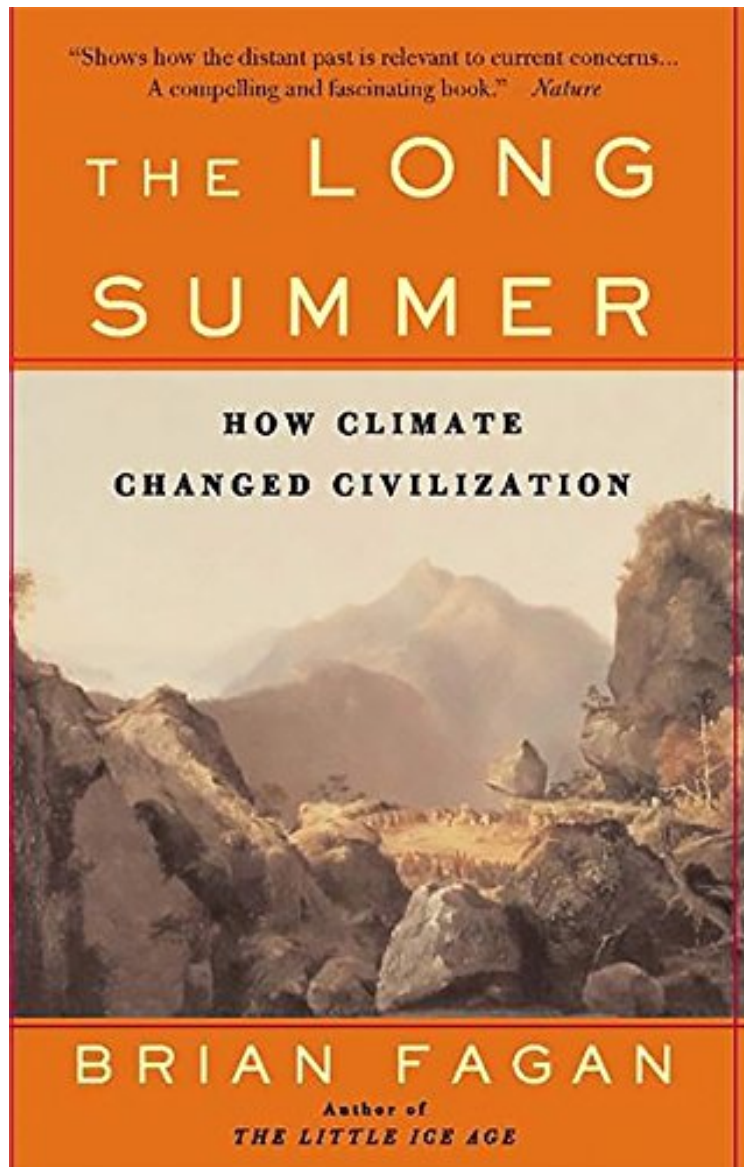


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The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization

Brian Fagan

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#588620 in Books Brian Fagan 2004-12-29 2004-12-29 Format: International Edition Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x .88 x 5.50l, .63 #File Name: 0465022820304 pages The Long Summer How Climate Changed Civilization | File size: 49.Mb

Brian Fagan : The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Climate is not Kind or Brutal--Just Indifferent By Martin Asiner Most people confuse climate with weather. If the weather is pleasant and reasonably mild, there is the temptation to think that this is the normal state of affairs. In THE LONG SUMMER, Brian Fagan demolishes this comforting thought by

