

Collapse: The History of How We Fail, and What We Can Do To Save Ourselves



Huls and Gardar Farm: A tale of Modernity



Modern Societies and the Environment

Diamond uses the modern societies of China and Australia as examples for readers to understand the environmental impacts being made today that reflect the environmental issues of the past. Both China and Australia fit the factors Diamond describes as leading to past societies' collapse such as environmental impacts, climate change, friendly trade partners, and responses to environmental problems. Because of the size and economic status of these countries, their environmental issues are much bigger than the borders they inhabit. With China's sulfur oxides, CFCs, and carbon dioxide emissions, air pollution has become a major concern in China, with extreme economic and health costs. Their influence and status in the world make them a global concern, as environmental impacts in China have the potential to spill over into the rest of the world. Australia is used as an example of a "First World Country", whose environmental problems can mirror the ones threatening other wealthy nations with a far bigger population and size. Australia's responses to its environmental issues are important for the world to pay attention to, as they can set an example to other big modern societies for how to handle factors that could lead to collapse. Specifically, Australia faces extremely low soil productivity, deforestation, low marine growth, and salinization. These issues are extremely difficult to solve and Australia's responses to these environmental issues are critical to its survival as a nation. Diamond also discusses this issue in the return to the modern world by presenting a third-world disaster, Rwanda. Rwanda fell victim to genocide by ethnic hatred, which was fueled by environmental issues, such as high population density that led to a lack of available land resources. The best term to describe the environmental problems in Rwanda is the "Malthusian Dilemma," which holds that as food production increases, so does population, so there is no improvement in food per person.

