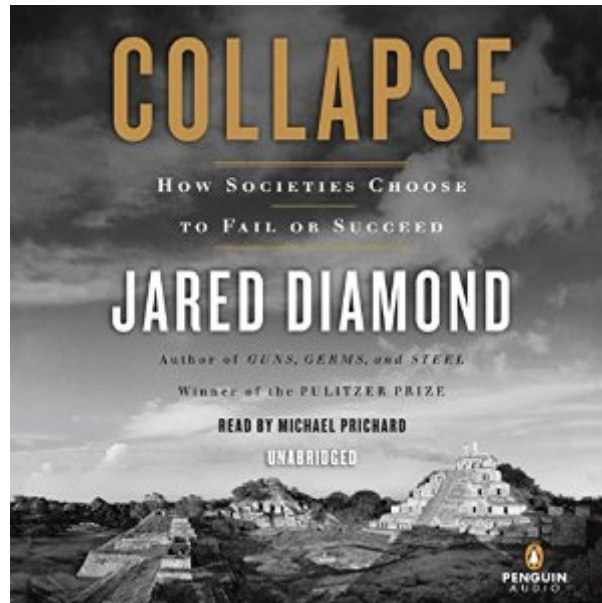


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Collapse: How Societies Choose To Fail Or Succeed



Synopsis

In Jared Diamond's follow-up to the Pulitzer-Prize winning *Guns, Germs and Steel*, the author explores how climate change, the population explosion, and political discord create the conditions for the collapse of civilization. Environmental damage, climate change, globalization, rapid population growth, and unwise political choices were all factors in the demise of societies around the world, but some found solutions and persisted. As in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Diamond traces the fundamental pattern of catastrophe, and weaves an all-encompassing global thesis through a series of fascinating historical-cultural narratives. *Collapse* moves from the Polynesian cultures on Easter Island to the flourishing American civilizations of the Anasazi and the Maya and finally to the doomed Viking colony on Greenland. Similar problems face us today and have already brought disaster to Rwanda and Haiti, even as China and Australia are trying to cope in innovative ways. Despite our own society's apparently inexhaustible wealth and unrivaled political power, ominous warning signs have begun to emerge even in ecologically robust areas like Montana. Brilliant, illuminating, and immensely absorbing, *Collapse* is destined to take its place as one of the essential books of our time, raising the urgent question: How can our world best avoid committing ecological suicide?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

About 15 years ago, I was shocked to read the results of an American aerial survey of roads in remote areas of the country, which concluded that there is (in 1990) no place in the continental

United States that is more than about 20 miles, as the crow flies, from the nearest road. At Philmont Scout Ranch in the Sangre de Cristo range of the Rockies in NE New Mexico, to which many hundreds of Scouts travel each summer for an extended "wilderness" hike, the paths, directions and speeds of each of the flood of hiking parties is managed on a wall-size map in their war room, much like a flight control room of a modern airport. The conscious purpose of the war room is to present "the illusion of wilderness" to the hikers, by preventing them from seeing that there are crowds of other hikers nearby in every direction, only hidden by a bend, a ridge, a ravine. In one of Jared Diamond's earlier books, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, he explored the role of man's natural environment in shaping the unique nature of the human societies that emerged in different regions of the world. It was backed by a prodigious body of research spanning anthropology, physiology, botany, archeology, animal behavior and climatology, to name only a few fields. Although his conclusions were satisfying and plausible, the subjects were too remote in time to garner more than a smile and a nod of the head. The paucity of detailed evidence regarding the biologic emergence of man, and man's development of agriculture, animal domestication and civilization, dooms Dr. Diamond's conclusions on those subjects to the realm of conjecture. Now we are presented with the other side of the equation: the role of man's behavior in shaping the environments in which he lives.

A debate between two camps continues to rage. One side thinks that the modern world continues to careen toward a non-sustainable future and impending doom. The other group thinks that "environmentalists" exaggerate their claims about a coming ecological crash. As usual the sides remain somewhat unproductively polarized with neither giving an inch to the other. This book's title exposes where Jared Diamond's sympathies stand, but he also takes some surprisingly neutral views. For one, he claims that some contemporary businesses have in fact successfully taken environmental concerns into consideration, and that these concerns have made them money and boosted their respect globally. Diamond doesn't believe that big business and environmental groups necessarily remain indissoluble enemies. And he goes further by suggesting that environmentalists should unabashedly praise those companies that have succeeded in balancing economics with ecology. "Collapse", though admittedly more slanted towards the environmental side of the continuum, nonetheless tries to narrow the gap between the two aforementioned camps. "Collapse" takes the reader on a dizzying historical and global tour. The chapters weave in and out of modern, ancient, and medieval worlds. Along the way Diamond extrapolates which behaviors have threatened (or arguably are currently threatening) a significant inexorable decline in a particular society's population. By juxtaposing past and present societies he hopes to reveal the similarities

between societies that no longer exist and the trends of the world today. The book surreptitiously asks whether our current world is threatened by a global collapse. Diamond uses a "five-point framework" to analyze various societies.

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