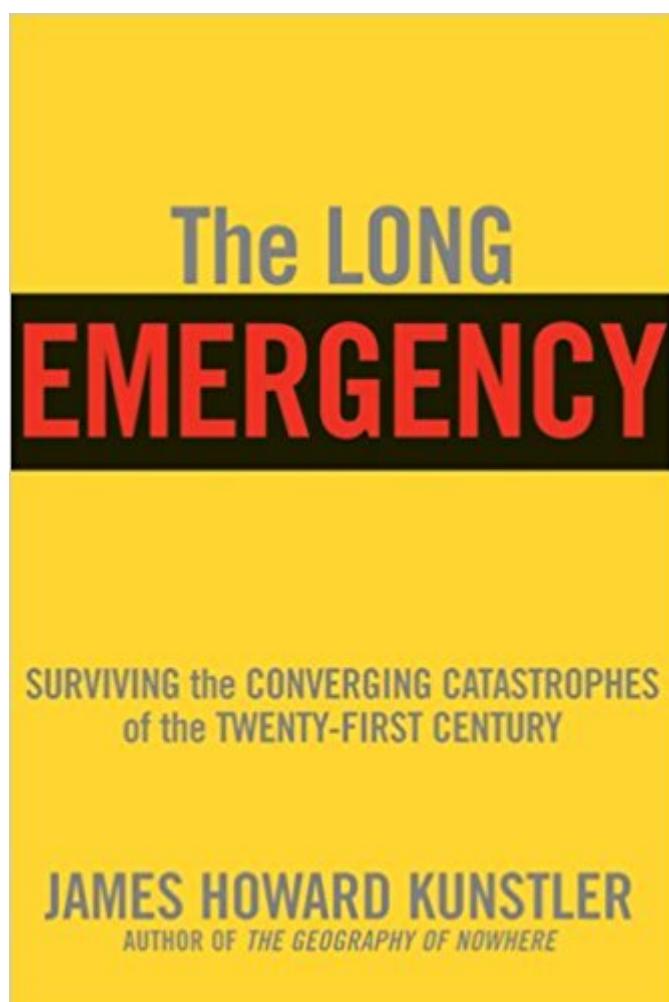


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The Long Emergency: Surviving The End Of Oil, Climate Change, And Other Converging Catastrophes Of The Twenty-First Century



Synopsis

A controversial hit that sparked debate among businessmen, environmentalists, and bloggers, The Long Emergency by James Howard Kunstler is an eye-opening look at the unprecedented challenges we face in the years ahead, as oil runs out and the global systems built on it are forced to change radically.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a brilliant piece of work, indeed so compelling that after glancing at it over morning coffee I set aside a work day and simply read the book. I take away one star because there is no index, no bibliography, and the author is very poor about crediting his sources. On page 163, for example, his observations about 300 Chinese cities being water-stressed, and about the Aral Sea disappearing, appear to have come directly from Marq de Villier's superb book on Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource but without attribution. This should have been footnoted. Having said that, I consider the book itself, despite its run-on Op-Ed character, to be a tour de force that is very logically put forward. Indeed, although I have seen allusions elsewhere, this is the first place that I have seen such a thorough denunciation of how cheap oil underlies everything else including suburbia and Wal-Mart cf. Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price. I am also quite impressed by the author's logical discourse on how communities have sacrificed their future coherence and sustainability for the sake of a few dollars savings on Wal-Mart products. There is a great deal in the book that is covered more ably and in more detail by the other 600+ books I have reviewed at , and

indeed, replicates much of what I write about in

Here is the argument that novelist James Howard Kunstler presents in this most engaging narrative:(1) We have a "one-time endowment of concentrated, stored solar energy"--i.e., oil.(2) At this point in history, give or take a few years, most of that stored solar energy will be gone. ("Peak oil" is upon us.)(3) The unprecedented growth of our society is predicated upon cheap energy and needs a continued supply of it to maintain itself.(4) That growth consists largely of a gigantic highway and road superstructure with massive suburban developments in places that cannot sustain their populations without cheap oil ("nobody walks in L.A.") (5) This land use structure is particularly and exclusively designed for the machines of cheap oil, cars, 18-wheelers, SUVs, etc., which will become too expensive to run as the oil patch rapidly depletes.(6) There is no substitute for oil--not coal, not nuclear power, not solar cells, not wind power, not hydroelectric power, not hydrogen fuel cells, not cold fusion, not corn oil--nothing will be adequate. The idea that human ingenuity will come up some sort of alternative fuel at the price we are paying today is just a pipe dream.(7) Our government has its head in the sand.Kunstler augments his argument with these major points:One, regardless of what energy source we might dream will replace oil, we will have to build the structures--nuclear plants, hydrogen fuel "stations," solar panels the size of New Mexico in the aggregate, massive forests of wind mills, etc.--from an oil platform, at least to begin with. Note that we now use energy from oil to mine coal and to build wind propellers. We use energy from oil to build nuclear reactors.

I heard about this book on Treehugger, the (n)Utne Reader and other places, and eventually the library here managed to ILL a copy for me. It's about the role of cheap oil in our society, and about what the end of cheap oil will likely do to us. Read this book. The back cover is the scary image of a horse pulling a ruined car. The same image is the cover of Stirling's *Dies the Fire*, and I find it frankly impossible to believe that this is a coincidence. In any case, Kunstler seems to be fairly well known as a social commentator who hates suburbia and advocates a return to close-packed urban communities, a "Smart Growth" booster, in other words. He begins with a reinterpretation of the twentieth century in terms of fossil fuel use, especially World War Two. As Murray and Millett agree in *A War to be Won*, I have added this idea to my lecture on WWII, which I recently delivered twice to summer students. He sees the 1973 embargo as the warning, which the US ignored (all except me; my whole life has been a bracing against the end of oil). Hubbert's Curve, which I'd heard of while I was still in Northern California, is a central issue in this book, with the peak predicted very

soon, if it hasn't come already. The Mainstream Media are talking more and more about the end of cheap oil, but no one is talking as starkly and unpleasantly as Kunstler. He then goes on to explain why several popular forms of "alternative" energy won't work. I wasn't sure that I believed all of what he said. I am not an engineer, but windmills (to generate electricity and pump enough water for stock) can be made without oil. Plastics can be made from fermented vegetable sludge; I ran a game once based on such a world.

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