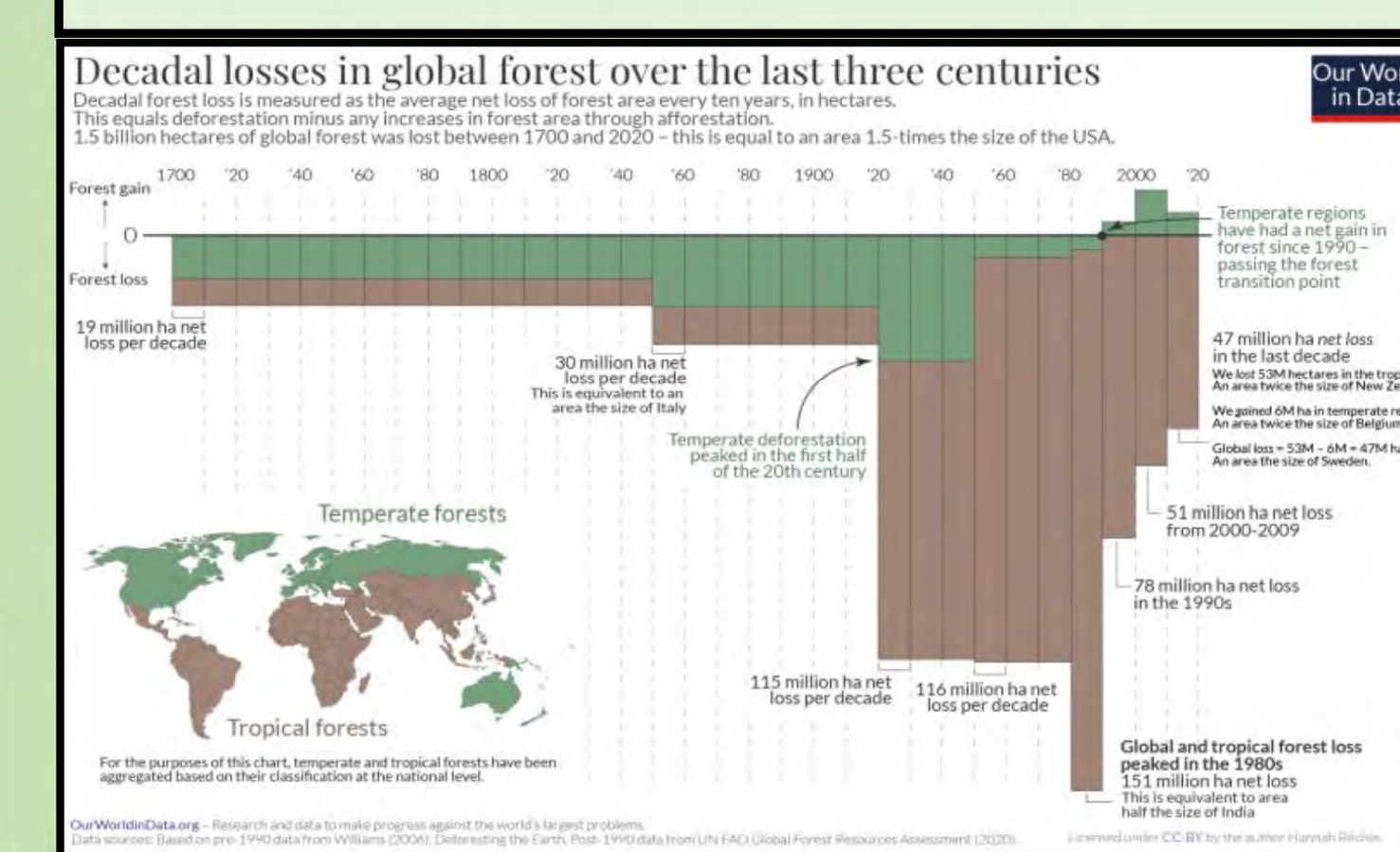
