

Perspective

A Lifetime Look at Water and Air
Pollution, Climate Change, and
Government's Role

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1 April, 2009

Why?

- ▶ Hearing incredulity in a student presenter's voice speaking of burning rivers
- ▶ Seeing "old-timers" reluctance
- ▶ Experiencing great changes in my lifetime
 - Every now and then it is good to look back at where we have been and take measure
 - The events in a person's lifetime define them

Those who don't remember ...

- ▶ The “Generation Gap” between those of us over 50 and under 30 is larger than previous differences:
 - They never saw a river burn
 - “Love Canal” is a mere footnote, if recognized at all
 - They never saw the Chesapeake Bay freeze all the way to Smith Island
 - Agnes is an old girl's name
 - “Ring Around the Collar” is a funny YouTube video
 - The Interstate roads always existed
 - The Government is All-Wise and Beneficial

Yes, Virginia, Rivers DID burn!



(Remnant of the June 22, 1969 fire as the fire boat continues to break up oil. Courtesy of The Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.)



Water Pollution - Burn, Baby, Burn!

- ▶ The Cuyahoga fire credited to starting the ball rolling was not the first, or largest, fire.
- ▶ No press photo exists of the 1969 fire - news agencies used photos from the 1952 blaze.
- ▶ The fire in 1952 on the Cuyahoga caused nearly thirty times the amount of damage.
- ▶ The Passaic (NJ) and Hudson (NY) also had their share of fires and dumping since 1918

Love Canal was NOT a nice place



COURTESY OF ADELINE LEVINE AND UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES,
THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO, SUNY
Black Goo Bubbles of chemicals would appear in the
ground when chemical drums burst; shown is a sinkhole in 1978.



“The image of toxic wastes bubbling up from the ground shocked people across the country, and in 1980 directly spurred Congress to pass the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, which came to be known as Superfund.”

From NY Times: Love Canal Declared Clean, Ending Toxic Horror

By ANTHONY DePALMA; David Staba, in Niagara Falls, contributed reporting for this article.

Published: Thursday, March 18, 2004

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E05E1DF1231F93BA25750C0A9629C8B63>

Superfund !

- ▶ Love Canal was not the worst, or only toxic dump.
- ▶ In grade school, I played in what was later a Superfund site. Always wondered about the frogs....
- ▶ The local High School ball fields are next to another Superfund site.
- ▶ **Housing is cheapest in re-zoned industrial areas.**

Living with air pollution

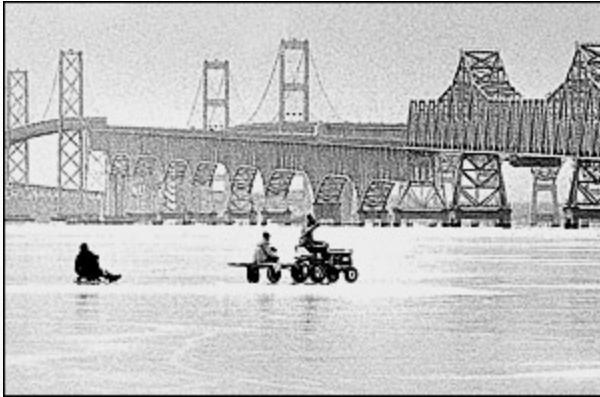
- ▶ “Ring Around the Collar” was real
- ▶ “...Summer in the city, back of my neck getting dirty and gritty...”
- ▶ Leaded gasoline
- ▶ Belching industrial smokestacks
 - Heavy metals
 - Hydrocarbons
 - Ash and grit

Weather and Climate

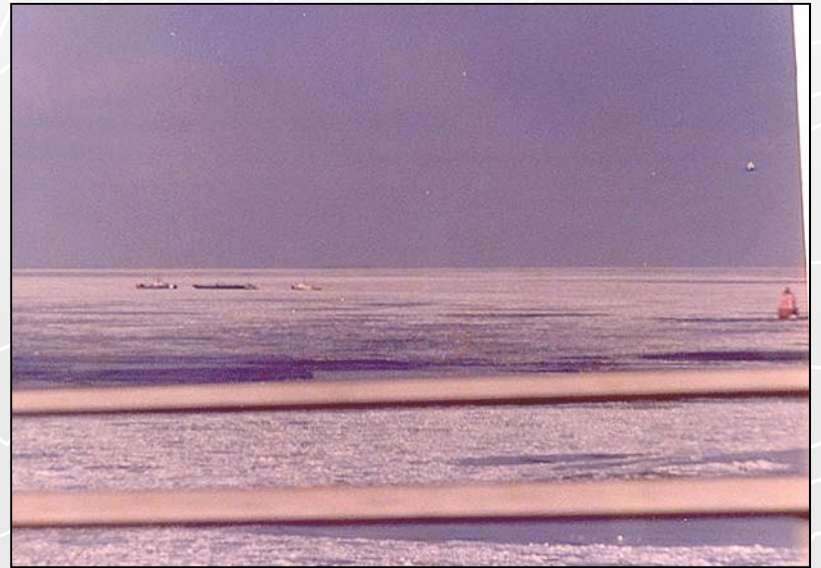
“Mother Nature”
Just Does Not “Care”



