reality or seriousness of global warming. Summarizing multiple lines of research, he helps the reader understand the

diversity of public responses to climate change and suggests promising ways forward. A very readable and helpful book!" (Anthony Leiserowitz, Director Yale Project on Climate Change Communication)"Hoffman's book is a much-needed analysis of how humans process informationâ •and how that messy mix of reason, emotion, and cultural influence shapes and reinforces our views on global climate change. Important reading for anyone who wants to influence public opinion and public policy on this crucial issue." (Fred Krupp, President Environmental Defense Fund)"Throughout the book, the author does an exceptional job of clearly summarizing what is a wealth of information, and presents it in a way that the reader can digest with ease by reading this book, the reader will become more aware of the social issues of accepting/rejecting climate change science and be better equipped when entering into dialogue with climate change deniers." (Rebecca Rhead Environmental Values)"Hoffman, [...], first lays out the psychological and social biases people bring to the climate discussion and then suggest techniques for making that conversation more productive . . . This slender, practical volume will aid anyone hoping to sway climate deniers - whether on Facebook, from a podium, or over a beer." (Jake Abrahamson Sierra Magazine)"I can certainly see [this book] being used by high school science teachers and teacher educators in science teacher preparation courses to help students understand the psychological and cultural aspects of the ongoing differences in people's views on climate change, and many other socially contentious issues. Concerned citizens and activists should also be able to mine many interesting and useful nuggets of information and advice from the book that can help them reach across the divide and build crosscutting alliances that are so critical for any meaningful progress to occur on climate change." (Ajay Sharma Science & Education)"Andrew is so right: 'It's about values, not science.' We learn values and their application from people we trust. So, in order to build trust, we must go to them with credible messengers and affirm their truth. This book offers a clear explanation of why this is so, and what do about it." (U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis (R-SC4) (1993â “1999; 2005â “2011))"Hoffman aggregates and analyzes social scientific data regarding reasons for disagreement, among the US public, about the veracity of the science of climate change. He asserts that public perception of the climate change debate is rooted in avoidance . . . An accessible, intelligent, comprehensive discussion of the impact of cultural values and political economies on the use and acceptance of scientific data and theories . . . Highly recommended." (H. Doss CHOICE)"One of the tallest orders of our day is to communicate effectively about global warming. Hoffman shows us how to talk about climate science and policy in ways that depolarize the debate and empower people to form their own opinions based on the scientific risks. This book is a valuable resource, and it comes at the right time." (Ken Kimmell President of the Union of

Concerned Scientists and former Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection)"This is a well-researched treatment of cultural dimensions of climate science and policy. Hoffman's ability to organize overlapping literatures into a cogent assessment of the current conditions makes for a wonderful book." (Max Boykoff, Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) University of Colorado-Boulder)

Andrew J. Hoffman is Professor of Sustainable Enterprise and Director of the Frederick A. and Barbara M. Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Michigan.

If some of your well-educated thoughtful friends believe the country is in grave danger from human-caused climate change while other well-read intelligent friends are equally adamant that no such process or danger exists, you may be puzzled by this disconnect across America. If so, this book is for you. Hoffman explains the underlying causes of this division (which have almost nothing to do with evidence) and gives concrete advice about how these two groups can discuss the subject, find common ground, and maybe even agree on concerted action. While the book provides advice for leaders pushing our country to take the first steps to slow climate change, it will be particularly helpful to a much larger audience. Millions of regular citizens are destined to help craft community decisions about how best to protect their families and neighborhoods against flood dangers, threats to their water supplies, health impacts, and the many other threats from warming to the local economy. Anyone speaking to a city council meeting, writing a letter to the editor, joining a neighborhood committee, or talking across the backyard fence about climate change should read this short book first.

The book is a typical Social Scientists exploration of the different reasons why the general public, excluding scientists, either accept or reject the science or the factual information proving the degradation of our dear Planet Earth, mainly as a consequence of the human activities of burning fossil fuel over the last decades or century. The author seem to suggest that the vast institution and infrastructure that's surrounding the fossil fuel industries " which is what drives the economy to a larger extent " must be completely changed, and resistance from vested interests should be expected. Although I agree with most of the points, if not all, that he made in the book but I will have to disagree with him here to an extent, because he seemed to suggest a complete overhaul of the industries which is a bit unrealistic I believe. A more inclusive process that galvanizes not just the general public but also the fossil fuel industries to accepting a well evaluated

policy of reducing carbon emissions to a bearable minimum is what I believe will work and what IÃ¢Â™ll suggest. It was a short, fascinating and an enlightening read over all, anyone who is interested in Climate Change Communication should find the book very useful.

I purchased this book to see if it would work as a resource in a class on human impact on/ of climate change I am teaching next fall. I am really glad I did! *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* explores the social and political dimensions of resistance to thinking about climate change, identity politics, and the importance of considering the words we use to discuss scientific topics in order to make them less threatening and more accessible to our audience. With examples that show parallels between public/ political climate change discussions and those on the ozone hole, smoking and cancer, and other sciencey social issues, and practical advice for communicating effectively about these issues, this book has a lot to offer anyone engaged in the discussion - maybe especially those of us who teach about it.

Why is America just simply incapable of acknowledging and addressing the issue of global warming? Why do almost half the citizens believe climate change is not real, despite almost universal consensus among climatologists? Are we deluded by faulty information, biased news reporting, media silence on the subject, religious teachings and strictures; entrenched beliefs and ideologies that do not accommodate such a reality, or have our brains just not evolved to a level capable of recognizing global warming as an existential threat to our very existence? Or, are we just too heavily influenced by culture and societal groupings that oppose action on global warming because of threats to vested economic interests. These questions have intrigued me for a long time. The answer is all of the above. The book by Andrew Hoffman delves into these questions and helps to answer them. The issue is like a Sword of Damocles that hangs over civilization. It is very perplexing and disturbing that not only can we not even acknowledge it, we cannot begin to take steps to combat it. Hoffman's book makes clear that we are influenced by group values, and cultural identity can overpower scientific reasoning. We employ ideological filters influenced by group values and we generally endorse the position that most directly reinforces our connections with others in our referent group, which strengthens our definition of self. These belief structures are resistant to change. We give greater support to evidence or arguments that support our pre-existing beliefs. According to Hoffman, people whose values are hierarchical and individualistic are more likely to be skeptical of climate change. People with egalitarian and communitarian values tend to support the notion of climate change. We may continue to deny the reality of global warming, but will

finally reach a point where it can no longer be ignored. More extreme weather, as it hits and affects all segments of society, will open our eyes as we experience ever more violent hurricanes and tornadoes; floods, extreme drought, fires, water shortages, rising ocean levels. Insurance companies, who certainly are aware of climate change, will be drastically raising rates for casualty premiums on real property. Just as tobacco companies were sued for damages to public health, fossil fuel companies and polluters will be sued for damages. Our denial will force us to pay a heavy price on many fronts. This book is recommended for those who want a better understanding of what drives climate change denial. This information offers a tool for aiding in convincing the deniers of the need to begin addressing the problem .... if it is not already too late.

Hoffman's book is a breath of fresh air for those of us who are frustrated about the climate change debate. His insights provide a new perspective from which to view an old topic. Comparisons with the abolition of slavery and the link between cigarette smoking and cancer offer hopeful scenarios for massive culture change. Even his suggestions about how to discuss the topic at the dinner table were inspiring. Put this book on your must read list.

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