



Review: Smoking Guns

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Reviewed work(s):

The Cigarette Papers. by Stanton Glantz ; John Slade ; Lisa A. Bero ; Peter Hanauer ; Deborah E. Barnes

Smokescreen. The Truth Behind the Tobacco Industry Cover-Up. by Philip J. Hilts

Ashes to Ashes. America's Hundred-Year Cigarette War, the Public Health, and the

Unabashed Triumph of Philip Morris. by Richard Kluger

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BOOK REVIEWS

Smoking Guns

The Cigarette Papers. STANTON GLANTZ, JOHN SLADE, LISA A. BERO, PETER HANAUER, and DEBORAH E. BARNES. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996. xx, 539 pp., illus. \$29.95 or £24.

Smokescreen. The Truth Behind the Tobacco Industry Cover-Up. PHILIP J. HILTS. Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1996. xiv, 253 pp. + plates. \$22 or \$C30.

Ashes to Ashes. America's Hundred-Year Cigarette War, the Public Health, and the Unabashed Triumph of Philip Morris. RICHARD KLUGER. Knopf, New York, 1996. xxi, 809 pp. \$35 or \$C45.

Recently, Philip Morris, the nation's largest cigarette company, has run full-page newspaper ads proclaiming that "minors should not use tobacco" and has lent its support to a raft of measures it says will restrict smoking by children. Why exactly would it be wrong for children to smoke if you believed,

These three new books about the tobacco industry, already widely reviewed in the popular media, provide very powerful evidence that the cigarette companies have been engaged in a long-standing practice of carefully crafting their public relations positions in order to appear to say one thing when their real goals, knowledge, and beliefs are quite the contrary.

Therefore, it would seem safer to assume that Philip Morris and the other companies genuinely believe the very opposite of what they say about smoking by minors. Indeed, because rather few Americans who try smoking as adults become long-term smokers, the industry is actually quite dependent upon children, whose smoking rates are now on the upswing. Nearly all reliable cigarette consumers begin as minors, frequently before they are teens; and though probably some of them would start smoking as adults were initiation delayed, it is very likely that many, many fewer would do so.

Moreover, if we examine the specific proposals Philip Morris endorses, three key measures widely favored by those in the tobacco-control movement go altogether unmentioned: (i) creating a national public health campaign (primarily anti-smoking advertising) designed to convince young people not to smoke; (ii) imposing penalties on the corporate owners and franchisers of those retail outlets (most important, convenience stores) that repeatedly sell tobacco products to children; and (iii) increasing cigarette excise taxes in the hope of making smoking too expensive for many youths.

Nevertheless, Philip Morris has at least made some genuine concessions, and what must be going on is that the tobacco companies are now feeling considerable heat because of all the bad publicity that is being created by the revelations contained in these three books and similar accounts. They must gen-

uinely fear that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will succeed in asserting jurisdiction over them and will impose far greater restrictions than those proposed by the industry itself. Because publications like these books are contributing to this impact, they deserve to be praised as important public health contributions.

The Cigarette Papers does a splendid job of skewering Brown and Williamson, a major tobacco company, with its own words, relying largely on secret, internal, company documents that were apparently leaked to University of California cardiologist Stanton Glantz, a long-time anti-smoking activist, by a paralegal worker for the company's key law firm. Glantz and his team based at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) who produced this volume vividly show the enormous discrepancy between what the company's public positions have been and what its officials thought, knew, and were doing internally.

In *Smokescreen*, Philip Hiltz, a *New York Times* reporter, presents much of the same material in his own words and in a shorter form—but to the same effect. Both books effectively use the "gotcha" approach, so that most readers are likely to experience a growing outrage at the industry, and especially its lawyers and friendly scientists, as they read along. Indeed, one of the most demoralizing messages of these books is in their portrayal of how easily the industry has been able to recruit scientists to its cause and use them to create the appearance of scientific controversy in the minds of the public even when those inside the companies privately had quite different understandings of the matters at issue.

Unlike that of the other two books, the coverage of *Ashes to Ashes* is far wider than the recent revelations based on the purloined files, and its tone is far more measured. Kluger's impressively encyclopedic history of smoking presents not only objectionable things about the tobacco companies but also the fascinating story of the industry's development and some unflattering aspects of anti-smoking activism.

Still, as far as current issues are concerned, it is not evident how far these new books take us. Assume they thoroughly document that for years the cigarette industry (i) has known that smoking is dangerous to smokers and nonsmokers alike, (ii) has understood that cigarettes are essentially a device for delivering addictive nicotine, and (iii) has knowingly cultivated smoking by children. Who really needs convincing? How many people really believe otherwise even without reading these books?

