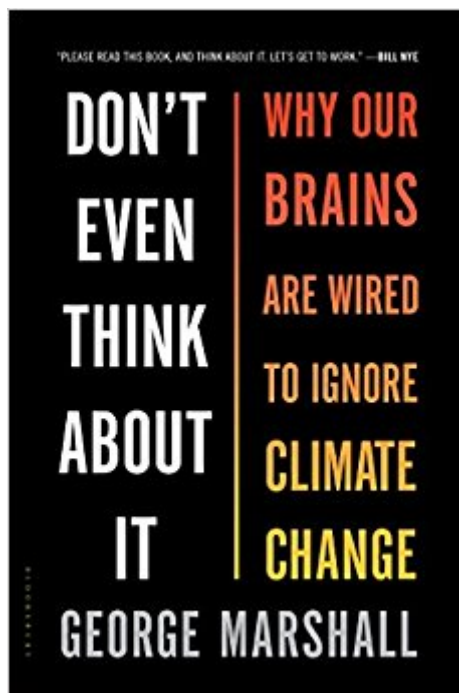




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Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired To Ignore Climate Change



Synopsis

Most of us recognize that climate change is real yet we do nothing to stop it. What is the psychological mechanism that allows us to know something is true but act as if it is not? George Marshall's search for the answers brings him face to face with Nobel Prize-winning psychologists and Texas Tea Party activists; the world's leading climate scientists and those who denounce them; liberal environmentalists and conservative evangelicals. What he discovers is that our values, assumptions, and prejudices can take on lives of their own, gaining authority as they are shared, dividing people in their wake. With engaging stories and drawing on years of his own research, Marshall argues that the answers do not lie in the things that make us different, but rather in what we share: how our human brains are wired--our evolutionary origins, our perceptions of threats, our cognitive blind spots, our love of storytelling, our fear of death, and our deepest instincts to defend our family and tribe. Once we understand what excites, threatens, and motivates us, we can rethink climate change, for it is not an impossible problem. Rather, we can halt it if we make it our common purpose and common ground. In the end, *Don't Even Think About It* is both about climate change and about the qualities that make us human and how we can deal with the greatest challenge we have ever faced.

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Customer Reviews

"[Marshall] offers advice on confronting climate change head on, stepping away from Green Guilt, and putting potentially world-saving policies into action." • The Boston Globe "Intelligent and genial . . . In the end, Marshall is neither fatalistic nor idealistic about

our chances of survival. Yes, he says, we're wired to ignore climate change. But we're also wired to do something about it. — Washington Post — “Clearly we're not responding to the reality of climate change with the speed the crisis requires. This book explains some of the reasons that could be—and how we might work around them in the short time that we have.” — Bill McKibben, author of *Eaarth* — “The science of climate change is easy: burning fossil fuels creates greenhouse gasses that are warming our world. George Marshall reminds us about the hard part: connecting the wellhead to the tailpipe in people's minds as soon as possible. Please read this book, and think about it. Let's get to work.” — Bill Nye — “Illuminating and important—makes clear why we continue down a dangerous path of increasing climate disruption, even when attractive, hospitable, alternative paths are available.” — James Hansen, author of *Storms of My Grandchildren* and Former Director of NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies — “George Marshall is one of the most interesting, challenging and original thinkers on the psychology of our collective climate denial. If his advice were heeded, we might just have the courage to look unblinkingly at this existential crisis, and then to act.” — Naomi Klein, author of *This Changes Everything* and *The Shock Doctrine* — “Enlightening.” — Publishers Weekly — “A real soul searching challenge for us all. Marshall illuminates the path to embarking on a heroic quest for a just and equitable world. A sobering, yet hopeful book.” — Frank DiSalvo, Director of the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future, Cornell University — “In 42 engaging, bite-size chapters, Marshall presents the psychological research demonstrating why climate change simply doesn't feel dangerous enough to justify action and how we can trick our brains into changing our sense of urgency about the problem. His work is a much needed kick in the pants for policymakers, grassroots environmentalists, and the public to induce us to develop effective motivational tools to help us take action to face the reality of climate change before it's too late.” — Booklist — “Fantastic.” — Grist — “Essential reading for everyone interested in communicating the science of climate change and its urgent policy implications.” — Critical Angle — “This is not a book to read and put away—but one that merits returning to and engaging with intellectually. Is there a higher compliment that one can give an author?” — Daily Kos

George Marshall founded the Climate Outreach and Information Network and has worked for twenty-five years in the environmental movement, including senior positions for Greenpeace USA and the Rainforest Foundation. He is a leading European expert in climate change communications,

is a lead advisor to the Welsh government, and counts major nonprofit organizations, politicians, businesses, and trade unions among his many clients. His website is <http://climatedenial.org/>.