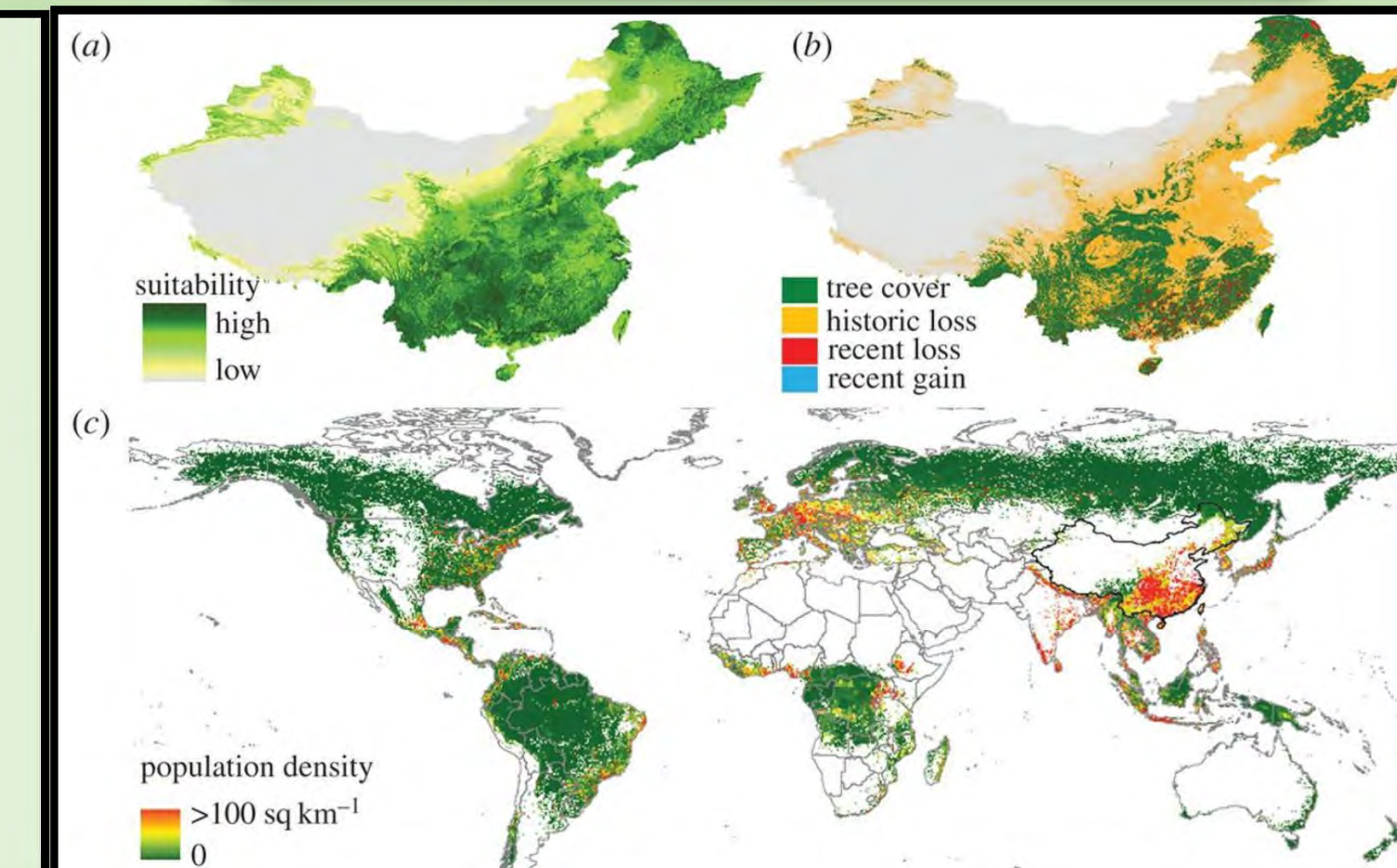


