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## We Are All Venetians Now

Are the world's major cities ready for the rising waters and freak storms of tomorrow?

BY FRANK JACOBS | OCTOBER 31, 2012



We are a coast-hugging species. About 44 percent of the world's population live beside the **seaside**, and that number is set to rise. Why? Maritime **commerce** and easy access to all that lovely seafood spring to mind. But maybe there's a more fundamental reason, a human instinct touched upon by the sailor Ishmael, explaining his aquatic affection on the very first page of *Moby Dick*: "If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me."

Unfortunately, the sea doesn't always return that tender affection. Like the number of coast-huggers, it too is set to rise. Between 1950 and 2009, global coastlines **rose** between 0.6 and 1 millimeter annually. Taken together, those two trends spell global disaster, albeit of the very, very gradual kind. So what if the sea swallows up a low-lying atoll here and there? Who cares if entire (albeit tiny) Pacific nations may be engulfed in a few decades? If it happens slowly **enough for the victims** to row away to safety, it surely happens too slowly for anyone else to notice. So, if you're a low-lying island nation, you probably need a 1 new comment for the world to pay any attention.

But add a noticeable rise in **extreme weather** to those creeping sea levels, throw in a high tide surge, and you've got Superstorm Sandy. Suddenly, New York looks eerily like it does in all those apocalyptic movies that were enjoyable because they seemed distant enough. Director Roland Emmerich's **cinematic *schadenfreude*** feels like a guilty pleasure now. It won't forever.

New York will survive, get on with business, and Sandy will recede in memory. But from now on, New Yorkers won't be able to say Mother Nature didn't give them notice. Folks in New Orleans got a similar, albeit more distressing, wake-up call in 2005 from Hurricane Katrina. In both cases, the storms are forebodings of the cities' future demise. Nothing is eternal. Like people and countries, cities too eventually kick the bucket. The likeliest scenario for New Orleans and New York is that they will die a watery death, swallowed up eventually by the otherwise life-giving sea. The waters will rise, steadily but imperceptibly, while Poseidon will occasionally reach into his war-chest for tempests to whack their defenses with -- until they break.

Not that the Greek sea god is a sort of pagan Osama bin Laden, who has a special bone to pick with the United States. The list of metropolises threatened by rising seas and freak storms is alarmingly long, if (from a U.S. viewpoint) reassuringly international. Some of the world's other great cities regularly threatened by coastal flooding, and **long-term candidates** for watery extinction, are:

**Mumbai, India:** 2.8 million inhabitants exposed to flooding

**Shanghai, China:** 2.4 million exposed

**Miami, United States:** 2 million exposed

**Alexandria, Egypt:** 1.3 million exposed

**Tokyo, Japan:** 1.1 million exposed

**Bangkok, Thailand:** 900,000 exposed

**Dhaka, Bangladesh:** 850,000 exposed

**Abidjan, Ivory Coast:** 520,000 exposed

**Jakarta, Indonesia:** 500,000 exposed

**Lagos, Nigeria:** 360,000 exposed

But this accounting doesn't include several notable cities. London is not on the list, perhaps because of its state-of-the-art **Thames Barrier**, the world's second-largest moveable flood gate (after the Dutch **Oosterscheldekering**), which is nevertheless predicted to lose its protective function by 2050 due to rising sea levels. The artist Michael Pinsky earlier this year provided a poignant reminder of that future threat: his project *Plunge* **encircled** noteworthy London monuments in blue neon at the sea level predicted for the year 3111 -- 90 feet above its current height.

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David McNew/News-makers

*Frank Jacobs is a London-based author, journalist, and blogger. He writes about strange maps, intriguing borders, and other cartographic curiosities.*

## 26 COMMENTS

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### Conversation from Facebook



**Elham Wahba**  
true?!!!

1 MONTH AGO



**Emre Safak**  
Patrick, where are the people who live in islands or low-lying nations going to move; you planning to set up a refugee zone or something?

1 MONTH AGO



**Patrick Neid**  
This article, like so many that happen after a normal storm—and that's what Sandy was, is total bullsh\*t. Since 1950 he claims sea levels have risen 2". Putting aside the fact that our measuring skills are not up to the task, 2" is meaningless unless you have an agenda/fear to sell. Yes, yes, think about it, in 360 years the seas "may" rise one foot. Well, if one foot makes a difference in your life you should move. Sea levels have risen 400 feet since the last ice age ended. If you want to get get nervous—get nervous about the ice age that is overdue! In the meantime send him and his money so that your life can suck as they pretend to manage the universe. Meanwhile if you are really concerned about this bs you should take 5 minutes, and that is all it will take, to review all the hurricanes of the last two hundred years. You will find that currently they are fewer and far between compared to what they had been. Hurricanes, like deep sea currents are cyclical.