detailing how past civilizations with a short generational memory made the same error to their ultimate ruin. The villain Fagan notes is the planet itself, one that does not easily give up its secrets about either climate prediction or control. Fagan likes to use the pump metaphor to illustrate how incremental changes in rainfall and temperature work to suck in human beings to live in unclearly defined areas in good times and expel them in bad. Fagan has the advantage of modern technology to examine the remnants of past civilizations, all of which point out that humanity has fought a millenia long struggle merely to survive and propagate the species. This struggle, Fagan concludes, has been largely random in the output. Even now, with modern day computers to crunch vast amounts of data, climatologists cannot even agree as to whether the planet is warming up or cooling down. From Paleolithic times until recently, all scientists, leaders, and decision makers had to go on were the most recent events of memory. That which worked recently must work today and will probably work tomorrow. It is this line of thought that gave these decision makers the illusion of control over their environment. Fagan is not judgmental about these decisions relating to social survival since we today are not doing things much differently from past eras. And what is it that Fagan identifies as the struggle to predict and control the environment? He correctly notes that human beings are about as intelligent today as were their ancestors, and that if they erred in their actions, then these errors are the forgivable results of inadequate science or human failing. Fagan analyzes the rise and fall of many cultures over the ages in a manner that deemphasizes their humanistic or tyrannical mindsets. In fact, he suggests that those cultures that were noted for their brutality and genocide were shaped by their environments that pushed them one way toward humanism or another toward despotism. The amounts of detail that Fagan goes into are daunting, an action which is necessary to buttress his thesis with scientific credibility. THE LONG SUMMER, then, is not light reading, yet it is vital reading for if we today fare no better than our predecessors, then the long summers which bedeviled them will surely return to haunt us but with infinitely greater destruction.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Fagan adds another fascinating chapter to the story...By Michael A. Starsheen I got interested in Brian Fagan's work because of an interest in climate change and another in archeology, which he combines to great effect in *The Long Summer*, as well as his other books, such as *The Little Ice Age*. He takes the paleoclimatological data that the researchers are developing as they study the process of global warming and climate change, and then applies it directly to the information we have from archeology and history of different cultures around the world. The result is a fascinating and new perspective on how shifting climate factors affect weather, and how that in turn contributes to the growth and collapse of cultures around the world. While these books are intended for a general audience, and Dr. Fagan clearly explains the science behind his narratives as he goes along, they are an important window into the possibilities that may face us in the future. Past cultures were unaware of the warming and cooling shifts of climate, which drove periods of harsh and unpredictable weather contributing to disasters, starvation, and the fall of governments. This provides a cautionary tale to us in the present, that we ignore the past and the present at our peril. I recommend *The Long Summer* to anyone interested in how the conditions after the Ice Age led to the rise and flourishing of civilizations around the world, and how subsequent changes contributed to their fall. It's a fascinating read.

24 of 25 people found the following review helpful. Often spellbinding By Brett Williams Fagan adds a new dimension to the failure of civilizations outside value reversals and psychological self-destruction posed by Brooks Adams, Spengler or de Tocqueville. Data from a variety of sources, not available until now, correlates with history the impacts of climate on civilization. Fagan opens with a curious personal experience - his small sailboat on treacherous Spanish waters, passed by cargo-laden hulks seemingly oblivious to nature's fury. This introduction becomes a wonderful analogy for the "scale of our vulnerability". As we complicate society and "tame" nature we also massively increase the calamity of nature's accumulating response. The Sumerian city of Ur becomes our first tour and what a tour it is. Fagan hits his stride, crystallizing his point when Sumerians are his centerpiece. Conceived around 6000 BCE as a collection of villages already employing canals for irrigation, the region suffered a monsoon shift driving Sumerians to increase organization through innovation. Hence, invention of the city by 3100 BCE. Volcanic induced climate shift eventually ran the Sumerian ship aground, as similar shifts did for others, not only starving the populous but dissolving faith in their gods, kings and way of life. But, Fagan writes, "The intricate equation between urban population, readily accessible food supplies and the economic, political and social flexibility sufficient to roll with the climatic punches has been irrevocably altered." "If Ur was a small trading ship, industrial civilization is a supertanker." And supertankers split in half now and then. The ability to simply return to farming or hunter gathering is now lost given that so many of us occupy the landscape, competing with everyone else under the same conditions. If some of us once comforted ourselves with notions of shinning up the hunting rifle, returning to nature in our tent during such a calamity - forget it. When societies - stretched to the limit - falter under climate change, stress in the psyche comes to the fore in ways never imagined, even (or especially) in abrasive group-oriented societies like ours. Tribal suspicions lie waiting for such opportunities. Making light of Postmodernists without trying to, Fagan notes the same human response by cultures separated by thousands of years, different continents, "meaning and value" systems; "In both the Old World and the New, human societies reacted to climate traumas with social and political changes that are startling in their similarities." Universal human truths after all. "But if we've become a supertanker among human societies, it's an oddly inattentive one. Only a tiny fraction of people on board are engaged with tending the engines. The rest are buying and