Easily readable and in depth, the author explores the complex reasons why people ignore, question, or outright deny the reality of climate change. He compares this denial with denial about other serious problems and, curiously, no one gets off the hook--there aren't exactly good guys or bad guys here. Very thought provoking and helpful for anyone looking to make sense out of these ridiculous times, and anyone trying to make a positive difference.

Very well written with clear exposition about why certain kinds of problems are hard for our minds to wrap themselves around. Well researched and convincing, with positive suggestions about how to go forward. Probably the best book I've read so far on how the human mind responds to problems beyond immediate experience.

A very good overview of the challenges involved with thinking about climate change, let alone trying to fight it. Marshall has talked with everyone, it seems. At the end, he pitches his ideas on how activists can/should talk about climate change, drawing a lot on George Lakoff's frame theory. Then he reminds us of why it is so vitally important to try to do something.

This book attempts to explain and come-to-terms with the reasons why human societies, particularly the U.S. populace, cannot accept the truth and reality of Global Warming and therefore initiate necessary political action and economic reforms to ameliorate or rectify the deadly trend that propels humanity toward catastrophe. This book describes the societal influences mainly from a psychological framework. Succinctly, our minds have not evolved to a level sufficient to deal with a problem like global warming. The prospect of dealing with the issue seems remote, bleak, and almost hopeless. Not only do vested economic interests inhibit reforms, our individual minds are not geared to deal with the problem. According to the author, climate change contains none of the clear signals we require to mobilize our inbuilt sense of threat and is open to misinterpretations caused by large insertions of distorted information disseminated by vested economic interests. "We cannot deal with climate change because the forces of genetic and cultural selection have not created brains capable of looking generations ahead." (Pg. 47) "The in-group loyalties and defensiveness that evolved to support small hunter-gatherer groups may be an obstacle when dealing with a universal shared threat." (Pg. 48) Our long evolutionary journey has led us to develop two distinct

information processing systems: the analytical and emotional. The analytical system is slow and deliberative - rationally weighing the evidence and probability. The emotional system is automatic, impulsive, and quick to apply mental shortcuts for quick conclusions. Most Americans operate on the automatic pilot of the emotional system. Our perception of risk is dominated by the emotional brain, which is poorly suited for dealing with uncertain long-term threats such as climate change. Information on climate change seems uncertain and contested. "A distant, abstract, and disputed threat doesn't have the necessary characteristics to mobilize public opinion." Advocates for action on climate change must speak to both brains. "The division between the emotional brain and the rational brain runs deep in our culture and is clearly expressed in the cultural divide between religion and science that first emerged during the European Enlightenment." (Pg. 121) "Climate change is not a minor inconvenience, it is an existential threat on a scale equaled only by nuclear war." (Pg. 229) Although our psychological framework does indeed play a major part in our failure to accept climate change as a real and existential threat, cultural factors play an even bigger part. The main obstacles to addressing climate change rest not in the individual minds of the collective mass, but in the cultural overhang of political, social, institutional, and economic forces. Entrenched economic interests are self-serving and dominate the political process and the information loop. Information disseminated through mainstream corporate media is often tainted by economic ties and special interest ideologies. The U.S. corporate media has largely been silent on global warming for the entire duration of the 2016 Presidential campaign. We, as a society, cannot come to terms with a pending climate catastrophe until our political and economic institutions begin taking it seriously and inform the disinterested masses of the true existential threat. Instead, the corporate, political, and media elites have chosen to remain silent or distort the facts. Consequently, no leadership or positive action has been forthcoming. For a better understanding of why our culture has failed to address the problem of global warming, I recommend the book *How Culture Shape the Climate Debate* by Andrew Hoffman.

Excellent book. Very insightful and readable. I am a geoscientist who has often puzzled over why so many people deny or ignore climate change, and this book gave me a lot of insight into how people think about it, and what the best approaches are for reaching out to the public. From this book I learned a great deal about a complex subject.

Our problem is not one of "wiring." It's that we have developed ways of life that have removed us from direct contact with the ecosystem. Thus, we are able to think in sociological terms (as part of a

family, community, country, etc.), but not ecological system terms (as part of Earth System).

It was surprising, and for the most part depressing, until the very end, when George Marshall came out with very direct and useful recommendations. I'm definitely glad I got & read it--and the perseverance to read the whole thing.

The author has thought deeply about why people don't talk about climate change very often and why most fail to take significant action. The author presents many angles on this question, UK climate communication expert/ campaigner is his background but he brings to bear a broad and astute reading of literature from cognitive psychology. I was convinced by many of his insights - especially his overarching points about the need for better narratives of how to live that take into account different values and connections to our cultural past rather than to an uncertain, apocalyptic future.

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