

ProgBlog

2012, No 5

This Troubled Year that Was:

The real 2012 and its Mayan Prophecy

The indicators that 2012 was a troubled year are many and manifold. The following is a telling sample:

- Late in October, super-storm Hurricane Sandy ripped through communities in seven countries in the Caribbean and east coast of North America, killing over 250 people and costing an estimated \$65.6 billion; it was the largest-ever Atlantic hurricane in diameter, with winds spanning an unbelievable 1,100 miles, as well as second most costly after Katrina.
- Two of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history occurred in 2012, one in a cinema in Colorado in July and the other only days ago at a Connecticut elementary school – both were horrifying incidents of mass murder which shook the nation.
- On February 14-15, the deadliest prison fire *in history* occurred at the National Penitentiary in Comayagua, Honduras, killing 360 people.
- Bangladesh suffered the deadliest factory fire in its history on November 24 when the Tazreen Fashion factory in the Ashulia district went up in flames, killing 115 and injuring at least 200.

- Severe, costly and fatal flooding occurred in a variety of countries during the year, including : (1) Russia in early July, when the equivalent of five months of rain fell overnight in southern parts of the country killing 144 people and damaging the homes of nearly 13,000 people; (2) the Brahmaputra floods, which followed heavy monsoon rains in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar, killed 124 people and displaced about six million; (3) Floods in Nigeria killed 137 people and displaced over 120,000 in July; (4) serious flooding also hit Great Britain and Ireland, North Korea, Romania, Fiji, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore and the Philippines in 2012.
- Early in December, Typhoon Bopha killed 1,020 people in the Philippines and devastated infrastructure and agriculture, destroying large tracts of coconut and banana trees.
- The 2012 World Disasters Report by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies states that the scale and complexity of disaster displacement has increased dramatically in recent years.
- January 2012 was the third most active on record for tornadoes in the US, behind 1999 and 2008 , and March saw one of the largest outbreaks ever recorded in the country for that time of the year.
- In the latter part of the year, Israel and Palestine came close to war - over 2,256 rockets were launched at Israel from Gaza from January 2012, of which about 1,456 were fired between November 14 and 21, with rockets fired at Jerusalem for the first time and at Tel Aviv for the first time since the first Gulf War.
- The bloody civil war in Syria has claimed tens of thousands of civilian lives in 2012 and is a destabilizing proxy war between Syria's allies and Western powers.
- In mid-December, North Korea defiantly fired a long-range rocket, putting its satellite into space which could enable future targeted launching of nuclear warheads from the rogue state.

- Economically, 2012 will end with the world's number one economy on the edge of a fiscal cliff and the Eurozone crisis showing no signs of abating any time soon in this new age of austerity.

Tragically, 2012 was studded with mass shootings of innocent citizens going about their daily lives when they were senselessly and cold-heartedly gunned down. This is the grim catalogue of multiple killings:

April

A gunman kills seven people and wounds three in a shooting rampage at a Christian college in Oakland.

July

A masked gunman kills 12 people and wounds 58 when he opens fire on moviegoers at a showing of the Batman film "The Dark Knight Rises" in Aurora, a suburb of Denver, Colorado.

August

A gunman kills six people during Sunday services at a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, before he is shot dead by a police officer.

Two people are killed and eight wounded in a shooting outside the Empire State Building in New York City.

September

A former employee kills five people and takes his own life in a shooting spree at a Minneapolis sign company from which he had been fired.

October

Three people are killed in a Milwaukee area spa including the estranged wife of the suspected gunman, who then killed himself.

December

A young gunman opens fire at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, killing twenty children and six adults (compared to the twelve schoolmates and a teacher slain at Columbine High School massacre), before shooting himself.

Has there ever been such a year as this for mass shootings? I don't think so.

Environmentally, economically, politically and socially the world in 2012 was unusually troubled. This raises the question – did the 7th century Mayan prophet get it right when he looked ahead to 2012 and foresaw a time of destruction?

A 7th century inscription on the Tortuguero Monument 6 in Tabasco, Mexico, speaks of the 21st of December 2012 as the end of an age, 5,200 years in duration, but not the end of the world. The prophecy for the end of this long cycle of Mayan time, a milestone in their long count calendar, indicated it would be a period of destruction ruled by a god of war. This inscription is a very rare far-future prophecy for the year we're in right now.

The Mayans saw time as cyclical and believed that its cycles were repeated throughout history, providing the basis for prediction of future states. Benedict (2011) states "The foundation of Mayan prophecy is their cyclic concept of time and history. Knowing what had occurred in a previous period enabled the prophets to indicate what was likely to recur."¹ For Mayans each world age, or "Sun", was made up of 13 *baktuns* of 400 years each (13 x 400 = 5,200 years). The 21st of December 2012 is the end of such a world age or cycle.

In my view, this prophecy got two things right. Firstly, that 2012 would be a time of transition between two world ages. Secondly, that 2012 would see much destruction in the world.

We are, indeed, transitioning from an industrial age based on fossil fuels to a more sustainable economy based on renewable energy, a profound change to our underlying energy order and the way our societies are run. We are living in an in-between time on the other side of global Peak Oil. Schumpeter's creative destruction of out-dated technologies and production systems is underway.

¹ Benedict, G. 2011. *The Mayan Prophecies for 2012*. London: Watkins Publishing.

And we are driven to revolutionize our energy order by the knowledge that climate change could soon reach a tipping point if we do not stop polluting our atmosphere on a scale which is overturning established climate patterns and unleashing extreme weather.

As the Mayan prophet predicted, 2012 does happen to fall in a transitional period of deep-seated change in the world which will lead to a new epoch in the development of human society. It is during such periods that we sense things becoming more unstable and chaotic. The instability we are witnessing is like the destruction of the old social order, or "age", which has become chronically unsustainable. Our troubled times, as shown by the indicators above, are caused by very high levels of change, from atmospheric imbalances to the Arab Spring, from historic tensions in the Middle East to global economic turbulence, from corruption to sure signs of social alienation.

Today's Mayan elders in Guatemala, for example, speak of a great pain accompanying the end of their age on 21st December 2012. They see the core problem being contamination of earth's atmosphere by pollutants. While NASA is correct that there are no unusual celestial events happening at this time, we are, nevertheless, seeing disturbances on a heightened scale in this transitional age, such as rising levels of economic disorder, unprecedented mass shootings, increasing natural disasters and growing conflict in the Middle East.

Since the Mayans know from their history what it means to undergo catastrophic social collapse, perhaps we should listen more attentively to their warnings, both past and present, about staying in harmony with earth and respecting cycles of time and history. This is especially true given that 2012 has turned out to be a troubled year of far-reaching change and disturbance which has undoubtedly planted the seeds for a deeply challenging 2013. Next year is likely to be characterized by continued creative destruction and an inspired human search for a better social order.