

Preface

WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF IGNORANCE, and it is important to understand how this came to be and why. Our goal here is to explore how ignorance is produced or maintained in diverse settings, through mechanisms such as deliberate or inadvertent neglect, secrecy and suppression, document destruction, unquestioned tradition, and myriad forms of inherent (or avoidable) culturopolitical selectivity. Agnotology is the study of ignorance making, the lost and forgotten. One focus is on knowledge that could have been but wasn't, or should be but isn't, but we shall also see that not all ignorance is bad.

Our primary purpose here is to promote the study of ignorance, by developing tools for understanding how and why various forms of knowing have “not come to be,” or disappeared, or have been delayed or long neglected, for better or for worse, at various points in history. Swimming as we do in oceans of ignorance, examples could be multiplied ad infinitum. Contributors to this volume probe the secrecy maintained by military classification, the “doubt” peddled by manufacturers of carcinogens (“doubt is our product”), the denialist claims of environmental troglodytes, the nontransfer of technologies (such as birth control) from colonial outposts to imperial centers, the role of disciplinarity and media “balance routines” on agnogenesis, and certain aspects of racial and sexual ignorance. The idea is that a great deal of attention has been given to epistemology (the study of how we know) when “how or why we don't know” is often just as important, usually far more scandalous, and remarkably undertheorized.

This volume emerged from workshops held at Pennsylvania State University in 2003 and at Stanford University in 2005, the goal of which was to come to grips with how ignorance has been understood, created, and ignored, linking these ideas also to allied creations of secrecy, uncertainty, confusion, silence, absence, and impotence—especially as these pertain

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We are hoping this volume will be taken as opening a door to a broader realm of inquiry. We invite others to step through this door, and to explore the many other realms of ignorance that saturate and define our world.