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## Rachel Carson Indicted at the Cato Institute

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Last week the big thinkers at the Cato Institute came unhinged at an event previewing a new book criticizing Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, which was released 50 years ago this week. They claimed that Carson is responsible for both the reluctance of African governments to use DDT in mosquito-eradication programs and the fact that DDT is widely used in mosquito-eradication programs in Africa. They blamed Carson for the failure of chemical companies to invest in new insecticides that could be used to eradicate mosquitoes and the fact that DDT is still used where permitted by the Stockholm Treaty. They even claimed that Carson was responsible for a scientist's recent claim that Olympic gold medalist Caster Semenya's hermaphroditic genitalia were a result of exposure to DDT in her native South Africa.

Carson has been dead for half a century. How does she continue to do so much harm?

It's complicated.

As Joseph J. Mangano and Janette D. Sherman report in the current issue of the *Spectator*, *Silent Spring* launched the environmental movement. Environmentalists helped persuade Richard Nixon to create the Environmental Protection Agency, lobbied for the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, and are leading the movement to regulate greenhouse gases that are heating up the planet. All of this involves government regulation.

Cato funders such as the Koch brothers and the Altria and R.J. Reynolds tobacco companies have no use for government regulation, which is why they write checks to Cato. To them, the "free market" provides most of the regulation we need.

So that much makes sense.

And not everything the two speakers said was unreasonable. Better said, some statements by one of the speakers were reasonable.

Perhaps Carson's scientific methodology was flawed, if she failed to correct for the decline in other diseases when describing increased percentages of cancer deaths in the United States between 1900 and 1950, as Andrew Morriss claimed.

Morriss, a co-author of the book (*Silent Spring at 50: The False Crises of Rachel Carson*) did most of the talking. But first the London Olympics.

How was Rachel Carson responsible for a recent claim that Caster Semenya's genital irregularities were caused by exposure to DDT?

Tren explained. The scientist who made the claim had been inspired by "the movement that Carson started." And he ignored the fact that Symenya grew up in a town where DDT hadn't been sprayed for 40 years.

Yet South Africans reacted to the Semenya story by refusing to let government spray crews into their homes.

"This is what you get when *Silent Spring* is held up as the example of scientific evidence," Tren said. DDT spraying drops off, the mosquito population increases, children die...

Try making that argument in a court of law, or in a court of public opinion.

Tren failed to mention current research from the University of Praetoria which found that urogenital defects in newborns are 33 percent higher where DDT is sprayed.

And there was more to Tren's argument than androgyny and the Olympics.

Tren, who admitted that Carson never urged a ban on the use of DDT, insists that her criticism of the insecticide 50 years ago continues to restrict DDT stocks and drives up cost. Yet somehow Carson is also responsible for the failure of chemical companies to create safer, cheaper alternatives to DDT.

Like I said, it's complicated.

So is Tren. He is president of Africans Fighting Malaria, but his interests are eclectic. He co-wrote of a book critical of the World Bank's opposition to tobacco-company marketing in developing countries. He lobbies against the distribution of generic anti-aids drugs in South Africa. He's a climate change skeptic and a proponent of privatization of Africa's water supplies.

Kipling never imagined a white man's burden so heavy.

University of Alabama Law School professor Andrew Morriss used the "with all due respect" formulation.

"A beautifully written book...a searing polemic with an image of a spring when no birds would sing, that remains in our national consciousness."

Then he jumped ugly.

Carson conspired with legendary New Yorker editor William Shawn to "use science as a weapon." She willfully and knowingly omitted critical scientific findings of which she had to have been aware. Her work was dishonest and deceptive.

In the end, Morriss said:

"She changed how Americans think about pesticides and as a result has changed how the rest of the world uses them, because American environmentalists have had a great deal of success in badgering the world into doing what American environmentalists think is the right thing—which is basically letting Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians suffer and die from malaria."

Before making that claim, Morriss introduced the population-control movement that was a hot topic in the fifties: "The anti-human arguments that there are too many people and we should stop efforts to increase population by reducing disease."

Carson's concerns about DDT served those ends, and children in developing countries are dying today because of the book she published.

"Poor people in Latin America and Asia are suffering, basically so that people at cocktail parties in New York can feel better," Morris said in response to a question about mosquito bed-nets that Western NGOs distribute in Africa.

That's the smear. Carson was a closet eugenicist and she has prevailed, even if her death from breast cancer didn't allow her to see her work finished.

Carson's death, in fact, is a set piece in Morriss's narrative.

"That Carson died of breast cancer so soon after *Silent Spring* only adds to the impact of the cancer story [that she advanced]," Morris said.

Die-hard critics, these guys at Cato.