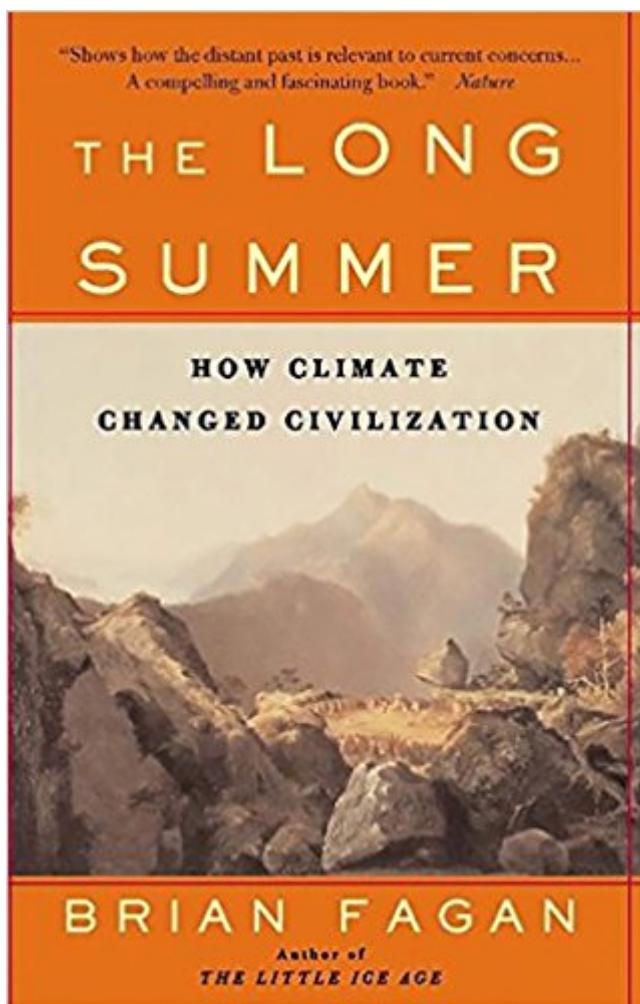


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# The Long Summer: How Climate Changed Civilization



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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  
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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. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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.

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.

I really like Brian Fagan's other works. I LOVE the big subject matter. I wanted a 'guns, germs and steel' type of view on how climate has affected civilization. What I got was a book with moments of spectacular vision immersed in a sea of mediocre writing, poor editing, and confusing structure. I won't belabor the already discussed abysmal editing of the graphics (anyone else notice Ecuador and Colombia transposed?), but I will note that I'd definitely not a stickler. I am usually willing to overlook a few minor mistakes, but I found something in virtually every section that was difficult to follow, distracting or just wrong. Chronologies were poorly treated in some sections, with the author jumping timelines and groups in a very confusing manner, basic copy editing neglected (Dos Pilos?), and the tone of some sections left me with the impression that the author had dictated his text and it was reproduced without appropriate editing. There is a big difference between written and spoken wording; verbal emphasis may not translate to the written page very well, and this requires extensive re-work in order to make it intelligible to the reader. The generalized lack of detailed editing contributed to confusion in most sections. Overall, a fairly good book. However, the above noted issues made for a distracting and convoluted read. Not up to the usual high standards set by Mr. Fagan in his previous work, with responsibility lying with the poor editing.

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