Perhaps these three books are best treat-



"FDA Commissioner David A. Kessler holds a cigarette advertisement as he testifies before the House committee on June 21, 1994." [From *Smokescreen*; Reuters/Mike Theiler/Archive Photos]

as the tobacco industry has insisted for decades, that smoking has not been proven either dangerous or addictive? Does this mean that the industry is about to admit what just about everyone else considers conclusively demonstrated? Don't bet on it.

ed as source material for the ongoing tobacco wars, as ready compilations of ammunition for anti-smoking activists, the many lawyers now suing the tobacco companies, and policy-makers and others seeking more effective tobacco-control measures. As reference treasures, however, they would be most useful if available in well-indexed, electronic form. In fact, the UCSF group early on arranged for all of the leaked Brown and Williamson documents to appear on the World Wide Web (<http://www.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/>). Moreover, through the same web site one can obtain a CD-ROM version of the documents, an electronic version of *The Cigarette Papers*, and access to the 19 June 1995 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (vol. 274, pp. 219–253), which featured key UCSF analyses of the documents. What Hiltz provides us with was also more or less already available electronically (on NEXIS, for example), because his book largely weaves together stories he earlier published on the tobacco industry in the *New York Times*. Perhaps Kluger will be able to convince his publisher to provide *Ashes to Ashes* in searchable CD-ROM form. Electronic availability is important because new revelations about the cigarette companies are now regularly emerging, some even since these books have been released. One useful electronic source of nearly up-to-the-minute information is the SCARCNet Daily Bulletin, produced by the Smoking Control Advocacy Resource Center of the Advocacy Institute in Washington, D.C. (Gopher://gopher.icg.apc.org:7003/11/news/tob).

Informative as these three new books are in their own right, readers of the combined 1600 pages will search in vain for sustained inquiry into what public policy toward smoking should be. Kluger sketches a few ideas at the end of his 800 pages; but those interested in policy would be far better served by reading his recent short essay in the *New York Times Magazine* (7 April 1996, p. 28). Hiltz and the UCSF group don't really address the policy question. Establishing wise tobacco-control policy is both an important and a difficult job. High cigarette taxes, for example, are appealing as a way to discourage youthful initiation, but rather unattractive as a regressive financial burden on addicted adult smokers who are increasingly poorer than the average American. Before the Food and Drug Administration or Congress steps in with new controls, we need serious analysis of what they should be.

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Vignettes: Scientific Debate

Simply because scientists sometimes claim . . . to leave their extra-professional lives at the laboratory door, analysts of scientific debate should not ignore the highly improbable psychology implied by such a claim.

—*Elisabeth S. Clemens*, in *Mass Extinction Debates: How Science Works in a Crisis* (William Glen, Ed.; Stanford University Press)

If orthodoxy treats the budding genius as it treated Semmelweis, we should not be surprised if the genius hits back, and if the weapons used against him are unfair, arbitrary, inequitable, dishonest, unscrupulous and unprincipled, then we should expect the genius to retaliate in kind.

—*Hans Eysenck*, in *Genius: The Natural History of Creativity* (Cambridge University Press)

Pictorial Primer

The Way Life Works. MAHLON HOAGLAND and BERT DODSON. Times Books, New York, 1995. xxii, 233 pp., illus. \$35.

Every introductory course is a language course, according to one of my undergraduate professors, and for those not schooled in modern biology, the late-breaking developments in biotechnology, medicine, and genetics may be as impenetrable as a foreign language. Often the names of the players in modern biology—DNA, enzymes, membranes, adenosine triphosphate (ATP), and the like—are introduced without a clue as to their function in cells and organisms. *The Way Life Works*, a collaboration by a molecular biologist and an illustrator, has taken a different approach to explaining biology and relies heavily on cartoons and drawings, some quite whimsical, to explain many of the key processes of molecular, cellular, and organismal biology. The focus is on the steps that occur rather than on exquisite detail—thus DNA is portrayed by four color-coded squares on coils, and the enzymes and proteins that operate on DNA have feet and faces as in a children's book and grab hold of the DNA, rip it apart, build new strands, and so forth. Even the most casual reader will get the idea

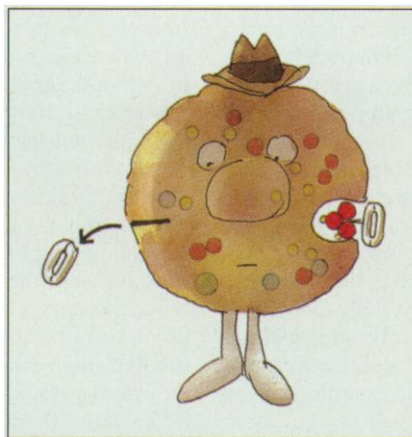
that nothing just happens in a cell, but that an array of players are at work in processes such as translation and sugar metabolism.

The treatment of molecular biology is not just descriptive but emphasizes basic principles—for example, the idea that organization overcomes entropy at the expense of solar energy flowing into living systems is stressed, as is the idea that energy is exchanged by the breaking and forming of chemical bonds. Similarly, evolution is explained in terms of “mistakes” and mutations that lead in some cases to favorable adaptations, and ecological systems are one example used to illustrate feedback cycles. Important historical

developments are highlighted as well, to show how critical experiments have shaped the course of biology.

The book is heavy on biochemistry and molecular biology, and topics such as photosynthesis and protein folding are treated in more depth than one might expect from an introductory overview. Cell biology, represented mainly by signaling and development, is treated more briefly, and neuroscience is mentioned in passing; disease, medicine, and immunology are not a focus of this book. Nonetheless, it is an easy-to-read introduction to many of the basics of modern biology for those who would prefer a less formal introduction to the subject.

Phil Szuromi



Behavior of a regulatory protein. “When a signal molecule enters one site it changes the function of another site.” [From *The Way Life Works*]