The Bay CAN freeze



The Winter of 1977 saw the Bay freeze all the way down past the mouth of the Patuxent. Temperatures did not get as high as freezing for almost a month. Supplies had to be delivered to Smith Island by helicopter.



It's all there in black and white...



The headlines read:
"Ice haults shipping in northern Tangier Sound"
"5 vessels aground" and "Watermen resilient"



Winters In General

- ▶ We can get more than a few inches of snow!
- ▶ Maryland's heaviest snows tend to be in February.
- ▶ 1996 snowmelt produced major floods.



Tidal Rivers DO “blow out”

- ▶ River bottoms can be exposed at low tide
- ▶ Shallow areas can be exposed even at high tide!
- ▶ In the Bay, what blows out one side can blow in to the opposite side.
- ▶ Wind can move massive amounts of water.



Hurricanes CAN radically change local landscapes

- ▶ The Ocean City Inlet was created by an unnamed hurricane less than 100 years ago. (1933)
- ▶ Agnes, David, Isabel, Katrina. Need I say more?



Barrier island damage by Isabel

Before Global Warming...

... there was Nuclear Winter.

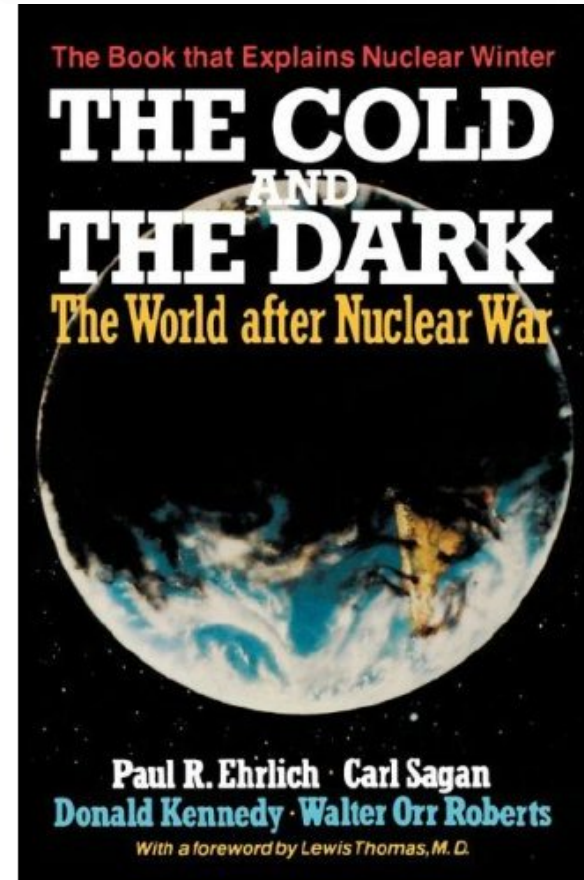
The TTAPS report had people really wondering whether the world would end in fire or ice.

