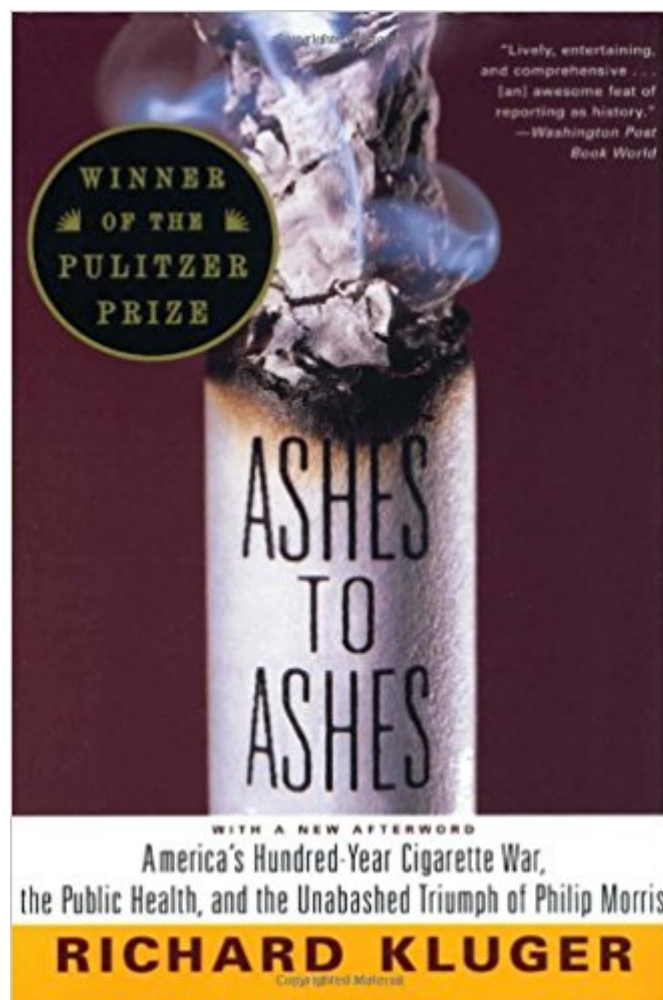




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Ashes To Ashes: America's Hundred-Year Cigarette War, The Public Health, And The Unabashed Triumph Of Philip Morris



Synopsis

No book before this one has rendered the story of cigarettes -- mankind's most common self-destructive instrument and its most profitable consumer product -- with such sweep and enlivening detail. Here for the first time, in a story full of the complexities and contradictions of human nature, all the strands of the historical process -- financial, social, psychological, medical, political, and legal -- are woven together in a riveting narrative. The key characters are the top corporate executives, public health investigators, and antismoking activists who have clashed ever more stridently as Americans debate whether smoking should be closely regulated as a major health menace. We see tobacco spread rapidly from its aboriginal sources in the New World 500 years ago, as it becomes increasingly viewed by some as sinful and some as alluring, and by government as a windfall source of tax revenue. With the arrival of the cigarette in the late-nineteenth century, smoking changes from a luxury and occasional pastime to an everyday -- to some, indispensable -- habit, aided markedly by the exuberance of the tobacco huskers. This free-enterprise success saga grows shadowed, from the middle of this century, as science begins to understand the cigarette's toxicity. Ironically the more detailed and persuasive the findings by medical investigators, the more cigarette makers prosper by seeming to modify their product with filters and reduced dosages of tar and nicotine. We see the tobacco manufacturers come under intensifying assault as a rogue industry for knowingly and callously plying their hazardous wares while insisting that the health charges against them (a) remain unproven, and (b) are universally understood, so smokers indulge at their own risk. Among the eye-opening disclosures here: outrageous pseudo-scientific claims made for cigarettes throughout the '30s and '40s, and the story of how the tobacco industry and the National Cancer Institute spent millions to develop a "safer" cigarette that was never brought to market. Dealing with an emotional subject that has generated more heat than light, this book is a dispassionate tour de force that examines the nature of the companies' culpability, the complicity of society as a whole, and the shaky moral ground claimed by smokers who are now demanding recompense.

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Customer Reviews

The time is right for a comprehensive history of cigarettes in America and their effect on public health and the economy. This book, passionate yet measured, bulky but absorbing, looms as definitive. Kluger (Simple Justice) traces the rise of the cigarette to the onset of mass production in the late 19th century. He moves forward with cross-cutting stories, about the barons and hucksters who developed the industry, the slow rise of medical and civic concern over smoking and the industry's increasingly obfuscatory and combative stance. Kluger has harsh words for government regulators, long too timid to take on a powerful industry. And while he ultimately indicts industry leader Philip Morris, his narrative suggests that the company, which has moved overseas and also diversified into the food business, has been managed with supreme savvy. Kluger concludes with an innovative policy remedy: because the tobacco companies will inevitably lose big in court someday, why not trade a federal exemption from lawsuits for limits on advertising, higher cigarette taxes, an end to tobacco price supports and required reductions on tar and nicotine? Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Two recent releases chronicle the history of the current political status of the controversial tobacco industry from different vantage points. Kluger's (The Paper, LJ 10/15/87) *Ashes to Ashes* is riveting and highly readable despite its length. From the Native American usage of tobacco through the lawsuits of the 1990s, Kluger follows the industry's agricultural and labor practices, technical advances, and marketing campaigns; he also considers research on tobacco's deleterious health effects and the tobacco control movement. Significant personalities and events such as the invention of the cigarette-rolling machine are featured. An extensive bibliography is provided, and a lengthy list of the Phillip Morris executives (and ex-executives!) are interviewed. Suitable for readers of high school age on up, this book belongs in every library. Much more scholarly, *The Cigarette Papers* focuses more on one company?Brown & Williamson?and one issue?health effects. In 1994,

