*Frackopoly: The Battle for the Future of Energy and the Environment*

Introduction

Hydraulic fracking has been noted to be one of the most detrimental acts in our environment today. The book *Frackopoly: The Battle for the Future of Energy and the Environment*, by Wenonah Hauter, details a thorough history of the beginning of fracking and its effects on the environment today. Fracking is where a tube is placed into the ground and highly pressurized liquid containing sediment and other small particles are shot into shale and bedrock. Gas and oil are then released and collected for other processes. This obviously has very adverse effects on the environment and can even lead to earthquakes.

One of the most impressive aspects of this book is in every detail that Hauter shares pertaining to fracking, there is some sort of political or historical alignment. She has tied every instance of oil consumption with a weakening in democracy, a change in presidential power, or some economic falter. Hauter has discovered that the reason these companies have been able to succeed for so long is that they wormed their way into politics and have been safely hiding there for decades.

This issue has not ended and will most likely not have an end in the near future. This industry has so much money, power, and influence in it, that it will take decades and a big shift in environmental practices to end. We rely on oil and gas. Unfortunately, fracking is a way that we are able to keep up with demands and keep our gas prices lower. Unless we see a big shift to electrical cars or a different type of fuel, this will most likely not see an end any time soon.

I chose this book because I remember learning about fracking in high school and thought it was interesting. I wanted to further explore this topic and hopefully learn something new and interesting. It is also one of the worst things we can do to the environment and should not be legal at all. I want to help raise awareness for this issue.

Body

One thing that is fascinating about this book is the sheer attention to detail and history of the whole picture. Hauter did not only focus on fracking, but the oil industry in its entirety. One thing she discussed was the beginning of the monopoly on oil. The famously titled book *The Seven Sisters* brought light to the seven companies that controlled the oil industry in the 50’s and how they did it. There are so many layers that kept these men out of jail even though what they were doing is highly illegal and morally grey.

One example of these powerful men’s tactics was John D. Rockefeller’s ploy to take over the oil business. He used the tactic known as predatory pricing where he priced oil lower than it was to produce because he could afford the cost of outlasting his competition. While he was losing a little bit of money to offset the price, his competition could not compete, cutting them out of the picture. Rockefeller is still one of the richest men to have ever lived.

In the chapter “Exxon: More Powerful Than Ever,” Hauter comes out bold with the statement “Exxon will be a top contender for committing the worst crimes against the Earth.” They are the largest producer of fracked gas and saw a profit of $32.5 billion in 2014. The CEO of Exxon, Monroe Rathbone, was one of the primary contributors to the creation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). This gave him a huge upper hand on the market. OPEC will intentionally change their rate of production to manipulate the market. This prevents any other competition from rising and keeps them in power.

With few people controlling the oil that the world relies on, there is little that the government can do to monitor the oil industry and regulations. When companies like Exxon spend millions in anti-climate change propaganda, it is difficult to get the true information out. As stated in the book, Exxon is documented to have spent $25 million on climate change denial efforts from 1998 to 2006. It can only be assumed that this number has skyrocketed with the growth of the internet.

One of the most prevalent debates about the validity of fracking is that by harvesting natural gas, there will be lower emissions from burning that gas than regular oil. There are many solutions to fracking and the book discusses many grassroot operations that have sprouted across the country. One of the lead scientists and advocates for safe natural gas use is Fred Krupp. He works for the Environmental Defense Fund and advocates for the combined use of natural gas and pollution trading to lower our footprint. There are new technologies that gasify coal and can convert it into methane. These are revolutions that can have big effects to the oil industry but, like all environmental hurdles, are not the most economically sound operations.

Regarding some of the direct solution tactics that are discussed in the book, a few options are cap-and-trade and the carbon tax. These have been circulated for years, but do they have any positive effect? In the review done by Steve Horn, he speaks with Hauter about these options. One of the responses that Hauter gave was that even some of the large environmentalist groups can be performative. Instead of putting in place effective mandates, there are schemes that are not effective. The carbon tax has also been under scrutiny if it is even effective at all. Recent data and numbers show that it is not as effective as once publicized to be. Hauter’s call to action is instead of being political, which got us to where we are today, go and take actionable steps. When we get mixed up in financial schemes, we will be thrown in the same loop that we have been for decades.

Conclusion

I think that this book is incredible. As some of the reviews said, every voter should read this book (Reiss). Nothing is scarier than an educated voter. The attention to detail, the context, and overall care about this topic is very compelling and makes you care about this issue. It truly is “the environmental issue of our time” and no one is discussing it. These powerful companies are so protected by decades of laws and billions of dollars, it seems like there is no end in sight. Books like these are a call to action and an exposure of the monopoly that is the oil industry.

I give this book and overall rating of 7/10. For the common reader, it is a bit lengthy and would be a commitment to read if environmental books are not your thing. It can also feel like a history book at times. There are so many names and dates that it gets hard to keep track of. If you are committed to learning about the environment and how the government plays a big role in protecting its interests, this book is for you.

References

Horn, Steve. “Frackopoly.” Resilience, 7 jun. 2016, <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2016-06-07/frackopoly/>

Reiss, Tammy. “Book Review: Frackopoly: The Battle For The Future Of Energy And The Environment.” Green Energy Times, 2016, <https://www.greenenergytimes.org/2016/10/book-review-frackopoly-the-battle-for-the-future-of-energy-and-the-environment/>