1 MONTH AGO



**Bharat Raj Poudel**  
True!

1 MONTH AGO



**Craig The dream of the rood Clark**  
get ready for the s\$\$t storm.

1 MONTH AGO

## Conversation on FP.com

**Tanofa**

just i'm asking , how it could be

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**Ahmed Mansour Anwer**

How .. ?!!how it could be for Bangkok, Thailand? which is exposed to a river which is far from the Gulf of Thailand about 2500 Km.How it could be for Alexandria, Egypt? which is overlooking on the mediterranean sea how it can be easy flooded otherwise the cities which are overlooking the oceans.How it could be for Dhaka, Bangladesh? ( the same reason as the first one but it is more far from the Bay of Bengal)Is it easy comparing between the city which is overlooking on the sea and other city which is overlooking on the ocean ?How much the distance that is from the point of the coastal flooding like "SANDY" and a block to be in safe in these countries that have low safety ?

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**YasserAssaghir**

مجلة القورين بوليمى تحذر من ان المدت الساحلية ومنها الاسكندرية معرضة لفيضانات واعاصير والغرق او الاختفاء فى اواسط القرن الحالى.. ياريت نتحرك من دلوقتى

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**clylov**

Hurry up, global warming. Having the East River rise and flooding out that useless piece of crap, the UN, would be a tremendous event.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**TOG**

Ah yes, lets all run for the hills. Talk about fear mongering. I mean, is climate change really that new of a phenomenon? I think some comments made already point out that it isnt. Why are we freaking out and making all these wild comments. I mean - the year 3111????? Are you kidding me? Humans have been traditionally bad at predicting outcomes. Just ask the scientists who are going to jail in Italy for not correctly identifying an earthquake that killed 300 people. I guarantee we are wrong about this.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**JosephineWilson22**

I've made \$64,000 so far this year working online and I'm a full time student. Im using an online business opportunity I heard about and I've made such great money. It's really user friendly and I'm just so happy that I found out about it. Heres what I do,

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**TimoJensen**

Ten thousand years ago, sea levels were 330 feet lower than today. You could walk across what today is known as the English channel. 400 years ago, glaciers in the European Alps, were almost melted away. 8-900 years ago, crops were grown on Greenland (hence the name), today all ice. Now, which time in history do we try to refer to as a steady condition for mother nature? Climate has always chanted, and it always will. Stop pretending spending billions of dollars can change anything. Only greentech corporations benefit from that spending.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**MrBeverlyhills**

[TimoJensen](#) So you're saying that climate change is occurring, and even though it's not man-made, it's inevitably going to cause hundreds of millions to billions of deaths.

And your conclusion is that we do nothing.

Interesting.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**TimoJensen**

@MrBeverlyhills im not concluding that anyone dies. Im asking you to consider if the multibillion dollars spent, is spent right. Finding alternatives to fossile fuel is important. Not because of CO2, but because we need to set us free from the middleeast. So far investing heavily in wind and solartechniques gives nothing, unless in areas where its blowing constantly, or where the sun shines constantly! Unfortunately neither nuclear (co2-free energy) nor carbonbased powerplants can adjust production in response to weather. It takes days to adjust production in redponse to weather. Now, invest in a solution to that. But please dont pretend we can change the weather by investing in AI Gores companies.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

**MrBeverlyhills**

[TimoJensen](#) [MrBeverlyhills](#) 98% of the most published climate researchers say humans are causing global

warming. In another study 97.4% of publishing specialists in climate change say that human activity is a significant contributing factor in changing mean global temperatures.

This means nothing to you?

Apparently scientists all over the world are in on some mass conspiracy theory that has not even slipped into the media's grasp yet, or scientists are all incompetent in comparison to your majesties genius in scientific literacy.

I'd say neither are true, although I'm sure you'd disagree. The fact is that global warming IS occurring, and warming of the climate system is unequivocal.

In fact, the science shows it may be too late to stop runaway climate change.

For example, parties to the UNFCCC have agreed that deep cuts in emissions are required, and that future global warming should be limited to below 2.0 °C (3.6 °F) relative to the pre-industrial level. Reports published in 2011 by the United Nations Environment Programme and the International Energy Agency suggest that efforts as of the early 21st century to reduce emissions may be inadequate to meet the UNFCCC's 2 °C target.

