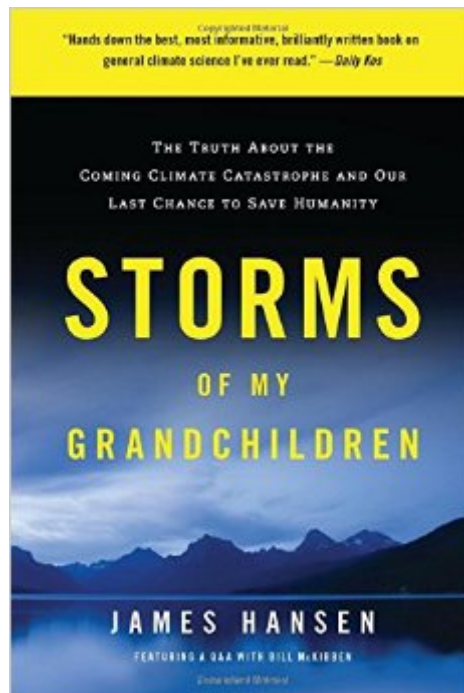


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Storms Of My Grandchildren: The Truth About The Coming Climate Catastrophe And Our Last Chance To Save Humanity



Synopsis

In his Q&A with Bill McKibben featured in the paperback edition of *Storms of My Grandchildren*, Dr. James Hansen, the world's leading climatologist, shows that exactly contrary to the impression the public has received, the science of climate change has become even clearer and sharper since the hardcover was released. In *Storms of My Grandchildren*, Hansen speaks out for the first time with the full truth about global warming: The planet is hurtling even more rapidly than previously acknowledged to a climatic point of no return. In explaining the science of climate change, Hansen paints a devastating but all-too-realistic picture of what will happen in our children's and grandchildren's lifetimes if we follow the course we're on. But he is also an optimist, showing that there is still time to take the urgent, strong action that is needed- just barely. Praise for James Hansen and *Storms of My Grandchildren*: "James Hansen gives us the opportunity to watch a scientist who is sick of silence and compromise ...offer up the fruits of four-plus decades of inquiry and ingenuity just in case he might change the course of history."-Los Angeles Times "Dr. James Hansen is Paul Revere to the foreboding tyranny of climate chaos-a modern-day hero who has braved criticism and censure and put his career and fortune at stake to issue the call to arms against the apocalyptic forces of ignorance and greed."-Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "When the history of the climate crisis is written, Hansen will be seen as the scientist with the most powerful and consistent voice calling for intelligent action to preserve our planet's environment."-Al Gore, Time magazine

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Customer Reviews

James Hansen, the world's most famous climate scientist, is thought by climate contrarians to be part of a liberal conspiracy. But as you'll see below (Chp. 9), he's as independent as he claims -- critical of Republicans for suppressing climate change science, but critical of Democrats for blocking the most important part of the solution. Surprises await readers of any persuasion. The book contains a mix of equal parts politics and science, so a guide to the chapters may be helpful. (For why this book is best on climate science, see my wonkish "comment" below.)

Chp. 1: Dick Cheney's climate task force. The frustrations of politics with a little science tossed in.

Chp. 2: The A-team. Hansen retreats and thinks through climate policy with his students.

Chp. 3: Visit to the White House. He's hopeful, then disappointed. This chapter launches into serious Paleoclimate science and explains the mystery of why the world starts to warm from an ice age before carbon dioxide increases. Fascinating if you like science. Otherwise, skim for interesting tidbits -- ice that would crush "New York City to smithereens," the development of civilization, coastal fishing, and more.

The first big surprise: "It may seem that I am harsh on climate models." He doesn't think they're good at estimating "climate sensitivity." In fact, he says, "Thirty years later [after the National Academy's 1979 estimate], models alone still cannot do much better."

Chp. 4: Back to 1989. Hansen asks for satellite instruments to collect crucial global warming data. No luck.

Chp. 5: A Slippery Slope. In 2003 Hansen writes an article with "extensive criticisms of IPCC" (UN climate science). He is not pleased that the best IPCC model "concluded that the ice sheets would grow as the world became warmer."

Chp. 6: Humanity's Trap. Aerosols are now counteracting carbon but we don't know much about them. A nice graph of solar output and the beginning of the White-House censorship story.

Chp. 7: The Keeling Curve. "Reality contrasts markedly with the impression created by the media." Carbon dioxide is not growing faster than expected by the IPCC scenarios. More on White-House censorship.

Chp. 8: Where Should We Aim? Hansen gets new data and draws "one of the most beautiful curves on the planet," showing how it was far hotter (with no ice) 50 million years ago. From that and more science, he concludes that we must return the atmosphere to 350 ppm.

