

Jared Diamond

"The World as Polder: What Does It Mean to Us Today"

Jared Diamond is a scientist and author of six books and numerous articles on environmental history and the development of human societies. Diamond has a B.A. from Harvard University and a Ph.D. in physiology from Cambridge University. He was a professor of physiology in the UCLA Medical School and is currently a professor of geography at UCLA. His many awards include a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, a Pulitzer Prize for *Guns, Germs and Steel*, and a National Medal of Science. In *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail*, from which our selection is taken, Diamond compares the success or failure of past civilizations and what factors contributed to their resurgence or decline to see what lessons we can draw from the past. Diamond opens this last chapter of his book with a list of 12 serious environmental problems facing us today—problems of resource destruction, of resource limits, of toxic and dangerous products, and of population growth. Despite this seemingly overwhelming list of problems, however, Diamond concludes that he is a "cautious optimist." Because these problems are caused by human activity, they are also within our control to change. As with other readings in this chapter, the change Diamond hopes for will require a change in our values and how we live among others.