The effects of an increase in global temperature include a rise in sea levels and a change in the amount and pattern of precipitation, as well as a probable expansion of subtropical deserts. Warming is expected to be strongest in the Arctic and would be associated with the continuing retreat of glaciers, permafrost and sea ice. Other likely effects of the warming include a more frequent occurrence of extreme-weather events including heat waves, droughts and heavy rainfall, ocean acidification and species extinctions due to shifting temperature regimes. Effects significant to humans include the threat to food security from decreasing crop yields and the loss of habitat from inundation.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**paulwall14**

[MrBeverlyhills](#) [TimoJensen](#) there are thousands how scientists who disagree, however they quickly find themselves out of a job and with no funding. Scientists know that if they promote man made global warming they get millions. Timo has it right climate change has always happened and always will. blaming humans is incredibly self centred.

Funny that the Global carbon tax was invented by bankers who seem to curiously profit out of all this.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**MrBeverlyhills**

[paulwall14](#) [TimoJensen](#) "there are thousands how scientists who disagree, however they quickly find themselves out of a job and with no funding."

Name one.

I know you won't because there is no such thing, but I just wanted to make that point. And no, there are NO thousands of scientists disagreeing. It appears that you're just making a guess without knowing the details.

99% of climate change scientists agree that climate change is a man-made phenomena. That other <1% do not constitute countless people, ESPECIALLY in comparison to the >99% that understand the science.

But of course people like you (who have no knowledge of the actual studies) know so much more than all the scientists that spent decades learning of thing that you could not even dream to understand.

Even if I were to point the studies out to you, you wouldn't know what to do with them since you probably don't even understand some of the more stringent details and equations involved.

"Global carbon tax"

There is no such thing. Now I know that you're simply a bullshitter.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**paulwall14**

[MrBeverlyhills](#) [TimoJensen](#)

I may be wrong but atleast I understand there is two sides. These two articles embarras you. You moked me saying I would not be able to reply? hmmm

SPECIAL REPORT: More Than 1000 International Scientists Dissent Over Man-Made Global Warming Claims - Challenge UN IPCC & Gore <http://www.climatedepot.com/a/9035/SPECIAL-REPORT-More-Than-1000-International-Scientists-Dissent-Over-ManMade-Global>

-Associate State Climatologist Fired for Exposing Warming Myths

<http://news.heartland.org/newspaper-article/2007/06/01/associate-state-climatologist-fired-exposing-warming-myths>

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**paulwall14**

[MrBeverlyhills](#) [TimoJensen](#) shame on you. Do you come from europe or australia? do you understand what I mean when I say carbon tax? I am ready with more sources believe me.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**MrBeverlyhills**

[paulwall14](#) [TimoJensen](#) No I'm an American, and as this is an American site I don't know why you would have thought otherwise. Take a look at my screenname a little closer.

You said "Global carbon tax". There is no such thing. IF you meant something else, then maybe you should have said that.

Your first link is BS. What the Hell kind of site is that? It's not even formatted correctly!

I took a look at the second link. Why is there no other article explaining this? I searched it pretty fervently. It's only from one article 5 years ago. Why is there no reference to this "Mark Albright" anywhere else? Is that supposed to be a global conspiracy now?

C'mon! Give me some damn substantial evidence. Wikipedia? CNN? Sky? Anything that's normal? No, of course not. Those are evil big business controlled by the mass corporate blah blah blah.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**planet8788**

MIT Richard Lindzen.

Many many more.... but again, they lose their funding when they speak out.

ALL THEIR MODELS ARE WRONG.

The Temperature trend is well below the best case scenario that NASA's James Hansen lined out 20 years ago but yet our emissions are much worse.

No warming in 14 years.... totally missed by the models.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**SangYee**

[TimoJensen](#) True true true.....

People overreact on meaningless events. Yet they don't worry detonating a few thousand nukes in testing will affect our planet. Go figure.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**TimoJensen**

Two things. Media reports that the storm/hurricane that hit New York in 1821 or 1822, was almost as powerful as Sandy. Flood levels were just a couple feet lower. second. Ten thousand years ago

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**SangYee**

[TimoJensen](#) Americans are naive. They think one disaster is the end of the world and we're all responsible. They complain the US needs to be more GREEN.....ha

Go to a 3rd world country and see how "GREEN" they are and "Environmental"

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply



**SangYee**

[TimoJensen](#) The 3rd world has to go through a economic stage of industrialization to uplift the poverty. One down part is the pollution. Also the cost to become green, change the society, garbage disposal and prevention, recycling and so on.....these take decades if not centuries in these places to evolve.

It's not overnight and clean initiatives will not work. These people are concerned about day to day living not 10-30 or 1000 year Ecologist's view of Mother Earth. Save the earth? Even if Global Warming...I mean Climate Change...I mean Carbon Footprints....is real.....(No one can prove for sure).

No one will drastically change the cultures of these places.

1 MONTH AGO

Like Reply

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