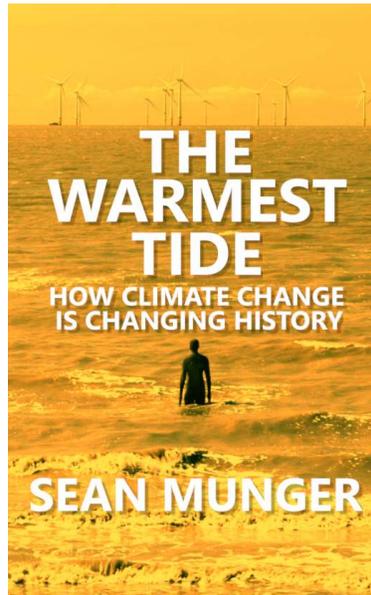


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THE WARMEST TIDE: HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS CHANGING HISTORY



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Chapter 1: The End of History?

Is climate change the end of the world, or the end of history?

No, it isn't. But understanding why it isn't, and how global warming has affected and will affect world history, has a lot to do with what you think history is, and how you look at the world.

In 1989, as Communism was collapsing, pundit and columnist Francis Fukuyama famously declared "the end of history." Two years later he was corrected by no less prominent a pop culture figure as Captain James T. Kirk of *Star Trek*, who answered, "We haven't run out of history quite yet." There's no question that global warming represents a fundamental shift in the tides of human history. Just how big that shift will be, and what it might mean for us in the future, is something that

few people have really confronted in a rational and systematic way. That's what I want to do in this book.

Climate change clearly does have enormous implications for all aspects of our society—business and the economy most directly, but also our political system, the global order of nations, and our religious and spiritual institutions. One may, and people often do, look at various aspects of this change in isolation. Insurance companies and financial planners are looking at how climate change and its related threats will affect the bottom line. Military experts are examining how climate change will affect patterns of conflict and global competition for resources. Pope Francis I, in his famous encyclical *Laudato si'* from 2015, interrogated climate change from a theological perspective. But are any of these sectors—financial, political, religious—talking to each other?

I posit that it takes a historian to try to put climate change in its broadest and most meaningful context. Historians are trained to see the big picture and ask the big questions about how everything fits together. I can tell you with absolute certainty that the historians of the future will be looking backwards to our era—the 2010s and 2020s—with intense interest, because what we do now and how we adapt to the wave of societal-level change that is coming will be the historical basis for understanding whatever form the world and human society take as a result of climate change. But we who live in this time, and are trying to make a living and raise our children and hold on to what we've got, don't have the luxury of waiting 20, 50 or 100 years to make sense of what's happening now. Thus, a historian living today, in 2019 or 2020, has a duty to apply his or her trained historical thinking to the conditions of today and tell it like it is. That is why this book exists.

This book is intended to be short, sweet and no-nonsense. I'm going to start with a few basic questions about climate change and how it's affecting the world, our businesses and our institutions. I'm going to tell you a bit about its history—that part is often missed—and perhaps what we can expect. I'll tell you about some things that are ending, and some others that may be beginning. I'll end with a potential vision of the future, not as prognostication, but as a reasoned guess about where climate change may be taking our history. That's what this book is and is intended to be.

Here's what it's *not*. It is not a polemic, a political tract designed to advance an ideology (or denigrate another). It's also not a jeremiad, a screed of apocalyptic doom intended to shock you (or anyone) into some kind of action. I come at climate change not with the pleading of an environmentalist, but with the temperance of historian. I speak often about climate change, and a reaction I commonly hear is something to the effect of, "I've never heard anyone talk about climate change like that before." I am not going to tell you to put a recycling bin in your kitchen or buy a Prius. There are plenty of books out there on climate change that are polemics or jeremiads, but this isn't one of them.

This also is not a science book. If you take a moment to thumb through it, you may be surprised to see not a single graph, chart or temperature map. Climate change has too long been dominated by data: sea level predictions, temperature averages and that sort of thing. You can't avoid some scientific concepts when talking about climate change, but that is a relatively minor aspect. You can't

tell the story, say, of the manned Apollo landings on the Moon without touching on some scientific concepts, but imagine how much of the substance of that history you'd miss if the main focus of the story was on the physics of trans-lunar trajectories. If you want the science, go look it up. No one's hiding it.

Before we delve into the substance, I want to say one more thing, and it's the elephant in the room when it comes to climate change. And that is *fear*. Many people shut down when the subject of climate change comes up, because it's too big, too scary, and too paralyzing to grapple with. And so much media coverage is geared toward shock headlines—the aforementioned jeremiads—that it's no surprise that this is a common reaction. A friend once told me, "Thinking about climate change literally makes me want to die." I understand that reaction, but I think we need to move past it.

On the frigid morning of March 4, 1933, the newly-inaugurated President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself— nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." He may as well have been talking about climate change. Fear is our worst enemy, but it is an enemy that can be defeated.

There is hope regarding climate change—not merely hope that its worst effects can be avoided, but hope that we can build a better world, and better lives for ourselves, even (and especially) in the face of such an awesome challenge. We, the human race, are not simply going to lay down and die in the face of climate change. There's no precedent in history for such a decision, and much precedent for exactly the opposite—the resilience and ingenuity of human societies to adapt themselves to new and even drastically different circumstances. But if you need that affirmation now, before we get into the meat of the project, go ahead right now and turn to Chapter 9. I'll wait.

So do we, who live in the era of climate change, find ourselves truly facing "the end of history?" If I thought so, it would be pretty pointless for me to write this book, Global warming is a turning point in history, no doubt about it. But if you'll allow me to quote *Star Trek* again, this time Mr. Spock: "History is replete with turning points. You must have faith that the universe will unfold as it should."