

Ice Age Predicted in the 70s? Not So Fast

by,

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For years, global warming deniers have proclaimed that in the 1970s, climate change was predicted to go in the opposite direction it is currently projected to head toward; taking the Earth into a global cooling trend, rather than the sharp spike in warming that is happening and is predicted to continue. This argument is not only a pointless squabble, but is incorrect and nitpicking small suggestions made in popular magazines that are not peer reviewed or accredited by the scientific community.

The reason for the argument's continued use is that, from the deniers perspective, if scientists predicted global cooling in the 1970s and were wrong, then we cannot trust the scientific warnings now, that global warming is real and getting worse. However, glaring problems exist in that line of thought. Most of the climate deniers cite two articles from the 1970s as the basis of their argument; a Time article from 1974, and a Newsweek article from 1975. Both discuss at length the possibility of a cooling trend that could have an impact on the Earth's climate.

The Newsweek article, written by Peter Gwynne, begins with a warning of smaller food supplies and leads into a discussion of the idea that the world may be cooling. Gwynne cites a report by the National Academy of Sciences that warns that major changes in climate could lead to political instability and economic stress worldwide. The author even writes that some climatologists suggested purposefully melting the arctic ice cap (Gwynne, 1975). To the denier, the article ends here. The mindset of a denier is that if scientists were willing to go this far when they saw a little cooling in global temperature, then there is no way that they are right this time.

Furthermore, a denier would quote a Time article from 1974 called "Another Ice Age?" that suggests the possibility that an ice age could happen if the cooling trends, that were occurring at the time, continued. The author, who is not named in the article, begins by writing

about abnormal and sporadic weather patterns occurring around the planet. The author also states that if the Sun's streak of decreasing activity were to continue, the Earth could be in a new ice age within a few hundred years' time ("Another Ice Age?," 1974). The denier continues to use the argument that the article confirms scientists were predicting cooling in the 1970s and thus, if scientists were wrong that time, they are wrong this time.

Neither of these articles do a decent job of suggesting that global cooling was a possibility in the 1970s. The Newsweek article even states that the average temperature around the equator had actually risen slightly (Gwynne, 1975). The article is more of a 'what-if' scenario if global cooling were to occur, rather than a study stating that the world is undeniably heading for a massive ice age. The article's opening paragraph is littered with doomsday and sensationalist predictions with little merit. In the direct center of the article, there is a map of the world that clearly indicates South America, central Africa, and Oceania were increasing in temperature. In fact, nowhere on the chart is there a space indicating regions of decreasing temperature (Gwynne, 1975). A denier simply cannot logically argue that the article proves global cooling was suggested, as there is no definite claim within the article.

The Time article makes a correlation fallacy within the first two paragraphs. The author states that some scientists believe a large number of strange weather effects were being caused by a major climate change ("Another Ice Age?," 1974). Day-to-day weather phenomena are not necessarily a direct result of a changing climate. Despite this, the author correctly states that the Sun can have an impact on Earth's climate, and that the Sun's activity had been in decline, which can in fact lead to global cooling. In fact, the Sun's activity should be pushing Earth toward a cooling trend ("Another Ice Age?," 1974). So technically, this is correct. While the denier stops

there and claims truth, the human factor is not mentioned. So while the Sun should be taking us into a cooling trend, human activity, which is leading to warming instead, goes unmentioned.

Global cooling was possible, however. As mentioned before the Sun's activity indicated global cooling was a possibility, but aerosols in the atmosphere also played a role in the possibility of global cooling. Aerosols are small particles in the air that partially block the Sun, this phenomenon is known as global dimming. This activity did happen from 1950 to the 1990s, and even decreased global insolation that kept the planet warm about 1.3 percent per decade (Mandia, 2013). However, the deniers argument that global dimming is preventing global warming falls apart when it is noted that this trend has been entirely reversed as a result of the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1977.

To claim two magazine articles prove climate scientists wrongly predicted global cooling in the 1970s is illogical, especially when it is taken into consideration that Newsweek and Time are not peer reviewed. They are popular magazines with no accredited scientific fact checking, not scholarly journals. Global cooling suggestions were around in the 1970s, but were vastly outnumbered by peer reviewed and scientific papers that predicted global warming (Cook, 2010).

The deniers argument in this case is a perfect example of cherry picking evidence. Cherry picking is when a small piece of evidence is used to state a claim, but when the entire body of evidence is considered, that claim no longer works (Mandia, 2013). Global cooling can be predicted by looking at one part of the Earth that is cooling and claiming the entire planet is cooling, but when all the evidence is considered, it is clear the planet is warming. The deniers have cherry picked in this case. These two magazine articles are a small piece of evidence. When all of the climate research from the 1970s is considered, a much different picture is painted.

From 1965 to 1979, there were a total of seven peer reviewed studies that predicted global cooling. However, in that same timespan, there were 42 studies that predicted global warming. From 1973 to 1979, the number of scientific papers per year that predicted global warming increased from two to eight. Meanwhile, the number of scientific papers per year that predicted global cooling showed little change in that span of time (Cook, 2010). An argument could have been made in the late 1960s and early 1970s that there was no scientific consensus on global climate change, as in 1975 the National Academy of Sciences stated they did not have enough of an understanding to form a conclusion. However, that cannot be stated any longer, as the current stance of the National Academy of Sciences is that global warming is real and is happening (Cook, 2010). The deniers argument that global cooling was predicted in the 1970s and thus scientists are untrustworthy directly coincides with the idea that there is no consensus on climate change. At that point there was not, but today there is, and thus the argument no longer holds any merit.

This relates to class work in several ways. Cherry picking was discussed as a way that some people try and disprove climate change, and is a prevalent problem clouding scientific fact from the general public. Furthermore, it had been addressed that there is a major consensus among scientists that global warming is real. The concepts of aerosols, global dimming, and the Sun's influence on global climate were all discussed in class.

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