

If you haven't been following the controversy that has erupted with the publication of *SuperFreakonomics: Global Cooling, Patriotic Prostitutes and Why Suicide Bombers Should Buy Life Insurance*, you should be. In *SuperFreakonomics* — the sequel to Steven Levitt and Stephen Duber's wildly popular *Freakonomics* — the authors take on climate change. Their arguments are somewhat complex but essentially boil down to the following: the threats from global warming have been greatly exaggerated; we shouldn't spend massive amounts of money reducing carbon emissions; and we should just geoengineer our way out of the problem. More specifically, their favored geoengineering solution is to imitate the effects of a massive volcanic blast — the most recent example of which is the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo. Scientists have [documented](#) that the spewing of millions of tons of sulfur dioxide from a massive volcanic eruption into the atmosphere can have a temporary global cooling effect (Levitt and Duber conveniently fail to highlight that this cooling [can also](#) change weather patterns dramatically, induce massive reductions in global rainfall, make widespread droughts more likely and increase ocean acidification.)

I won't recount the many problems with the SuperFreakonomics arguments. Instead, you should read Elizabeth Kolbert's scathing critique in the New Yorker [here](#). A highlight from her review:

Given their emphasis on cold, hard numbers, it's noteworthy that Levitt and Dubner ignore what are, by now, whole libraries' worth of data on global warming. Indeed, just about everything they have to say on the topic is, factually speaking, wrong.

You should also read Real Climate's [An Open Letter to Steve Levitt](#) — written by Levitt's University of Chicago colleague climatologist Raymond Pierrehumbert — here. My favorite line?

By now there have been many detailed dissections of everything that is wrong with the treatment of climate in **Superfreakonomics**, but what has been lost amidst all that extensive discussion is how *really simple* it would have been to get this stuff right.

The latest news in the *SuperFreakonomics* battle involves Berkeley Economist J. Bradford DeLong, who as a service to his readers posted Chapter 5 of the book on his blog. He has now received a [letter](#) from *SuperFreakonomics* publisher HarperCollins ordering him to

remove the chapter from his website or risk a copyright infringement action. As Andrew Leonard of Salon [writes today](#):

No matter how many lawyers HarperCollins sics on critics, the publisher won't be able to stop the bad press