

How Human Greed  
Impacts Global Warming

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## Thesis Statement

Societal norms play a key role in Global Warming by influencing humankind's destructive behaviors and consumer decisions. I intend to show how society and the creations our ancestors molded greatly impact our reluctance to change the products we purchase and our "it's not my responsibility" mindsets. Utilizing research on how climate has evolved with humankind I want to showcase the part we all play in Global Warming and how we *can* reduce our destructive footprints together. Above all, some believe large organizations, not including fast-food industries, should be held responsible for finding environmental alternatives and that the average consumer should not be expected to change their lifestyle.

## Critical Reflection

Societal norms play a crucial role in Global Warming by influencing humankind's destructive behaviors and consumer decisions. I intend to show how society and our ancestors' creations have significantly impacted our reluctance to change and our "it's not my responsibility" mindsets. Utilizing research on how climate has evolved, I want to showcase how we impact Global Warming and that we can reduce our destructive footprints together. Above all, some believe large organizations, not including fast-food industries, should be held responsible for finding environmental alternatives. The same people think that the average consumer should not be expected to change their lifestyle.

Humankind has a long history of destroying our planet and attempting to fix it before inevitably falling down the same path. However, plastic pollution is one source of destruction that has stayed with us for over 70 years and has not shown signs of stopping anytime soon. As a way of advancing global economies, disposable plastic items were created, refined, and mass-marketed. In today's society, we rely heavily on plastic, like plastic bags for groceries, plastic bottles for water, and even plastic bags for our mass-produced bread loaves. Our dependence on plastic material originated from the aftermath of WWII, and our need for plastic has snowballed due to technological advances, economic expansions, and population growth. Humankind now produces 322 million metric tons of plastic every year, and it is expected to increase anywhere between 12.7 million to 250 million metric tons in the next six years. Plastic is one material that does not decompose and is not consumable by the Earth, animals, or humans. Regardless, we still produce plastic at an alarming rate rather than searching for a better alternative that can be broken down without harming the planet or the creatures that inhabit it. If

everyone on Earth refused to reduce their waste because they thought only large corporations and billionaires polluted, then our streets would be stockpiled with garbage. Plastic is making its way into our food sources and our bodies because of the trash in our oceans. We should not be waiting for our streets to be covered with waste and pollutants before we finally wake up and take action.

Single-use plastics may not seem like a big issue to many people, so long as it makes it into the trash can. However, even if we throw away plastic accurately, that does not mean that it is no longer harmless to the environment. A good percentage of single-use plastics never make it to a landfill or a recycling bin and are left to flow into our oceans. Even if plastic makes it to a landfill, it can still leak harmful pollutants into the sea. Also, any loose plastic could quickly be whisked away by the wind. Earth has over 7 billion people inhabiting it, and we have created over 300,000 Fast Food and coffee shops from chain organizations like McDonalds and Starbucks. With the development and implementation of a biodegradable alternative to plastic, we could create a big dent in the pollution that consumes our ecosystems. Our consumption of plastic also plays in Global Warming because 6% of the World's oil production is explicitly used to create plastic. The process of producing plastic inevitably releases almost 400 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. Through my research on plastic usage, Global Warming, and human consumption, I was a bit taken aback by the answers I received.

My survey on Global Warming awareness revealed that many believed in Global Warming, but, few believed they should have to change to prevent it. When asked what actions are taken to reduce their environmental footprint, many mentioned recycling and limiting plastic usage. However, a handful of people responded saying they do not try to live sustainably. For

example, one person stated, "I take as long of showers as I like, and I don't care how much plastic I use." and someone else responded, "None. Footprints fade.". In reality, our footprints are not fading. While they are no longer in our line of sight, trash suffocates our oceans and litters our beaches. The percentage of drinkable water on Earth is also diminishing because of our carelessness. Another question in the survey asked in fast food restaurants should find alternatives to drinking glasses and plastic straws. Forty-one out of the total forty-six responses said yes, they should discover environmentally friendly cups and straws. Only one respondent had a firm opinion on this question. They placed all of the blame on China and south-east Asian organizations for dumping trash into the ocean. They requested that we stop blaming consumers for waste just because they want a straw and a hamburger. Also, they believe billionaires with private jets should be taxed and that they hate being told to change their lifestyle when big corporations do nothing. Consequently, it is ignorance like this that is damaging and worsening our future.

