

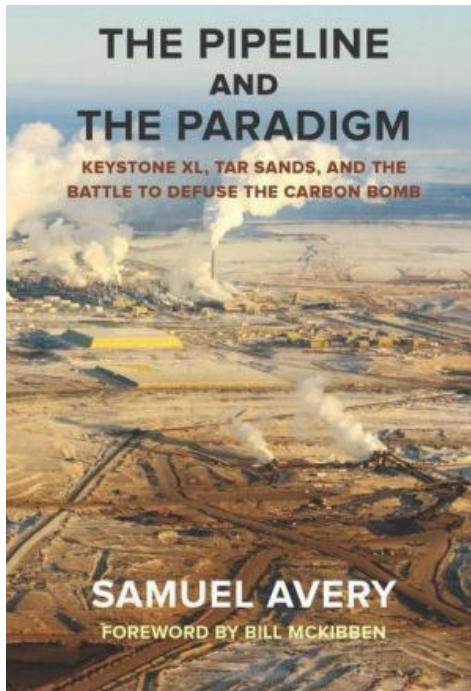


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Dissects subject in comprehensive manner

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“The Pipeline and the Paradigm: Keystone XL, Tar Sands, and the Battle to Defuse the Carbon Bomb,” by Samuel Avery. Washington, D.C.: Ruka Press, 2013. 225 pages, \$19.95.

“In Frankfort, Kentucky, the day was filled with marchers carrying signs and banners protesting mountaintop removal coal mining,” Samuel Avery writes in the introduction to his latest book, “The Pipeline and the Paradigm: Keystone XL, Tar Sands, and the Battle to Defuse the Carbon Bomb.”

“Every February, a thousand people gather at the state capitol building to denounce the dynamiting of mountain ridges and the bulldozing of dirt and broken bedrock into valleys and streambeds for the sake of cheap fossil fuel,” Avery continues.

So begins the author’s journey into one of the most controversial multinational projects ever proposed: the Keystone XL pipeline. The long-anticipated conduit for synthetic crude derived from tar sands originates at the Keystone Hardisty Terminal in Alberta, Canada, and winds its way through Saskatchewan, Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma, before arriving at deepwater ports on the Texas Gulf Coast. The project has been a political football since the summer of 2011, when President Barack Obama denied TransCanada’s request for formal approval from the United States government to complete the pipeline.

Avery has degrees from Oberlin College and the University of Kentucky and has taught at Elizabethtown Community and Technical College. His previous books include “The Globalist Papers,” “Buddha and the Quantum: Hearing the Voice of Every Cell,” “Transcendence of the Western Mind: Physics, Metaphysics and Life on Earth” and “The Dimensional Structure of Consciousness: A Physical Basis for Immaterialism.” He lives on a small farm outside Louisville and consults extensively on a variety of topics. Although he is solidly against completing the pipeline, Avery does acknowledge opposing viewpoints and works hard to distinguish between fact and fiction.

“Meteorologists say an unusual confluence of several weather patterns, including La Niña, was the direct cause of the warm start to 2012,” he explains. “While individual events cannot be blamed on global warming, Crouch (a climate scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric

Administration's National Climatic Data Center) said extremes such as these are expected to get more frequent because of man-made climate change."

The book is written in two major sections: Part 1: The Paradigm, consists of 10 chapters that set the stage for what follows in the six chapters that comprise Part 2: The Pipeline. Personally, I found the most interesting reading to be in the second half. Avery discusses interviews with those associated with, and affected by, the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. He went to considerable lengths to talk to everyone he could find who had some connection to the project: executives, legislators, workers and especially land owners. Consider this excerpt from "The Dakotas," the first chapter in Part 2:

"I spent the day yesterday with a farming family in Cogswell, North Dakota: Paul and Tammy Mathews and their teenage son, Elijah," Avery writes. "They have a beautiful home on a low hill overlooking two thousand acres of corn and soybeans. An agent for TransCanada came to their front door in early 2007, without notice, and spread out a map on their table showing the Keystone 1 pipeline going right through their living room!"

Avery's ability to explain the technical aspects of our ongoing efforts to get the most out of our remaining fossil fuel reserves is one of the key strengths of the book. For example, many of us have probably heard the term "fracking" being thrown around as the efficacy of the proposed pipeline has been passionately debated from the kitchen table to the conference room. At the same time, chances are few of us have a concrete understanding of the methodology used to extract oil and natural gas from reservoirs that are increasingly challenging to navigate.

"(Fracking) has increased productivity of natural gas wells and brought prices down in recent years to the point where gas is beginning to replace coal as the major fuel of American electricity generation," Avery observes. "Gas burns cleaner than coal."

Obviously, this is good for the environment and our future, but not necessarily the best news for a major coal-producing state like Kentucky. It highlights a strength of Avery's literary style: Even though his overall bias is evident on every page, he approaches his subject matter in a comprehensive and balanced manner. He realizes that economics tends to drive the decision-making apparatus in most circumstances and he is fully aware that getting society to call for more environmental oversight of initiatives such as the Keystone XL pipeline is an uphill battle. Most people are not as concerned with the long-term implications of our decisions as they are with the potential short-term gains represented by this kind of project.

We can all agree that the choices we make today will have repercussions far into the future. My sense is that you would find the book thought-provoking and insightful. I recommend it highly.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*