

Agnotology: The Cultural Production of Ignorance

October 7th and 8th, 2005

9 am – 5:30 pm

Levinthal Hall, Stanford Humanities Center
424 Santa Teresa Street
Stanford University



The workshop will explore a new theoretical perspective and methodology —agnotology, the cultural production of ignorance— in interdisciplinary science studies. Workshop participants will explore how ignorance is produced or maintained in diverse settings, through (for example) media neglect, corporate or governmental secrecy and suppression, document destruction, and myriad forms of inherent or avoidable culturological selectivity, inattention, and forgetfulness. The point is to develop a taxonomy of understandings and uses of ignorance, but also tools for understanding how and why diverse forms of knowledge do not or did not "come to be" or are delayed or neglected at different points in history.

Organizers: Londa Schiebinger, Barbara D. Finberg Director, IRWG, and Professor of History of Science, Stanford University and Robert N. Proctor, Professor of History of Science, Stanford University

Iain Boal, Research Fellow, Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley "Lost Paths in Technics: The Bicycle in Global History"

Lundy Braun, Associate Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine and Africana Studies, Brown University "Biomedical Science, Colonialism, and the Production of Invisibility: The Case of Asbestos Diseases in South Africa."

David Magnus, Director, Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics, Stanford University "Agnotology as a Strategy in the Debate over Genetically Engineered Organisms: The Precautionary Principle versus Risk Assessment"

Adrienne Mayor, Visiting Fellow in Classics and Human Values, Princeton University "Suppression of Indigenous Fossil Knowledge: From Claverack, New York 1705 to Agate Springs, Nebraska, 2005"

David M. Michaels, Professor of Occupational and Environmental Health and Epidemiology, George Washington University "Manufacturing Uncertainty: Contested Science and the Protection of the Public's Health & Environment"

Charles Mills, Professor of Philosophy, University of Illinois at Chicago "White vs. Black: Race in the Epistemology of Ignorance"

Naomi Oreskes, Associate Professor, Department of History and Program in Science Studies, UC San Diego "Deny, Deny, Deny: How to Sow Confusion over Climate Change"

Robert N. Proctor, Professor of History of Science, Stanford University "Agnotology, A Missing Term to Describe the Cultural Production of Ignorance (and its Study)"

Geoffrey Sea, Author and independent scholar, Piketon, Ohio "The Circle Game: Uranium Enrichment and the Depletion of Knowledge"

Michael J. Smithson, Reader, School of Psychology, Australian National University, Canberra "Social Theories of Ignorance"

Sponsored by the Patrick Suppes Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Science and Technology, Program in History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Biomedical Ethics, Center on Ethics, Stanford Humanities Center, Modern Thought and Literature, and the Institute for Research on Women and Gender