

Shortlisted Book for the 2023-24 Book in Common

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Elizabeth Kolbert

Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future

Date: 2021

List price: \$17 paperback

Publisher website: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/617060/under-a-white-sky-by-elizabeth-kolbert/>

Publisher description:

That man should have dominion “over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” is a prophecy that has hardened into fact. So pervasive are human impacts on the planet that it’s said we live in a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. In *Under a White Sky*, Elizabeth Kolbert takes a hard look at the new world we are creating.... One way to look at human civilization, says Kolbert, is as a ten-thousand-year exercise in defying nature. In *The Sixth Extinction*, she explored the ways in which our capacity for destruction has reshaped the natural world. Now she examines how the very sorts of interventions that have imperiled our planet are increasingly seen as the only hope for its salvation. By turns inspiring, terrifying, and darkly comic, *Under a White Sky* is an utterly original examination of the challenges we face.

This book is shortlisted for the 2023-2024 Book in Common because

- *It is engaging to students and to a broad audience.* Kolbert is an award-winning science journalist with a writing style that is both accessible and compelling for students and the wider community. Students are anxious for enhanced climate change curricula and programming: in 2019, in an Associated Students election at Chico State, students voted to recommend incorporating climate change education in all fields of study, and this book would contribute to that priority.
- *It has broad appeal across disciplines.* Kolbert’s compact book is directly relevant to a wide range of classes and disciplines, including the GE Sustainability and Climate Change Pathway and courses in all colleges that center resilience and sustainability, ethics and environmental impact. *Under a White Sky* includes chapters on specific case studies (including efforts to keep Asian Carp out of the Great Lakes; to examine water diversion efforts and land loss in Louisiana; to save pupfish in Nevada; and to develop more resistant species of coral in Australia) that could be assigned individually or as a whole.
- *It is relevant and timely.* Conversations about climate change and what humans must do now to make the planet inhabitable in the future are of urgent importance. Chico State is a leader on climate action and resilience, and this book would provide a strong anchor to our campus and community conversations about climate change and environmental justice. *Kirkus Reviews* describes the book as “urgent, absolutely necessary reading as a portrait of our devastated planet.”
- *It relates to the university mission.* This book asks readers to consider the vital importance of creating Resilient & Sustainable Systems in order to “advance environmental, social, and economic sustainability” and forge a “just and resilient future,” and grounds this work in the responsibilities of Civic & Global Engagement.