Research has shown that 1 in 3 American Adults consume Fast Food every day, and more than two hundred million adults live in America. That means sixty-six million plastic cups are thrown away every single day in the United States alone, and yet consumers are not to blame? Americans believe that just because they are one person, they can not make an impact and change our society. This notion is false on several levels. Our greed and our laziness have us going through the daily motions, not realizing that united we could collapse entire industries with a single boycott. We all seem to point fingers at large companies for carbon emissions, yet we will not take the time to recognize that those emissions are from creating products for the

consumers. Similarly, we are actively destroying our forests because our schools demand the use of paper.

Forests, like the Amazon Rainforest, provide a majority of the oxygen we breathe. Even though oxygen is crucial to our survival, we chop them down for use in a classroom; paperbound books, graph paper, loose-leaf, etc. In a study done by Ben Johnson, a school of a hundred teachers uses approximately two hundred and fifty thousand pieces of paper a year. Bob Schildgen calculated that a single tree averages ten thousand to twenty thousand sheets of paper, which means a minimum of twelve trees are cut down per school. Schools and Universities are contributing to ten percent of all global warming emissions because they require deforestation. When a tree is chopped down, all of its stored carbon dioxides emit into the atmosphere. Seventy-two thousand fires have occurred in the Amazon Rainforest since the beginning of 2019 to progress agribusiness. The consequences of Global Warming loom over our heads whether we choose to recognize it at all.

In the 1980s, we were only several signatures away from a global framework developed by the World's major powers to reduce carbon emissions. Even though we have more scientific proof than 40 years ago, we have not come that close to global change since. Once again, the greed of humanity pushed away from the decree. We ended up not bettering our futures because of our toxic and damaging relationship with the fossil fuel industry. Society has always believed that energy usage meant a growing economy, so if we burned a lot of fossil fuels, the better our lives would be. Consequently, eighteen of the warmest years in history have occurred in the twenty-first century, and we are barely 19 years into it.

Carbon dioxide is useful since it keeps the Earth from freezing. However, the overabundance is melting our polar ice caps and flooding our continents. In Newport, Rhode Island colonial-era homes from before the American Revolution are at risk from the rising sea-level. The entire community faces the difficult decision of abandoning their home and history or fight for funding to prevent flood damages. In the northernmost town of the world, Longyearbyen, permafrost, which is supposed to stay frozen, is thawing. Not only is the permafrost thawing, but coffins in the cemetery are rising to the surface and will occasionally slide down the road. The World is becoming so warm that the coldest cities are melting. Signs of Global Warming surround us, and there are thousands upon thousands of articles detailing the consequences.

Global Warming will be the end of all of us if we do not wake up and fight against societal norms. Our ancestor's creations can no longer be the products that carry us into the future. If we continue to rely on plastic and fossil fuels, we will be serving ourselves to the end of the World on a silver platter. Whether we work alone or as a unit, it is the consumers' responsibility to fight against the greed of large corporations. The change we need will not happen if we continue to disregard our actions and blame the ten largest corporations for Global Warming. The time to stand up and fight is now, and I will show people that Global Warming is not a myth and that our actions have severe consequences.

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## Literature Review

1. “Amazon Rainforest Fires: Here’s What’s Really Happening” by Alexandria Symonds
  - a. The majority of fires in the Amazon rainforest are caused by human greed and the progression of agribusiness while naturally caused fires are extremely rare. While fires in the Amazon rainforest have always been commonplace, there was a 39% increase in deforestation due to the drawback of forest protection by Brazil’s new right-leaning president.
  
2. “How Much Has ‘Climate Change’ Been Scrubbed From Federal Websites? A Lot.” by Coral Davenport
  - a. With the election of a new United States president, Climate Change and/or Global Warming has either been completely scrubbed from all federal websites or played down and made out to look as if it is a plot crafted by democrats. In many climate change articles, the term was replaced with a more vague word, sustainability.
  
3. “Losing Earth: The Decade We Almost Stopped Climate Change” by Nathaniel Rich
  - a. Our own humanistic greed has pushed us further and further away from signing pacts in order to decrease the number of carbon emissions. Between the years 1979-1989, we had almost taken great precautionary steps in order to reduce our chances of destroying our planet and ourselves with it and we haven’t come close since.
  
4. “The Climate Change Endgame” by Thomas E. Lovejoy
  - a. Extinction rates have been rapidly increasing and several ecosystems are being wiped out due to man-made climate change. While a temperature increase of 2-degrees Celsius may seem like a small deal, it is actually very destructive to ecosystems, especially tropical coral reefs.
  
5. “‘We Cannot Save Everything’: A Historic Neighborhood Confronts Rising Seas” by Cornelia Dean
  - a. The sea-level has been steadily rising in Newport, Rhode Island and the communities are faced with a tough decision of what is worth saving. Much of America’s history is located along the east coast and many historical districts and artifacts are at severe risk of flooding and erosion. Is our history worth saving?