



The Winds of Change: Climate, Weather, and the Destruction of Civilizations

Eugene Linden

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The Winds of Change places the horrifying carnage unleashed on New Orleans, Mississippi, and Alabama by Hurricane Katrina in context.

Climate has been humanity's constant, if moody, companion. At times benefactor or tormentor, climate nurtured the first stirrings of civilization and then repeatedly visited ruin on empires and peoples. Eugene Linden reveals a recurring pattern in which civilizations become prosperous and complacent during good weather, only to collapse when climate changes -- either through its direct effects, such as floods or drought, or indirect consequences, such as disease, blight, and civil disorder.

The science of climate change is still young, and the interactions of climate with other historical forces are much debated, but the evidence mounts that climate loomed over the fate of societies from arctic Greenland to the Fertile Crescent and from the lost cities of the Mayans in Central America to the rain forests of Central Africa. Taking into account the uncertainties in both science and the historical record, Linden explores the evidence indicating that climate has been a serial killer of civilizations. *The Winds of Change* looks at the present and then to the future to determine whether the accused killer is on the prowl, and what it will do in the future.

The tragedy of New Orleans is but the latest instance in which a region prepared for weather disasters experienced in the past finds itself helpless when nature ups the ante. In the closing chapters, Linden explores why warnings about the dangers of climate change have gone unheeded and what is happening with climate today, and he offers perhaps the most explicit look yet at what a haywire climate might do to us. He shows how even a society prepared to absorb such threshold-crossing events as Katrina, the killer heat wave in Europe in 2003, or the floods in the American Midwest in the 1990s can spiral into precipitous decline should such events intensify and become more frequent.

The Winds of Change places climate change, global warming, and the resulting instability in historical context and sounds an urgent warning for the future.

The Winds of Change: Climate, Weather, and the Destruction of Civilizations Details

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From Reader Review The Winds of Change: Climate, Weather, and the Destruction of Civilizations for online ebook

Bruce Sanders says

This book is about climate change and its affects on civilization. It starts out reminiscent of Jared Diamond's Collapse in that it goes through examples of civilizations that died at least partially because of rapid climate change. The book then becomes a primer on how rapid climate change can occur and how man made global warming could cause a rapid climate change event. The interesting emphasis is on the notion of sudden rapid climate change. Too many people believe climate change will be a slow grinding process that gives us at least a chance to continually adapt to the problem. This makes clear that that is not necessarily so, that Earth's past includes severe and sudden climate changes. The book is very well done as a climate change primer and appropriately circumspect in its conclusions. It's not simply a run for the hills doomsday book. Rather it does a good job of educating the public on various aspects of climate change. Eugene Linden has always been an excellent popularizer of science topics and this book is no exception.

Elizabeth says

The Winds of Change: Climate, Weather, and the Destruction of Civilizations (Hardcover)
by Eugene Linden

Wayland Smith says

Climate change is a hot button topic, and the source of a lot of debate (except among most scientists, who almost all agree it's real). This book takes a look at climate change, but not just recent events like most people think of. This looks at historical instances of massive weather shifts having significant effects on world events, like the fall of the Mayan Empire, the destruction of the Spanish Armada, the the loss of the Viking colonies in Greenland and North America, and the fall of the ancient city of Akkad.

Linden takes a lot of high-end scientific concepts and makes them easy to understand. There's a lot to think about here, and, since it's a fair, objective piece, the US comes off looking not so great in a lot of it. US businesses are among the biggest obstacles to addressing climate change effectively.

Two things make me ever more uneasy reading this when I am. The first is that the book, published in 2006, cites the Kyoto Accords as a step, but nowhere near enough. Considering Trump pulled the US out of those, it's not a good feeling in the wake of this read. Secondly, as I write this, what some predict will be the most powerful storm to ever hit North Carolina is looming on the horizon, having gone from a tropical storm to a Category 4 in two days, and may well be Cat 5 before it hits.

It's a good, if disturbing, read, and makes a very good case for the science of global warming and climate change, as well as highlighting some of the potential horrific things that might happen if this isn't addressed.

Eileen says

If you have any doubts that we are experiencing extreme and fast climate change, read this book. Linden goes through what we know about long cycles of climate, and what has been discovered in recent years. He also explains why the public is not alarmed while scientists are.

The science is explained in term that laymen can understand, and Linden has actually gone to places such as Antarctica, Greenland, and on a cruise to study the Gulf Stream with scientists. His writing is authoritative, and back by science. Once you begin to understand what the Greenland ice cores, Antarctic ice cores, and lake and ocean bed sediment cores tell us about climate in the past and mechanisms involved in climate change, you can understand what is going on now. You do need a bit of science background to understand the use of the proxies in the science, but it's not that hard if you can grasp the concept of isotopes.

Dan says

Very well researched and written. Linden presents his case without bias and systematically disproves and silences opponents of climate change by examining historical sites and evidence with a different perspective.

Grace says

The banner on this book describes it very well, "Climate, weather, and the destruction of civilizations." The author describes climate changes over the eons in a clear and understandable manner, and the impact of these changes on earlier civilizations. Our political dysfunction allows for no preparation for any traumatic events and keeps the average person in a state of ignorance - regardless of whether or not climatic changes are the result of human activity.

Anu says

This was an informative and educational read about climate change past and present. I liked how it linked together issues involving policy, politics, and economics along with the science aspects. It definitely sheds a light on the failures of government and large corporations to act.

