

for God's answer to human sin: the gospel of Jesus Christ. I also recommend a "Thinking in Public" interview by Albert Mohler: "The New Religion of Artificial Intelligence and Its Threat to Human Dignity—A Conversation with Adam Kirsch," recorded April 12, 2023. It is available online at <https://albertmohler.com/2023/04/12/adam-kirsch>.

Reviewed by David C. Winyard Sr., Department of Engineering, Grace College & Seminary, Winona Lake, IN 46590.

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HOW TO SELL A POISON: The Rise, Fall, and Toxic Return of DDT by Elena Conis. New York: Bold Type Books, 2022. 388 pages. Hardcover; \$30.00. ISBN: 9781645036746.

Suppose you were creating a new college course on the interaction between chemistry and public policy (this happens to be true for this reviewer). Elena Conis's *How to Sell a Poison* would be a nearly perfect book to read as you set your syllabus. The author presents a thorough historical context with sufficient, but still accessible, chemical detail. The book does not gloss over complexities in the interactions between politicians, industry, and environmental advocates, but it also manages to compel the reader with winsome writing and a peppering of human-interest narratives. And while the book inexplicably does not have a complete set of references, it is an excellent resource for a reader who wants to develop an understanding of the history of DDT and why there are some who are calling for its continued and increased usage to combat malaria.

The structure of *How to Sell a Poison* is mostly chronological, including some information of the early uses of DDT by Swiss potato farmers, the promotion of its use by the United States military in World War II, an explosion of usage in the 1950s and 1960s as both an agricultural and a consumer product, the mounting evidence of DDT's negative environmental impact, advocacy and legislative action in the 1960s and 1970s, and the ongoing debate regarding continued or increased use of DDT to keep malaria in check. This historical structure is written in a compelling way, with most chapters headed by an account of one of the primary actors in an ongoing drama created by benefits and dangers of the pesticide's use. Going far beyond the well-known story of Rachel Carson and her seminal *Silent Spring* (1962), we meet chemists, soldiers, physicians, patients, agricultural workers, government scientists, politicians, supreme court justices, concerned citizens turned plaintiffs, journalists, environmentalists, industry executives, and lobbyists. By the end of the book, the reader will feel that they have been inside the mind of all of the important actors in the multiact drama that was and is DDT.

Conis includes sufficient chemical detail even while she keeps the book accessible to a general audience. The

reader comes to understand the molecular structure of DDT, how it is synthesized, why it is persistent in the environment, how it kills insects, and why it increasingly bioaccumulates going up the food chain. These details are not presented in a tacked-on chapter, but in the historical context as needed to understand the DDT narrative.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is that it does not gloss over the complexities or nuances in the DDT story. This is important to gain an authentic understanding of how DDT became ubiquitous and how it fell out of favor. Yes, the story of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* is included, but so is the congressional testimony that followed and the ultimate lobbying of tobacco interests encouraging a DDT ban as part of a scapegoat campaign to cover up their own cancer problems. The reader also comes to understand the crucial role that the DDT controversy played in the establishment of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Environmental Defense Fund. A true historian, Conis gives you a compelling behind-the-scenes understanding of who held influence regarding DDT and how their influence was wielded.

Nearly every chapter begins with a narrative regarding one of the main actors in the DDT story. This feature makes the book easy to read and compelling. You see the promise and the problems of DDT from the point of view of a land developer, a chemist, a government scientist, a physician, a health department officer, a member of congress, an organic gardener caught in the overspray, an attorney, an immigrant agricultural worker, a bird enthusiast, the surgeon general, a university professor, a journalist, the EPA director, the mayor of a small town, and several others. As their stories are told, the reader is led to an understanding of the many facets of DDT in an organic and interesting way. Each story is backed up by references, as appropriate, to letters, articles, books, or government documents. But even as the stories are historically documented, they read more like a story than a history textbook.

The one frustrating aspect of the book for this reviewer is the lack of a comprehensive bibliography. The author refers to many documents in the chapters, but then does not include a complete reference to all of them so that the reader can find those documents. This will not bother most readers, but as an instructor designing a class, this reader is seeking primary documents (public laws, scientific journal articles) to give to my students to directly illustrate the connections between chemistry and public policy.

Overall, this is an excellent book for anyone who is seeking a thorough and nuanced understanding of DDT.

Reviewed by Herb Fyneweaver, Professor of Chemistry, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.