(Nuclear Winter: Global Consequences of Multiple Nuclear Explosions

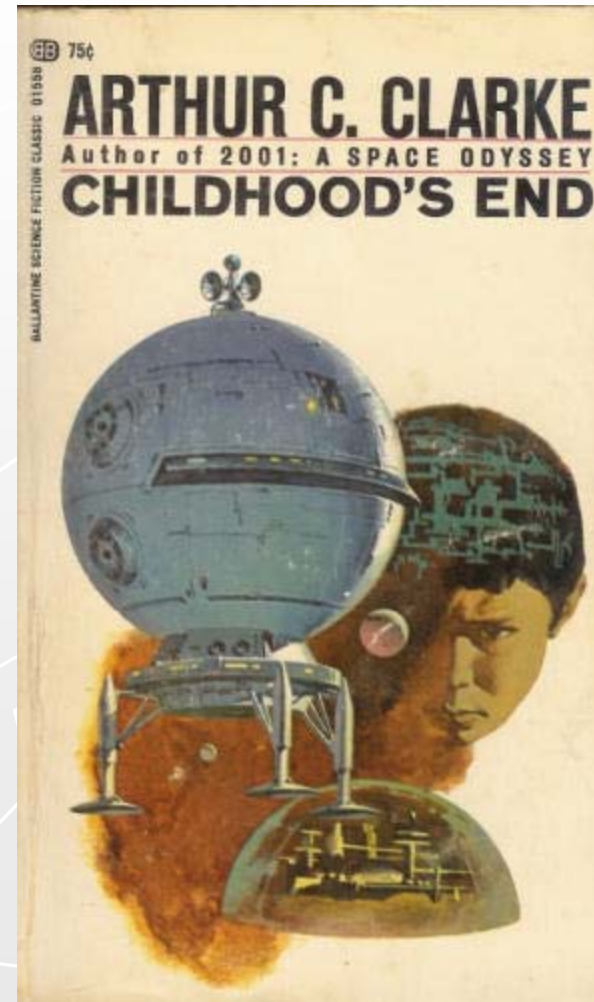
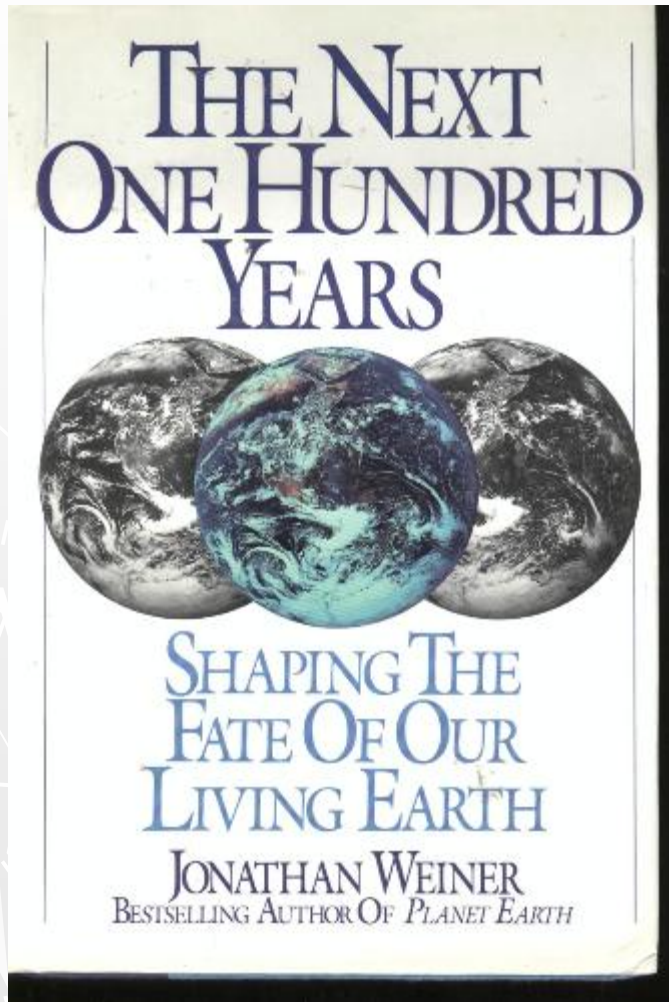
R. P. Turco, O. B. Toon, T. P. Ackerman, J. B. Pollack, and Carl Sagan (23 December 1983)

Science 222 (4630), 1283. [DOI: 10.1126/science.222.4630.1283]

<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/222/4630/1283>)



The 2 scariest books I've ever read



We Are From The Government

We are here to help...



"We have met the enemy..."

"... and he is us." Pogo comic strip character.

- ▶ Sampling permissions can be hard to get because the longer a person lives, the more negative things about Government they remember.
- ▶ We are a Government for, of, and by the people.
- ▶ People make mistakes.

Examples of such help

- ▶ Requiring asbestos to be used in government and school buildings
- ▶ Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics
- ▶ “Eminent Domain” land acquisitions
- ▶ MTBE in “winter” gasoline
- ▶ Fines and Fees for the “little guy” while Corporations evade them

Knowledge is Power

- ▶ You don't know it all
- ▶ I don't know it all
- ▶ We both know things about the same topic:
 - one has "been there, done that"
 - one is still getting there.
- ▶ Only life experiences separate us.

**Those who cannot remember
the past are condemned to
repeat it.**

**~ George Santayana, *The Life
of Reason, Volume 1, 1905***

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness. When change is absolute there remains no being to improve and no direction is set for possible improvement: and when experience is not retained, as among savages, infancy is perpetual. **Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.**