



Lead Wars: The Politics of Science and the Fate of America's Children (California/Milbank Books on Health and the Public)

By Gerald Markowitz, David Rosner

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In this incisive examination of lead poisoning during the past half century, Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner focus on one of the most contentious and bitter battles in the history of public health. *Lead Wars* details how the nature of the epidemic has changed and highlights the dilemmas public health agencies face today in terms of prevention strategies and chronic illness linked to low levels of toxic exposure. The authors use the opinion by Maryland's Court of Appeals—which considered whether researchers at Johns Hopkins University's prestigious Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI) engaged in unethical research on 108 African-American children—as a springboard to ask fundamental questions about the practice and future of public health. *Lead Wars* chronicles the obstacles faced by public health workers in the conservative, pro-business, anti-regulatory climate that took off in the Reagan years and that stymied efforts to eliminate lead from the environments and the bodies of American children.

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Editorial Review

Review

“In *Lead Wars*, CUNY’s Gerald Markowitz and Columbia University’s David Rosner convincingly show that the Baltimore toddler study emerged from a century of policymaking in which the US government, faced at times with a choice between protecting children from lead poisoning and protecting the businesses that produced and marketed lead paint, almost invariably chose the latter.”

(*New York Review Of Books* 2013-03-21)

“*Lead Wars* clearly shows that the scandalous and tragic history of lead is one that our society is doomed to repeat over and over again unless we develop and fight for better safeguards against chemicals and new technology.”

(Helen Jupiter *Mother Nature Network* 2013-03-26)

“A fascinating new book.”

(Howard Markel *PBS NewsHour The Rundown Blog* 2013-03-29)

“Thoroughly researched and clearly written, this book does an excellent job of illustrating the problem society encounters when science and industry face off over likely harm versus economic benefit.”

(Richard Maxwell *Library Journal* 2013-05-01)

“A deeply conceived and well-written book by two of America’s best public health historians. It’s also an important background briefing on the politics and ethics of scientific research for journalists who will be covering environmental health issues like these.”

(Bill Kovarik *SE Journal* 2013-07-01)

“Chronicles the monstrous irresponsibility of companies in the lead industry over the course of the 20th century.”

(Nicholas D. Kristof *New York Times* 2013-10-16)

“I want to thank David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz for what that they’ve done to bring the story of the lead paint wars to the public.”

(Senator Sheldon Whitehouse 2013-10-17)

“The prolific team of Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner has done it again. *Lead Wars: The Politics of Science and the Fate of America’s Children* is a thoroughly researched, passionate, and gripping history of a major public health problem. . . . *Lead Wars* challenges us to take better care of our children by fighting those industries that appear to regard them—especially poor black and Latino children—as disposable.”

(Elizabeth Fee *Health Affairs* 2013-10-01)

From the Inside Flap

“The story Rosner and Markowitz tell of generations of children gravely damaged by promiscuous dispersal of lead, and the persistent attempts made to evade responsibility for the harms caused, is both true and shocking. This book will not just educate future environmental and health leaders, it should outrage

them.”—Richard J. Jackson MD, MPH, Professor and Chair, Environmental Health Sciences, UCLA Fielding School of Public Health

“Lead Wars argues that the tragedy of lead is one that our society is doomed to repeat again and again unless we develop better safeguards to protect us against chemicals and new technology. This book is a “must read” for public health professionals as well as for political scientists, social historians and for all who care about the future of America’s children.”—Philip J. Landrigan MD, Ethel H. Wise Professor of Community Medicine and Chairman in the Department of Preventive Medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine

“Can being poor justify differing standards for research or a focus merely on harm reduction and the politically feasible? Markowitz and Rosner make the compelling case that in public health the practical and possible may in the end be immoral and dangerous, and a consequence of the war on science. A necessary read for anyone who cares about public health, the role of government, children, medical experimentation and environmental justice.”—Susan M. Reverby, McLean Professor in the History of Ideas and Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies, Wellesley College

“Lead poisoning remains a tragedy (and scandal) of immense proportions, and the authors utilize new sources—including previously unexamined court records—to tell a story that is as gripping as it is important.”—Robert N. Proctor, Professor of the History of Science at Stanford University and author of *Cancer Wars*

“This book tells the story of a public health tragedy affecting millions of children, the determined doctors who tried to help, and an industry propaganda campaign which prolonged and worsened the tragedy. For as long as powerful corporations manipulate politicians and public opinion to profit from dangerous products, this will remain an important story for our country.”—Sheldon Whitehouse, United States Senator

Lead Wars makes clear the public health dangers we face if we continue to ignore this corporate strategy that defines “acceptable” levels of risk for the thousands of chemicals in use. It brings home the importance now more than ever of taking a precautionary approach to managing toxic chemicals. This book is a must for any activist who wants to understand the strategies polluters use to continue business as usual. —Lois Marie Gibbs, Executive Director, Center for Health, Environment & Justice

“In this outstanding book, Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner utilize historical scholarship to expose a major tragedy in recent public health: the failure to protect children from the harms of lead in our environment. Despite the fact that the toxic effects of lead have been known for centuries, they show—using previously unavailable documents—how the lead industry has protected their profits at public expense, despite their explicit knowledge of its many dangers. *Lead Wars* brings this tragic history to light in a narrative that integrates deep investigation and analysis with compelling advocacy and compassion for children who continue to be at risk from one of the world’s best-known toxins.”—Allan M. Brandt, Professor of the History of Medicine at Harvard University, and author of *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product That Defined America*

“Markowitz and Rosner have majestically woven the key characters and elements of the history of lead poisoning into a captivating narrative that exposes a tremendous and terrifying truth; unless it serves the needs of private enterprise, public health is incapable of controlling the causes of chronic disease and disability. In place of prevention, we have settled for partial solutions. Everyone who has an interest in public health, health policy or history should read this book.”—Bruce Lanphear, MD, MPH, Clinician Scientist, Child & Family Research Institute BC Children’s Hospital and Professor of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC

About the Author

Gerald Markowitz is Distinguished Professor of History at John Jay College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He is, along with David Rosner, coauthor of *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution* (UC Press), and eight other books.

David Rosner is Ronald Lauterstein Professor of Public Health and Professor of History at Columbia University and Co-director of the Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health. In 2010 he was elected to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

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