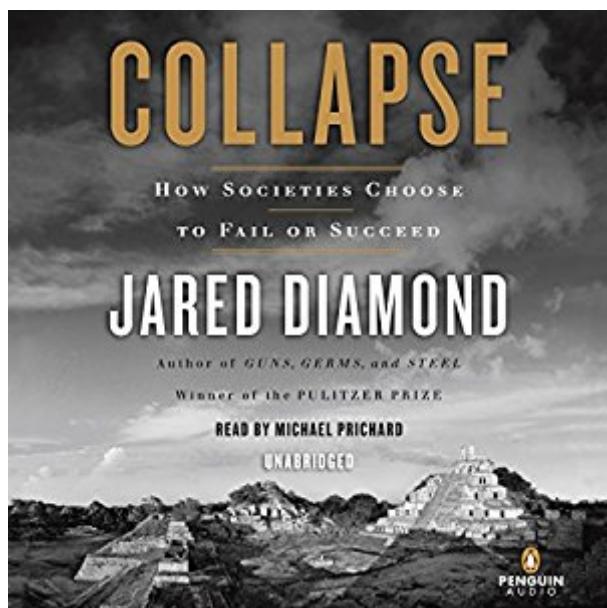


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# Collapse: How Societies Choose To Fail Or Succeed



## **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**

"Collapse" is my third Jared Diamond book and, as before, he does not disappoint. Combining

Anthropology, History and Geography with Environmental studies of how humans use, and misuse, Natural Resources, Diamond draws interesting insights into past societies and how their fates can relate to our modern world. To support his conclusions Diamond cites the findings and thoughts of many specialists, past and present, as well as his own field research at various locations around the world. With in depth proses "Collapse" gives the reader plenty of food for thought. Starting with his experiences in modern day Montana, Diamond examines the state's issues with logging, mining, soil erosion, water conservation and wildlife, both native and foreign. The insights by local ranchers, miners, loggers, rural and urban people give you an idea on how Montanans feel about government regulations and laws on those issues. Moving on to past societies the author follows the same scenario. In depth histories of such far flung places as Easter Island, Greenland and Iceland, New Guinea and Japan explains how they may have dealt with the same environmental problems that plague us today. I really enjoyed the Easter Island history and how this isolated speck of land moved from a sub-tropical paradise to a barren, treeless island and what role religion may have played in it's story. Up north the Vikings were facing their own problems when they colonized Greenland. At first they did well but conditions slowly deteriorated and when the Inuit returned, the Norse colonist were faced with human competitors as well as environmental challenges. The Anasazi and the Mayans are also looked at, how each society dealt with changing conditions and leaders that failed to address their many problems of population and environment. Changing to modern societies Diamond looks at the Rwandan Genocide, the issues faced by The Dominican Republic and Haiti. China's and Australia's evolving societies and how they are moving into today's world. With all this background Diamond discusses his conclusions and poses questions like; Why do some societies make the wrong decisions? What role do Big Business and the environment play in our future survival? The chapter on Big Business is especially enlightening with segments on Oil and Mining Companies, the Logging and Seafood Industry and how these vital businesses effect our future, for good or ill. Lastly he poses the question of what, if anything, can we learn from past societies's successes and failures. This is a great book, one that covers a lot of issues and gives both sides of the story. Jared Diamond is one of the best writers of science and history. He consistently takes me into new realms of wonder with interesting topics and unique insights. While I experienced no down loading problems with this Kindle edition is did notice a couple of "quality control" issues. Through out the book there were several places where punctuation's were left out and in the chapter on the Vikings in Greenland; the word "fjord" was replaced with "3ord". In neither case was the problem bad enough so that I couldn't follow the text, nonetheless it showed a certain lack of that quality control by the publisher. Regardless, this is a book well worth reading and I'm

glad to have it on my Kindle. Last Ranger

A great read especially for those who enjoyed *Guns, Germs and Steel*. This book is organized more like an academic paper though not written in an overly academic language. Diamond supports his thesis with several case studies based on evidence from various sciences such as palynology, archaeology and genetics. He argues that societies' ability to succeed or fail is based on five variables though not all five are always applicable. These variables include environmental degradation, climate change, conflicts with neighboring peoples, positive relationships especially trade with neighboring peoples and the societies' ability to adapt and change. Though a well-researched book, those expecting another *Guns, Germs and Steel* may be disappointed as this book is a bit more academic.

Jared Diamond combines numerous fields in his exploration for why societies collapse. The chapters on the Greenland Norse and Hispaniola contrasting Haiti and Dominican Republic provide fascinating past and present examples for how environmental issues can drive societies to economic misery, decline and collapse. Diamond provides many other examples, including a discussion on Montana's environmental and social challenges to start the book. As Diamond points out, the environmental challenges we face today are solvable and controllable by human populations. History provides us lessons we can apply to today's policies. Yet, many societies fail to recognize the challenges faced or fail to solve them. Great read if you're interested in environmental history and how environmental problems drive economic and political instability.