However, the writing in this book wasn't that good. Some parts were erratic, shifting suddenly from topic to topic. Other times same information was repeated numerous times throughout the book and was tedious. Also, the author made really odd analogies that were awkward and even made me cringe... Definitely needs another edit! If you want to read about past civilizations and our potential future, I would recommend Jared Diamond instead.

Steven Ford says

This book is very interesting, covering climate change in Earth's history, evidence of how this has affected human civilizations in the past, how unstable Earth's climate is and how it may have fine tipping points

which in breaching can cause dramatic climate changes, and how humans are able to effect the climate sufficiently (and may be doing so already) to tip the climate.

Mom says

Linden argues that rapid climate change has occurred historically more often than we would like to admit, and that it has had devastating impact on great and now vanished civilizations. I laid the book down after reading all but the last chapter two years ago. I read the last chapter this week (June 2008) after severe thunderstorms led to flooding in much of the USA Midwest, and I have renewed understanding and respect for the author's analysis of the relationship between carbon emissions and global warming. As for our society's ability to cope with global warming, it appears that the train has already left the station.

Thomas says

A competent but unadventuresome tour of the state of global warming science and media coverage thereof, circa 2006. Linden was a longtime environmental writer at Time, and one of the first "big" journalists to start covering global warming on a regular basis, and the several chapters that deal with the history of climate change in the media are excellent and fascinating. But this really-quite-decent book is most notable, unfortunately, for coming out at just about exactly the same time as, and being totally overshadowed by, Elizabeth Kolbert's juggernaut of global warming book, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*.

(I thought [a minority opinion, to be sure] that Kolbert's book was competent but unadventuresome also--just how unoriginal Kolbert's book was is highlighted by the literally dozens of sections where the two books treat the same material in practically identical ways. But that's another story. Anyway, Linden's book is just as good if not a little better, because he provides richer social/political context for the scientific material they both cover. But timing+marketing means a lot in publishing, and Kolbert won this particular battle of the magazine writers.

Tangentially, Tim Flannery's *The Weather Makers*, which also came out at the same time, is way more interesting, way more original, and way more inflammatory to boot. Amusingly, given that he's a scientist and the other two are writers, Flannery's book is much better written, but also plays more loosely with the line between what is known and not known. I'd recommend Kolbert for a primer on basic climate change science, Linden for that plus more of the social, political and media context, and Flannery if you already know a fair amount of that stuff and are up for a more intellectual, idiosyncratic and enjoyable take on all that, plus some powerful sections on the need for action, and what that action ought to be.

Zjay says

Linden examines historical events to determine if climatic change could have been a factor explaining the decline of civilizations. He carefully reviews the evidence scientists have presented over the last 30 years. He explains the chief "gears" that drive air currents. He cogently explains the ocean currents that greatly affect weather. He investigates the El Nino phenomenon and its global consequences. Most interesting to me was his examination of the scholarly debates regarding whether climatic events account for the decline of the Akkadian Empire in Mesopotamia, the incursions into Roman territory of the Avars, the decline of the

Mayan Empire, the demise of Norse settlements in Greenland, the difficulties encountered by English colonists in North America, and the famines throughout India in the 1870s. I learned that climatologists now have proof that the climate of a region can change dramatically in just a few years. Some civilizations have been able to adapt to new climatic conditions; others have been unable to do so.

This work focuses on climatology and scientific methods of determining the climate of the distant past. Linden also describes and reviews numerous works which over the past three decades have significantly changed our understanding of the influence of climate on human history.

James says

A tsunami of both separate facts and the patterns and trends made up of those facts. The author's message is urgent, but his tone is dispassionate - he seems to feel he doesn't need to shout because the information he presents shouts for itself. My basic nature is to be skeptical about any ideas or data other people present; one of my mottoes is "Prove it." However, in this area, I am convinced. The numbers are there to show that our global average temperatures are getting hotter and that the heating-up is also speeding up.

'The Winds of Change' contains a tremendous amount of history about our planet's climate, with explanations of the research that provided that historical background, and an equal amount of info about the mechanisms by which the atmosphere and the world ocean route much of the heat Earth absorbs from the Sun in the tropics to the planet's temperate and polar regions and bring colder air and water back to the equatorial regions to start the cycle over, as well as the effects on that circulation of the continents' locations, mountain ranges, and forests.

Along with well over 90% of our civilization's climate scientists, the author draws the logical conclusion that the warming process now taking place is destabilizing weather in many regions of the world, with increasingly ruinous effects on agriculture, fishing, and other vital aspects of human civilization, along with economic engines such as the insurance industry. Those who deny this are only able to do so by ignoring or willfully misinterpreting the data that have led to a clear consensus among the people who know the most about the subject. As the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it, they're entitled to their own opinions, but they aren't entitled to their own facts, and this is about facts.

Mary Brodd says

*changing climates favored bigger-brained, more adaptable hominids

*climate change more abrupt than originally thought

*THC - thermohaline circulation - as water evaporates, it becomes saltier, therefore heavier, so it SINKS, pulling the current behind it. Happens ONLY in the North Atlantic (Gulf Stream)

*cycles exist from 100,000 years down to 20 years (El Nino) - we are at the intersection of lots of cycles

*Human activities both increase risk of severe climate change and minimize earth's ability to cope with such changes (deforestation, mangrove depletion, etc).

We're doomed.

(suggested reading - "Late Victorian Holocausts" by Mike Davis)

Pumsish says

3.5*

Pam says

Very thorough. Eye-opening as well.