selling goods among themselves, entertaining each other... Those on the bridge have no charts or weather forecasts and cannot even agree that they are needed; indeed, the most powerful among us subscribe to a theory that says storms don't exist... And no one dares to whisper in the helmsman's ear that he might consider turning the wheel." So ends a well written, at times spellbinding account of our past and warning to our present, ignored at our own peril.

Humanity evolved in an Ice Age in which glaciers covered much of the world. But starting about 15,000 years ago, temperatures began to climb. Civilization and all of recorded history occurred in this warm period, the era known as the Holocene--the long summer of the human species. In *The Long Summer*, Brian Fagan brings us the first detailed record of climate change during these 15,000 years of warming, and shows how this climate change gave rise to civilization. A thousand-year chill led people in the Near East to take up the cultivation of plant foods; a catastrophic flood drove settlers to inhabit Europe; the drying of the Sahara forced its inhabitants to live along the banks of the Nile; and increased rainfall in East Africa provoked the bubonic plague. *The Long Summer* illuminates for the first time the centuries-long pattern of human adaptation to the demands and challenges of an ever-changing climate--challenges that are still with us today.

.com A professor of anthropology by training, Fagan traces the effects of climactic change on civilizations over the past 15,000 years--a period of prolonged global warming that has only accelerated over the past 150 years. In particular, he's interested in how civilizations have responded to, or been radically altered by, changes in environment. One of Fagan's most compelling examples is his detailed history of the city of Ur, in what is now modern-day Iraq. Once a great city in one of the world's earliest civilizations, it first thrived thanks to abundant rainfall and then suffered even more severely when the Indian Ocean monsoons shifted southward, changing rain patterns. By 2000 B.C. its agricultural economy had collapsed, and today it is an abandoned landscape, an assemblage of decaying shrines in the harshest of deserts. Fagan views this event as pivotal. It was, he writes, "the first time an entire city disintegrated in the face of environmental catastrophe." But not, Fagan notes, the last. In his epilogue, which covers the last 800 years of human history, Fagan explores the climatic upheavals that left 20 million dead in famine-related epidemics in the 19th century. He notes that today 200 million people barely survive on marginal agricultural land in places such as northeastern Brazil, Ethiopia, and the Saharan Sahel. If temperatures rise much above current levels, and rising seas flood coastal plains, the devastation could dwarf any disaster humankind has previously known. Fagan doesn't offer easy solutions, but he presents a compelling history of climate's role in the background--and sometimes foreground--of human history. --Keith Moerer
From Publishers Weekly
Anthropologist Fagan engagingly presents an abundance of geological and archaeological evidence supporting the idea that human civilization has been shaped by significant climate change to a greater extent than previously thought. As in his other books, including *The Little Ice Age*, Fagan cushions his scientific data with absorbing historical narrative. The "long summer" of the title is the Holocene warming trend of the last 15,000 years, which has coddled humanity throughout recorded history. While scientists have always known that cycles of cooling and warming within this era have affected humans, only in the last part of the 20th century did they have detailed ice and sediment cores to provide evidence for specific events. Fagan uses the new information to authoritatively walk readers through the major climatic changes in human history, including droughts that led to the formation of the first cities, rainfall increases connected to the spread of bubonic plague, and volcanic eruptions that triggered disastrous cooling trends. Although often repetitive, these examples serve to prove without a doubt that humans have been increasingly vulnerable to climate change ever since we left a nomadic lifestyle for an agriculture-based one. Part cautionary tale and part historical detective story, this book encourages readers to appreciate the increasingly clear links between great weather changes and human society, politics and survival. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "Extremely readable and thought-provoking, this book should appeal to many people, including those concerned with global warming and its implications for the future."