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The Necessity of Cultural Change

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President Barack Obama said, "We are the first generation to feel the effect of climate change and the last generation who can do something about it." In the past, the Earth felt invincible and the possibilities of humanity endless. Since the industrial revolution began three centuries ago, society has flourished. Population has grown by six billion people (1), food production has surged and transportation has allowed people to quickly reach any part of the globe. We have been able to do anything we could imagine; soar like birds, reach the depths of the ocean and fly to the moon. However, this golden age of progress hid a future of powerful environmental changes and unsustainability. If we do not act soon, severe weather changes and a refugee crisis on a scale not seen before will rattle the foundation of our cultural identities and threaten our only home.

Climate change is real. Since 1750, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 120 ppm (2), leading to a drastic rise in Earth's temperature, increasing the instances of "heat waves, coastal flooding, extreme precipitation events, and more severe droughts" (3). By 2100, if greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise, "California could see a 77% increase in the average area burned across the state." (4). Events like this will occur around the globe. If the climate continues to change at its current rate, "tens of millions of people will be forced from their homes by climate change in the next decade" (5). Areas of the Earth will not be able to support human life and habitable areas will become crowded, straining resources and spurring violence. We are quickly approaching the point of no return. If we do not do something to prevent these changes than it will simply be too late. This is not a problem for the future, but one for the present.

Studies have shown that the earth can only sustain a population of ten billion people; we are projected to reach that before the end of this century (6). We need to act now, and not through regulating our current system, but by developing an entirely new infrastructure. This constitutes a change in culture. In order to preserve our future and the prosperity of future generations, we need to stop thinking that Earth is here only to support and fuel our progress. If we understand that we are only part of a complex and fragile ecosystem

then we will be more conscientious of the environment. We will develop a system that is sustainable and beneficial for the environment and therefore us. Experiences drive us and our actions are dependent on the relationship we form with those experiences. We are the generation most affected by climate change and thus we must bear the heavy burden of leading the way for the cultural change in attitude towards our natural resources and our place in the environment.

Footnotes

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-15874560>
2. <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/climatescience/greenhousegases/industrialrevolution.html>
3. <https://www.ucsusa.org/our-work/global-warming/science-and-impacts/global-warming-impacts>
4. <http://time.com/4985252/california-wildfires-fires-climate-change/>
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/nov/02/climate-change-will-create-worldsbiggest-refugee-crisis>
6. <https://www.livescience.com/16493-people-planet-earth-support.html>