

# Merchants of Doubt Summary

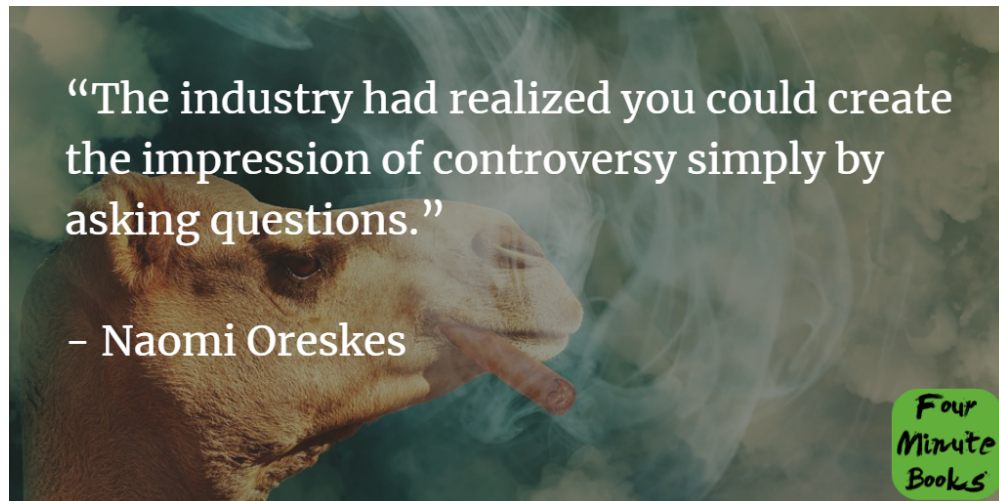
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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Merchants of Doubt* explains how a small but loud group of researchers were able to mislead the public from the well-established truth on issues such as global warming, tobacco, DDT, and more for decades.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



We know that smoking is bad for people. But a few generations before us, they didn't have a clue. And here's the kicker: the medical community did. In fact, they had research documenting smoking's negative effects clear back in the '50s. How did it take so long for the news to reach the consumer?

Tobacco companies spread doubt among consumers. And it worked. At least for a while.

When they got wind of the studies showing the harmful effects of smoking, the tobacco companies in the US came together and did the only thing they could: spread confusion. Challenging the scientific research that revealed smoking's ill-effects, they paid for research to prove it wasn't all that harmful.

This isn't the only time that people in a position of power were able to skew scientific results in their favor and cast a shadow of doubt among the public. Other examples include the dangers of pesticide DDT, global warming, and nuclear weapons. In *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, authors Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway explore these controversies further.

Here are 3 interesting takeaways from this book:

1. The tobacco industry didn't just mislead people about the harmful effects of smoking, they cast doubt over science itself.
2. In the 1970s, the US government skewed scientific research on acid rain to benefit big corporations.

3. Even though science proves global warming, individuals have been misleading the public about it for decades

Are you ready to sift through the lies and get to the real truth? Let's learn!

## Lesson 1: The tobacco industry cast doubt not just on the effects of secondhand smoke, but on the scientific process.

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The tobacco industry went as far as to fund their own studies about the effects of smoking. They wanted to keep people buying their products. But they could only keep their secret for so long. Soon, people started to know what smoking really can do to the body. But it wasn't until the 80's that they even began to examine the effects of secondhand smoke.

In 1986, the US Surgeon General reported inhaling secondhand smoke to be just as harmful as smoking yourself. In 1992, the EPA issued a report that gave listed all of the ill-effects of secondhand smoke. But still, tobacco companies resisted. **Instead of the earlier approach of attempting to shed doubt on specific studies, they instead decided to run a campaign that made people question the scientific process itself.**

These companies refuted the credibility of the EPA's combination of multiple studies for evidence, saying combining studies wasn't sound science. They also fought the EPA for using studies that had only a 90 percent assurance of certainty. The tobacco business created reports that the EPA was using "junk" science and unjustly giving too much weight to imaginary problems. But these criticisms couldn't be further from the truth. The EPA's study was peer-reviewed twice in front of a panel of specialists and scientists.

## Lesson 2: The US government compromised the truth about acid rain in the interest of big business.

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In the 1970s, many environmental issues came to the center of US politics. One of these issues was acid rain, a phenomenon where rain falls with a lower than usual pH (acidic) causing plants and animals to suffer or die. Eventually, scientists linked this to the burning of fossil fuels and found that sometimes it can occur in places far from where the pollution happens.

Soon after, scientists discovered that half of the acid rain falling in Canada was from US pollution. The rain was hurting the resources the Canadian economy was highly dependent on.

Together, the US and Canada assembled scientists to research the phenomenon further. But just a year later, the US government assigned another panel of scientists to do the exact same thing. The government then took the liberty to go around the scientist in charge and assigned one of their own scientists on the panel.

The scientist was Fred Singer, and they put him on the panel specifically to ensure the financial costs of the plan to prevent acid rain would be at a minimum. **Because of Singer, the review was drastically altered, and it made the results in the study seem doubtful at best.** And worse still, it didn't make trying ways to remedy the problem seem worth it.

## Lesson 3: It has been an uphill battle to convince the public of global warming because people have been spreading skepticism about it for decades.

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Scientists have known about global warming for decades. But it wasn't until the 1980's that it even began to be taken seriously.

In 1977 scientists from multiple studies concluded that increased CO2 in the atmosphere caused a rise in global temperatures. But unsatisfied, the government made up another panel to look into the effects of CO2. Unfortunately, the panel faced a divide between natural scientists who wanted what was best for the climate, and economists, whose main interest was how it would affect the country financially.

The economists wrote the first and last chapters of the review, and concluded that new technology would resolve the problem of carbon dioxide. They said that if it wasn't, then generations in the future would adapt.

This report paved the way for the White House to quiet the increasing calls to address the problem of fossil fuels. Like other environmental issues at the time, prominent scientists pegged global warming as just another media ruse.

In a White House briefing, the same scientist in charge of the panel that dismissed the problem before said the government's position on global warming was that it was just a result of solar activity. **No wonder the problem took so long to address, the government allowed prominent scientists to lead the public astray on national television!**

## Merchants of Doubt Review

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While not flawless, *Merchants of Doubt* is an immensely important and timely book. It's a surprising story of a true conspiracy by the government that not many know about. It shows how much power big business can wield when they spread doubt about the scientific research that isn't in their favor.

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## Who would I recommend the Merchants of Doubt summary to?

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The 24-year-old considering going into politics, the 39-year-old political activist, and anyone who is interested in the media and public opinion.