

This is the print version of the Skeptical Science article 'Al Gore got it wrong', which can be found at http://sks.to/gore.

Is Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth accurate?

https://skepticalscience.com/al-gore-inconvenient-truth-errors.htm Retrieved Feb 2 2021

What The Science Says:
While there are minor errors in An Inconvenient Truth, the main truths presented - evidence to show mankind is causing global warming and its various impacts is consistent with peer reviewed science.

Climate Myth: Al Gore got it wrong
"Al Gore's Oscar-winning documentary on global warming, An Inconvenient Truth, was [...] criticised by a high court judge who highlighted what he said were "nine scientific errors" in the film.

Mr Justice Barton yesterday said that while the film was "broadly accurate" in its presentation of climate change, he identified nine significant errors in the film, some of which, he said, had arisen in "the context of alarmism and exaggeration" to support the former US vice-president's views on climate change." (The Guardian)

It's worth pointing out that Al Gore is a politician, not a climate scientist. Debunking Gore does not disprove anthropogenic global warming. Nevertheless, it is instructive to look at the purported errors in An Inconvenient Truth as it reveals a lot about climate science and the approach of his critics.

What Al got right

Retreating Himalayan Glaciers
Contrary to James Taylor's article, the American Meteorological Society's Journal of Climate never said growing glaciers are "confounding global warming alarmists" - that's a quote from the Heartland Institute website written by... James Taylor. He's actually quoting himself and attributing it to the AMS! To put the Himalayas in context, the original AMS study is not refuting global warming but observing anomalous behaviour in a particular region, the Karakoram mountains. This region has shown short term glacier growth in contrast to the long term, widespread glacier retreat throughout the rest of the Himalayas due to feedback processes associated with monsoon season. Overall, Himalayan glaciers are retreating - satellite measurements have observed "an overall deglaciation of 21%" from 1962 to 2007. In essence, the Karakoram glaciers are the exception that proves the rule.

Greenland gaining ice
Re Greenland, a big clue is the study's title: Recent Ice-Sheet Growth in the Interior of Greenland. The study finds increasing ice mass in the interior due to heavier snowfall - an expected side-effect of global warming - and doesn't factor in all the melting that occurs at the edges of the ice sheet. Overall, Greenland is losing ice according to satellite measurements here, here and here.

Antartica cooling and gaining ice
Antarctic cooling is a uniquely regional phenomenon. The original study observed regional cooling in east Antarctica. The hole in the ozone layer above the Pole causes increased circular winds around the continent preventing warmer air from reaching eastern Antarctica and the Antarctic plateau. The flip side of this is the Antarctic Peninsula has "experienced some of the fastest warming on Earth, nearly 3°C over the last half-century". While East Antartica is gaining ice, Antartica is overall losing ice. This is mostly due to melting in West Antarctica which recently had the largest melting observed by satellites in the last 30 years.

Hurricanes
The dispute isn't that global warming is causing more hurricanes but that it's increasing their severity and longevity.

What Al got wrong

Mount Kilimanjaro
Indeed deforestation seems to be causing Mount Kilimanjaro's shrinking glacier so Gore got this wrong. In his defence, the study by Philip Mote came out after Gore's film was made. But Mote puts it in perspective: "The fact that the loss of ice on Mount Kilimanjaro cannot be used as proof of global warming does not mean that the Earth is not warming. There is ample and conclusive evidence that Earth's average temperature has increased in the past 100 years, and the decline of mid- and high-latitude glaciers is a major piece of evidence."

Dr Thompson's thermometer
Al Gore refers to a graph of temperature, attributing it to Dr Thompson . The graph is actually a combination of Mann's hockey stick (Mann 1998) and CRU's surface measurements (Jones 1999). However, the essential point that temperatures are greater now than during the Medieval Warm Period is correct and confirmed by multiple proxy reconstructions. More on Dr Thompson's thermometer...



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Al Gore's film was "broadly accurate" according to an expert witness called when an attempt was made through the courts to prevent the film being shown in schools.

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Al Gore, certainly the most vilified proponent of climate change anywhere in the world, earned most of this enmity through the success of a film he presented called An Inconvenient Truth (AIT). The film was a staid presentation of climate science to date, a round-up of research, science and projections, with many cinematic sequences employed to harness the power of the medium.

The majority of the film, covering issues like Himalayan Glaciers, Greenland and Antarctica losing ice, the severity of hurricanes and other weather phenomena, was accurate and represented the science as it stood. Since the release of the film, considerably more evidence has been found in support of the science and projections in the film.

One claim was in error, as was one attribution of a graph. The error was in the claim that climate change had caused the shrinking of Mount Kilimanjaro, although the evidence that the shrinkage was most likely caused by deforestation did not appear until after the film was made. The error of attribution was in reference to a graph of temperature and attributes it mistakenly to a Dr. Thompson, when it was actually a combination of Mann's hockey stick and CRU surface temperature data.

The Legal Case

The film is also subject to attack on the grounds that Al Gore was prosecuted in the UK and a judge found many errors in the film. This is untrue.

The case, heard in the civil court, was brought by a school governor against the Secretary of State for Education, in an attempt to prevent the film being distributed to schools. Mr. Justice Burton, in his judgement, ordered that teaching notes accompanying the film should be modified to clarify the speculative (and occasionally hyperbolic) presentation of some issues.

Mr. Justice Burton found no errors at all in the science. In his written judgement, the word ***error*** appears in quotes each time it is used – nine points formed the entirety of his judgement - indicating that he did not support the assertion the points were erroneous. About the film in general, he said this:

17. I turn to AIT, the film. The following is clear:

i) It is substantially founded upon scientific research and fact, albeit that the science is used,

in the hands of a talented politician and communicator, to make a political statement and to support a political programme.

22. I have no doubt that Dr Stott, the Defendant's expert, is right when he says that: "*Al Gore's presentation of the causes and likely effects of climate change in the film was broadly accurate.*"

The judge did identify statements that had political implications he felt needed qualification in the guidance notes for teachers, and ordered that both qualifications on the science and the political implications should be included in the notes. Al Gore was not involved in the case, was not prosecuted, and because the trial was not a criminal case, there was no jury, and no guilty verdict was handed down.

Note: the vilification of Al Gore is best understood in the context of personalisation. When opponents attack something abstract - like science - the public may not associate with the argument. By giving a name and a face and a set of behavioural characteristics - being a rich politician, for example - it is easy to create a fictional enemy through inference and association. Al Gore is a successful politician who presented a film, his training and experience suitable to the task. To invoke Gore is a way to obfuscate about climate science, for which Gore has neither responsibility, claim nor blame.

Basic rebuttal written by GPWayne

Additional useful sources and comments can be found at https://skepticalscience.com/al-gore-inconvenient-truth-errors.htm