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Review: The Global Warming Reader: A Century of Writing About Climate Change

By Bill McKibben, Editor

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

DeKalb, Illinois

McKibben, Bill, ed. *The Global Warming Reader: A Century of Writing About Climate Change*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012. 422 pp. ISBN: 9780143121893 US\$18.00, paperback.

For more than two decades, the U.S. Congress had a bi-partisan record of no action on global warming. Those who have done the least to cause climate change are among those most affected. While summarized, statements like these, and many more, make this book relevant, timely, and engaging. The book's thirty five pieces cover a period dating from 1896 to 2011, though most date from the year 2000 or later. The documents are drawn from a wide variety of sources, including book extracts, speeches, testimonial statements before Congress, research results, and charts and graphs presented as stand-alone pieces. The documents are sectioned into three categories: science, politics, and impact. Each piece has an introductory paragraph by the book's editor on the item's significance and the background of the author(s).

Versatility is found in both the content and authors including: James M. Inhofe's 2003 statement before Congress claiming that global warming is a hoax; two documents on religious understandings and action in relation to global warming; James Hansen's proposed solution to global warming by instating a carbon tax on coal, oil, and gas applied at the first point of sale with the entire tax being returned to the people; Dr. Vandana Shiva's agricultural solution that biodiverse ecological farming is the answer, not genetic engineering; Arundhati Roy's fictional allegory about keeping ski slopes open in light of warming winters; Al Gore's graph from the movie "An Inconvenient Truth" showing 650,000 years of variations of CO₂ and temperature; two sets of pictures of the same landscape taken by E. O. Wheeler and David Breashears eighty years apart showing a large loss of ice; and much more. One would be hard pressed to create a better list of documents to include.

The editor, Bill McKibben, is a well-known author and environmentalist. In his introduction, he states that the articles have a basic message which is that "...we've taken the stability of our own planet entirely for granted. That stability has let us largely ignore the physical world..." (p.13). Ignoring global warming has led to a world with no assurance of continuing support for us. Concern about CO₂ warming was primarily dormant for the first half of the twentieth century. Then in 1957, Roger Revelle and Hans E. Suess published "Carbon Dioxide Exchange between Atmosphere and Ocean and the Question of an Increase of Atmospheric CO₂." McKibben considers this paper "the opening volley of the climate change wars" (p. 37).

Among the many books available on global warming, this one is unique. While the sum total of these documents represents a brief overview of documents covering global warming over more than a century, this book provides readers an awareness of how global warming science, politics, or impact evolved over time and where we stand at the current time. This book is highly recommended for lay readers, professionals and activists, and a worthy addition to any general library collection.

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