Chp. 9: An Honest Path. Possibly the book's biggest surprise: "It is extremely irresponsible, in my opinion, to make the assumption that efficiency and renewables are all that will be needed." We will need fast breeder reactors, and fortunately we have "\$50 trillion" worth of left-over uranium for fuel. He blames the Democrats. "Argonne scientists ... were ready to build a demonstration fast-reactor power plant." But in 1994, Bill Clinton announced, "We will terminate unnecessary programs in advanced reactor development." Hansen concludes, "It seems possible that antinuke people, who heavily support the Democratic Party, were being repaid." He explains his economic

proposals for "a rising price on carbon applied at the source" in the form of "fee-and-dividend." "A cap-and-trade agreement will be just as hard to achieve as was the Kyoto Protocol."Chp. 10: Venus. "If we also burn the tar sands and tar shale, I believe the Venus syndrome is a dead certainty."Chp. 11: Storms of My Grandchildren. Recent anti-coal protest activity, and some science of storms. In this age of political correctness, right and left, it's a delight to be invited into Hansen's home-spun, un-censored, scientific world. If you appreciate the fresh air, two very different books may be of interest.Â Carbonomics: How to Fix the Climate and Charge It to OPECÂ explains why Hansen's refunded carbon tax is a good idea that works, and predicted Copenhagen's failure over a year in advance: "developing countries will not accept internationally set caps." It then explains what to do about it.Â Sustainable Energy - Without the Hot AirÂ is a fabulous, authoritative book on alternative energy, and provides the back story on the need for carbon capture or nuclear power. Together, the three books cover most of climate-policy related science with almost no overlap. In summary, this is no journalistic quick read. It's fascinating, not because it's slickly written -- it's certainly not -- but because both James Hansen and his science are fascinating and you get a front row seat as the story unfolds.

I hope not, but it's hard to find a basis for optimism after reading James Hansen's book and looking at the current American political situation. Hansen's prescriptions for averting a climate catastrophe are tough to meet, and at the moment there is a political backlash against bold government endeavors such as these. Right now, taking action on climate change is largely perceived as one competing political issue among many at best, and as a power-grab based on tainted science at worst. Hansen argues that maintaining the human civilization that developed after the last ice age depends on us stabilizing the climate. It was James Hansen's testimony before congress in 1988 that brought global warming into the public square as an issue, and he has been at the center of the shouting match ever since. He begins the book by recounting his efforts to convince the political leadership of the importance of tackling climate change in the Bush Administration. Unfortunately, the political appointees in NASA did all they could to keep him from expressing the views in a public setting, using a law about government employees engaging in political campaigns. Hansen expressly says that he prefers to stick to the science, but that the problem is so daunting that he had to speak out. Hansen actually talks about the science behind climate change, and makes it relatively easy for readers to understand. With a large amount of Co2 emissions, heat is trapped in the atmosphere, and there's an energy imbalance between how much heat is coming into the earth from the sun and how much is radiated back into space- thus resulting in the temperature warming

up. So Co₂ is a climate "forcing" as he puts it. There are many kinds of climate forcings, many of them natural, but as Hansen points out, human Co₂ emissions outpace them by several orders of magnitude. What has Hansen so concerned about the present situation is his work with paleo-climate data, which, he says, are more important than climate models, useful though they may be. He persuasively argues that the last mass-extinction coincided with release of powerful methane hydrates in the ocean, and that this led to amplifying feedback loops, and that we are in danger of pushing the climate to a similar tipping point. The solutions he presents are a tall order to meet, and frankly I think they will be nearly impossible in the current political situation. First and foremost, we need to cut carbon emissions to 350 ppm to avoid pushing the climate past a tipping point, and cap-and-trade won't get us there. The "offsets" are based on phantom emissions reductions in the future, which are rubber-stamped by an international body and then sold to other companies so that they can emit more carbon- most of the targeted "offsets" are rarely met, and the energy efficiency they would have achieved in any case without the cap-and-trade. What he proposes is a tax-and-dividend, (or fee-and-dividend)- a gradually rising price on carbon collected by the government, and proceeds distributed to citizens. The idea is to create an incentive for a drastically reduced carbon economy because, as he put it in an NPR interview, as long as fossil fuels are cheaper, people will continue to use them. Second, we need to phase out coal- put a moratorium on all new coal plants unless they are built with the capacity to completely capture their carbon emissions. Energy efficiency is an important aspect too, but people buying more efficient light bulbs and cars is not going to fix this. Perhaps most controversially among environmentalists, he backs the increased use of nuclear power to meet our electricity needs; he is all for wind and solar as part of the solution, but as of now they have not shown enough consistency in meeting energy needs. What makes it particularly difficult for me to maintain optimism that a political solution to this is going to be found is what Hansen says about special interests and the necessity of public pressure. He is very critical of the way special interests have influenced the way environmental legislation is crafted, and of the way even organizations such as the Environmental Defense Fund have a "Washington mentality" which prevents what needs to be done from being done; i.e., settling for cap-and-trade and for capturing carbon emissions to be added to new coal plants "eventually." Unfortunately, the recent Supreme Court decision in Citizens United does not bode well for Hansen's hopes. Furthermore, he says that there needs to be public pressure for the best legislation, and perhaps even civil disobedience directed at coal companies. Unfortunately, at the moment the populist winds are not blowing in this direction. The people who see climate change as the important issue that Hansen does are in a small minority. And the problem is that by the time

climate change causes disastrous effects, it will be too late to do much about it. There may perhaps be some technological breakthrough in energy or in carbon capture that can do away with coal's carbon emissions. Moreover, the political scene is as chaotic and nonlinear as our planet's climate, so things may change yet. In any case, well-informed citizens owe it to themselves to read this important book.

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