*Collapse* by Jared Diamond accurately discusses the concept of societies failing to thrive and falling apart. Within the book, Diamond analyzes societies of the past from all corners of the globe, from the Norse in the Arctic to the Easter Islanders in the Pacific. Through each society Diamond figures out how the territory was set up and what exactly brought down the collapse of the people there. Most of the reasons that societies collapsed had to deal with the environment that they were attempting to live in. For example, if people attempted to colonize an area that had poor soil, that would lead to a variety of problems for the society. The fields there would only be fit for farming or animal raising for a couple of years before the resources were depleted, and it would take a very long time for them to grow back due to poor soil quality. This would mean growing food would have to take place on a very small scale, limiting resources greatly and increasing the risk of starvation. The poor soil would also lead to slow tree growth, meaning that if a society wasn't able to

careful then they would use up their lumber supply quicker than they can grow it back, and without wood a society will risk failure due to lack of supplies. Therefore, poor environment quality as well as quick exhaustion of the lands resources helped cause the collapse of a number of societies in the past. Why would societies of the past overuse their natural resources so fast?

Couldn't they see that their ways of life were destroying the landscape? Diamond answers questions such as these, explaining that while it's easy for us in the future to see what the problems were, they weren't so clear for those colonizing the land at the time. Many of the societies that collapsed happened to first settle their while the land was at its best, when the soil was rich and the climate was good for growing, and a time that wouldn't last. The settlers made their homes there and took advantage of the prosperous times, thinking that that was how life always was in that environment. However, when the climate changed back to its poorer state of being, the settlers were unprepared for the rapid degradation of their environment and experienced a tragic collapse. So the settlers of these collapsed societies didn't necessarily exhaust their soils and cut down all of their trees on purpose or out of greed, rather it was due to an unexpected change of events for them that left them unprepared for a harsher climate than the one they were used to. Diamond also discusses modern day societies, those that have been around for centuries and may or may not continue to live on in the future. Examples of such societies range from the lowly populated fields of Montana to the bustling and highly polluted cities of China. Exhausting the soil and other resources of an environment is not just a problem of the past, but rather it lives on today as prevalent as ever before. Resources such as oil, fish and wood are becoming scarce in some areas which will lead to problems in the future if not soon dealt with. Environmental degradation due to abuse by big businesses is a major problem at home and overseas. Pollution from cities and industry are starting to cause problems on a global scale, causing for a need to act to avoid potential collapse. The well-being of the environment today lies in the hands of government, businesses and public opinion. Governments have the power to create regulations about how the environment can be used or preserved in order to stop resource depletion. Businesses have the choice to abuse the environment around them or try their best to remain a clean company. Public opinion helps shape the ideas of both government and big business, as the people are the ones represented in governments and big businesses will have to listen to their paying customers if they wish to stay profitable. Therefore, the well-being of the environment rests in the hands of the people and their decisions. By being informed about the resources that they use and how those resources are acquired and created, the people will have the ability to make good decisions to support

environmentally sound practices that will bring about the betterment of society and environments all around the world. I personally believe that Diamond did a good job in explaining his facts, keeping the reader both well informed and interested in what he was saying. While some of what Diamond writes could come off as pessimistic, he is merely trying to portray facts about what has happened in the past and what is happening today. His bleak descriptions of reality are not meant to simply scare the reader into believing that the world as we know it is destined for collapse, but rather that people in today's society just need to be careful with how we treat our environment.

Diamond takes time to mention the good things that modern society is doing today to improve our situation, showing that there is still plenty of good news and still hope for the human race. Overall, Diamond does well in educating the reader about collapsed societies of the past. Not only does he go into detail in explaining what aspects of a society went wrong and led to the eventual collapse, but he also takes time to compare the collapsed societies to similar societies that managed to thrive. By doing this, he not only discusses what doesn't work, but also what does work in a society. This extra detail in his writing succeeds in further educating the reader about societal success. In conclusion, Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* does a decent job in explaining the environmental problems of yesterday and today, and how they have led to problems in different societies around the world, ranging from pollution to the entire collapse of a society. This well-written book describes the good and the bad in our world and tells the reader exactly what can be done to alter the course of our societies so that they can avoid the risk of potential failure or serious environmental issues such as land degradation or the exhaustion of natural resources. With the knowledge gained from this book, the reader can make educated decisions that can help the bigger picture of society by supporting businesses that are environmentally friendly and avoid the support of practices that might harm the environment further. With the knowledge from this book people can shape our society today so that it can avoid the risk of collapse in the future.

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