Diamond uses the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic to showcase how environmental and political factors sculpt the landscapes surrounding us even in the modern day.

Conclusions and Further Research on the Modern Environment



Many different conclusions can be drawn from our current environmental situation using Diamond's *Collapse* as a model. First, we can conclude that many modern societies are failing to make any of the challenging decisions necessary to protect ourselves not just from man-made climate change, but the inevitable climatic change that will and has always occurred. Failure to future-proof our civilizations will have disastrous effects, even if those effects do not occur in a hundred years or will be spread out over the next thousand. It is up to us to make the changes that we would like to see in the world.



A major example of what we can do to change is the ethical consumption of wood products, such as purchasing products that do not use large amounts of wood or destroy large sections of forest. Temperate forests are recovering, gaining trees, each year, but tropical forests are still seeing dramatic losses each year, especially in regions such as China and India. Support for re-wilding and reforestation at home is important, but speaking out and trying to organize to prevent what hasn't been lost yet is just as important step in the process of preventing our *Collapse*.

References

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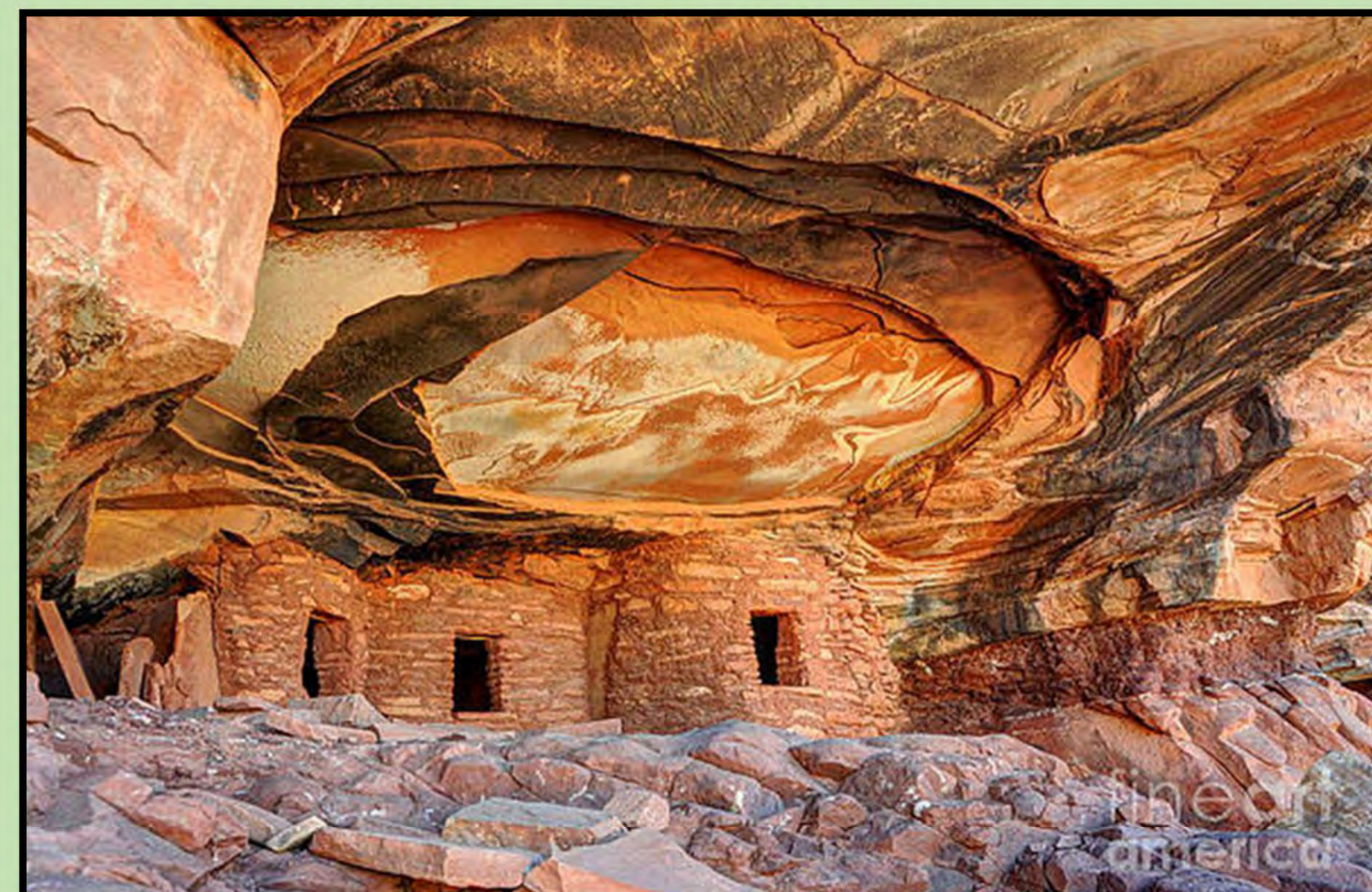
The Huls and Gardar farm are used as a microcosm by Diamond to represent the follies of both of their respective ages. The Huls farm, a family-owned dairy that operated for 110 years before selling off its dairy stock in 2020, and the Gardar Farm, a dairy farm in the ill-fated Greenland Viking colony. Both represented the peak of the technological production of their respective civilizations, as well as the pitfalls of both the Greenlandic Arctic and the Plains of Montana in terms of being able to produce milk, or any agricultural production, even when using the best available techniques. This microcosm of human civilizational accomplishment and the fight between the realities presented by the environment and societal dynamic is recurrent throughout *Collapse*. These farms specifically show how our accomplishments can fail to measure up to the challenge of survival, even if we try our hardest. If we ignore the environment around us and do not develop new techniques for developing the environment, we are doomed to collapse. This theme is recurrent throughout *Collapse* and will be further expounded on below in the ways past civilizations responded to these challenges, and often failed to rise to the occasion due to their inaction or slowness to adapt.



"The End" Five-point framework

- Climate Change
- Impact on environment
- Decline in friendly contact
- Increase in hostile contact
- Conservative outlook

What Can Be Learned From the Past



There have been many different native societies in the past which fell victim to this five-point model of collapse. Competition between tribal groups on Easter Island led to increasingly severe deforestation in service of a goal that did not benefit their respective clans' overall survival. The Anasazi peoples of the American Southwest failed to notice the regular cycles of deluge and drought which brought with it both severe contractions and burgeoning expansions of their civilizations, causing continuous cycles of collapse to occur among different peoples at different times. Deforestation also brought about the permanent decline in their civilization overall, as the environment could only support a certain rate of replenishment, which fell continuously as more trees were logged, to build cities that provided cultural and religious output, but not any meaningful product otherwise, thus draining already deprived outer regions of further resources, such as at Pueblo Bonita. Pictured next to the Easter Island (Moai) heads above

These elements of collapse teach us that if we do not care for our environment now, with planning spanning hundreds of years in the future, our own civilizations will be subject to both the whims of nature and others.



How We Can Develop Solutions Based On the Lessons of the Past

Using Diamond's Five-point framework for how societies have collapsed in the past allow us in the present to recognize these signs in modern societies. We have the gift of hindsight in which we now know that factors such as climate change, impact on the environment, decline on friendly contact, increase in hostile contact, and a conservative outlook have all contributed to past societies' collapse. We now recognize these issues in modern societies such as China, Australia, Rwanda, and Haiti. This allows these societies to reevaluate their current environmental standards on whether they are compatible with their survival or collapse. These changes have been implemented in Australia, in which farmers are changing their irrigation systems to be compatible with the current nutrient levels of their soils and changing their grazing animal populations to be compatible with this soil degradation as well.