Glantz received an anonymous package containing thousands of pages of internal documents from Brown & Williamson. The author's analysis of these indicate that, public statements to the contrary, the company did indeed know about the health and safety effects of their products and actively sought to suppress the information. The documents, made available by the University of California via the Internet (<http://www.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco>), are quoted extensively. Also included is a statement by Brown & Williamson in response to the 1995 publication of some of these data in the Journal of the American Medical Association. This work is extremely thorough and at times makes for tedious reading. Recommended for academic and large public libraries. Eris Weaver, Marin Inst. for the Prevention of Alcohol & Other Drug Problems, Rohnert, Cal. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This is the finest work on the critical subject of tobacco that I have ever read, Mr. Kluger's research is incomparable on a subject that so badly needed it. Earlier tracts on the subject were either incomplete or so didactic as to become opaque. The tragedy of tobacco production is that the moral failure was not seen as the crime it clearly was. This book explains authoritatively and in measured tone how the crime played out and is still playing out. The further tragedy of this story is that it has become a blueprint for deadly production in other industries e.g. fossil fuels, pharmaceuticals. This is not a story of designing a product but of designing a deceptive means of selling a deadly product. Delightfully, Mr. Kluger also writes very well, turning a dreary and disgusting history into the dramatic tale of depraved capitalism.

This is a long but generally fascinating book. I was rarely less than interested and to me it was a disappointment to get to the end and have unresolved issues raised (simply because the story was ongoing when written). There is a short afterword to this edition that takes the story from 1996 to 1997. The author spoke to a lot of players in the story and this comes across in the telling. This is a work of journalism as well as history. Mostly fact-based journalism - the author does express views through the story but often covers a variety of points-of-view before arriving at a conclusion. The main story threads are the growth of the tobacco industry, development of an understanding of the health issues and the cigarette industries responses to them, the marketing of product, government responses, the growth, changes in various of the main companies over time - especially the rise of Philip Morris to the major global player (It is this story I found the least interesting - there are a lot of discussion of company politics and paragraph introductions to some fairly insignificant corporate players), and the growth of the anti-tobacco forces. I thought the coverage of a major court case

(Cipollone v cigarettes companies) was particularly gripping. My wife read the updated kindle version when it arrived and didn't find many text errors at all. This is the first non-fiction work I have read on the kindle and I missed the ability to use an index, but it is useful to have the bibliography here. Overall I can highly recommend this work but hopefully the kindle version can be corrected to become as fascinating a story as the paper version.

The primary competition for this book's potential readership is Allan Brandt's *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product That Defined America*. I say Brandt's is the better choice mainly because Kluger becomes so bogged down in minutiae that I found myself skipping many paragraphs (e.g., recitations of the accounting jargon associated with tobacco company stock transactions, exhaustive biographies of minor figures, overly technical discussions of the biochemistry and histology of tobacco-borne diseases, etc.) In contrast Brandt's eloquence and pithiness made me not want to miss a single word.

The strongest part of the book follows the business side of tobacco. The author is especially adept (as you would expect from a novelist) at sketching out the players in the history of tobacco. He is also very good on the history of various cigarette brands, their composition, advertising, their ups and downs, sales strategies. This is the best part of the book. A number of wonderfully told stories and incidents pepper the book. The author weaves this information into a steadily growing body of evidence that smoking is harmful, and then pits the industry figures against scientists, and tosses in politicians and anti-smoking groups as the battles go on. The book has one glaring weaknesses, obvious to anyone. The author badly needed an editor to exercise control over his tendency to go off course and to go overboard and tell everything he knows about something. For example, the business diversification of Philip Morris is really tangential to the story, and should have been cut. The author's style is encyclopedic, which is not a problem at first, but it wears the reader down by the halfway point. The author seems very weak in essential areas of chemistry and biology. At one point he even refers to cellulose as "protein-like". He struggles badly with the effect of air and flue drying on the chemistry of tobacco, particularly nicotine. He seems to miss the boat on ammonia technology and the rise of Marlboros. But maybe that information came out too late for him to include it.

Mr Kluger's tome contains fascinating insight into the nuts and bolts and agendas of entities involved with 19th and 20th C. E. history of combusted cigarettes, cigars and experimentals. Not all

of it can be taken at face value, but it does cover a huge amount of information over the many aspects of this staple of the US economy.

There is no question but that the book was exhaustively researched and tells you everything you might want to know about the tobacco industry over the past 100 years. Often it was compelling reading as well. But it seems to me it could have been a good deal shorter and still have gotten the main points across--say under 450 pages rather than 750 pages. It seems that every fact Kluger ever uncovered went into this book. As a general matter, I also found the book much more interesting when it was talking about the "bad guys" (i.e. the tobacco industry and particularly their advertisers), rather than the efforts of the various anti-tobacco groups to show the harmful effects of smoking. I found those sections comparatively tedious. No question that the book is quite an accomplishment though and I would certainly recommend it although I didn't find it necessary to digest every word

I am in the cigar industry. This book was extremely well researched and enjoyable. Many of the scenarios experienced by cigarette manufacturers are now being experienced in the cigar.

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