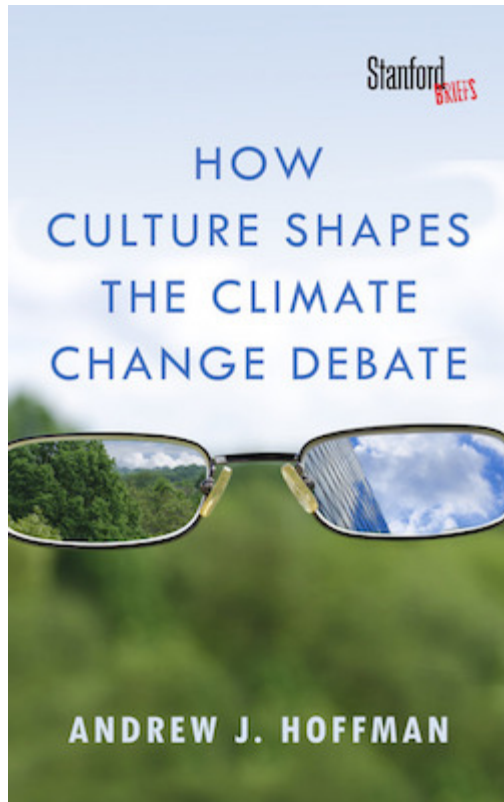


## HOW CULTURE SHAPES THE CLIMATE CHANGE DEBATE

Reviewed by Danya Rumore, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

***A helpful primer for those interested in what research has to say about why climate change remains so socially contentious***



**How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate**, by Andrew Hoffman, Stanford University Press, 2015

Andrew Hoffman's new book *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* skillfully weaves together research from numerous social sciences – ranging from psychology to sociology – to show that public confusion about and lack of action on climate change is not the result of a knowledge deficit or a misunderstanding of the relevant science. Instead, Hoffman shows the startling disconnect between the high level of scientific consensus on one hand and the lack of social consensus on the other is the result of people's intentional and unintentional avoidance of information.

Research suggests that avoidance of information is the result of a variety of cultural and cognitive dynamics. Hoffman effectively summarizes four such forces: (1) humans use cognitive filters, such as motivated reasoning; (2) our cognitive filters reflect our cultural identity; (3) cultural identity can overpower scientific reasoning; and (4) our political economy creates inertia for change. He concludes "The debate over climate change in the United States (and elsewhere) is not about carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas models; it is about opposing cultural values and worldviews through which that science is seen." Building on what research has to say about these forces, he suggests that no amount of

<http://www.anthemenviroexperts.com/?p=815>

science, in and of itself, can reconcile conflicting cultures and values. Instead, he advises that worldviews will have to be altered. This, in turn will necessitate careful public education and engagement campaigns that take account of the strong cultural and cognitive forces causing the current cultural schism.

Hoffman's conclusions are by no means new – indeed, similar points have been made, albeit in bits and pieces, by the many scholars he cites. He does add great value, however, and advances our understanding by summarizing and insightfully stitching together existing scholarship. His goal in writing this book was to “build an edifice from the large and growing body of research in sociology, psychology, and other social sciences about why people accept or reject the science of climate change.”

In successfully doing this, Hoffman's small book – with its less than 100 pages of text – packs a big punch. It is a helpful primer for those interested in what research has to say about why climate change remains so socially contentious despite the considerable scientific consensus that exists. Written in readily accessible language, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate* will be user-friendly for anyone trying to grasp what social science research has to say about the lack of action on climate change.

Hoffman's book provides an excellent example of the kind of writing — succinct, clear, interesting, that we need.

Karen Seto: Urbanization: Solution or Crisis for Climate Change? How do engineers design machines, methods and infrastructure? At omega tau, experts give detailed answers. Over the last ten years, we have produced 300 episodes in which we dug deeper, until we ran out of questions. Join us on our journey through the world of science and engineering: the closer you look and listen, the more interesting things get. C. Conversations in Anthropology. 1. How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate. Andrew J. Homan. Education Director, Graham Sustainability Institute. Ross School of Business/School of Natural Resources & Environment. University of Michigan. Center for Environmental Justice and Sustainability Seafile University. @HoffmanAndy. Divergent Trends. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Building Trust in the Climate Change Debate. 1. Distrust of the present climate messengers. 2. Distrust of the process that created the message. 3. Distrust of the message itself. 4. Distrust of the solutions that come from the message. u Environmentalists v Democrats w Scientists. AGW believers hate people, they hate the Western economy. It changed the debate over climate change by staking a position on the radical flank. Similarly, when Farmers Insurance filed a class action against nearly two hundred communities in the Chicago area for failing to prepare for flooding by arguing that the towns should have known that climate change would lead to this outcome,9 pundits argued that Farmers would lose the case. But the real effect, again, is staking out the radical flank. Or more to the point, how can events be utilized to drive the change that is necessary? Returning to Rahm Emanuel's quip, how can we be sure to never waste a good crisis? Copyright (c) 2015 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr.