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Summer Assignment

AP World History Summer Assignment

Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies

By Jared Diamond

Read Parts I, II, and III since they contain the main argument. Then pick one chapter from Part IV depending on your interests. Each of these illustrates the thesis as it applies to a geographic area: Australia, East Asia, Oceania, Eurasia and the Americas, and Africa. Since not everyone will be interested in the same chapter, you will want to be ready to explain the argument in the one you choose. Finally, read the Epilogue. You'll read about 325 pages. However, many of you will want to read the whole book; that is allowed.

The central claim (thesis) of this book is that "history followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples' environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves" (25). How Diamond makes the claim is his argument; how he supports the claim is his evidence. Your job is to discover the reasons why Diamond makes this claim, i.e., you will need to follow his argument and evaluate his evidence. Your job isn't to agree or disagree with him, though if you agree, you will be asked to supply counter-arguments and/or evidence. Personal experiences and hunches may help you start an argument for or against Diamond, but neither will be sufficient since his own evidence goes far beyond one person's experience.

Be prepared to take whatever time it takes to read and understand this book, and please take notes as you read, whether on paper or in the margins of the book.

Notice that Diamond usually gives us the questions he is working on, so you can look for the answer. The Preface begins with one question: "Why did history unfold differently on different continents?" (9). The Prologue begins with Yali's question (p.14), which is the original statement of the question in the Preface. You might try marking your book with a Q next to each question he asks. Note that there are at least two on 15, two on 16 and an implied question on 17 (What are the objections to discussing Yali's question?), and so on. Reviewing a chapter by trying to answer each of the questions that you marked is a wonderful way of checking your understanding (or studying for a test!). Though the questions in the Preface and Prologue may take the whole book to answer, many of the questions in each chapters are answered in that chapter and add a piece to answers for the big questions.

Diamond states his argument briefly for the first time in the Prologue. You might note its main features, then watch how Diamond expands on each of them. Pages 28-32 outline the structure of the book, so read them carefully in order to see the overall picture of his argument. You will find that if you can explain each of the figures and tables Diamond presents, that you will probably have gotten the main evidence and lines of argument under control. So, read a chapter, and then try to explain the figures/tables to a family member or friend. Some figures describe the argument (esp. p. 87); most figures (maps, e.g.) and tables describe the evidence. Be clear about how this evidence supports his argument.

This is work and it is fun because of all the questions Diamond addresses and answers and the surprising evidence he musters. If you like learning, and really want to show you are ready for a college-level course, this should turn out to be a rewarding experience.

Good luck and see you soon!

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Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies
By Jared Diamond

Take notes as you go, in the book, on paper, or on your computer. Write down words you do not know and look them up. Also keep a list of questions that you have about the book.

Answer the following questions with *complete explanations* in a Word Document named “AP World GGS.” You must submit this assignment by the first day of class 2017/2018 school year, and you must bring a printed copy with you on the first day of school.

Prologue: Yali’s Question

1. Why do you think Diamond chooses to begin his book with a question?
2. Why do you think Yali’s question is relevant for us today?
3. Diamond proposes his answer to Yali’s question: Do you find this persuasive so far? If so, why? If not, what kind of evidence would he have to supply to persuade you?
4. Diamond challenges some common explanations for differences among human societies. Are you familiar with these explanations? Do you know people who share them?

Part One: From Eden to Cajamarca

1. Take note of this title. Where is Cajamarca? What is Diamond referring to?
2. What do you expect to learn in this section of the book?
3. Why would Diamond choose to start here?

Chapter One: Up to the Starting Line

Diamond says: “An observer transported back in time to 11,000 B.C. could not have predicted on which continent human societies would develop most quickly, but could have made a strong case for any of the continents.” Why does Diamond begin his story at this point in human history; why not sooner or later?

Chapter Two: A Natural Experiment of History

How does the fact that the Maori defeated the Moriori (a “natural experiment of history”) support Diamond’s argument?

Chapter Three: Collision at Cajamarca

Pizarro defeated the Incan emperor Atahualpa, just like the Maori defeated the Moriori in the previous chapter. Why does Diamond use historical anecdotes to support his argument at this point in the book, rather than some other kind of evidence, like statistics?

Can you think of a time when a less materially advanced society defeated a more materially advanced society? If you can, doesn't that cast doubt on Diamond's claim?

Part Two: The Rise and Spread of Food Production

1. What do you expect to find in this section of the book?
2. Why do you think Diamond chose to write about food?

Chapter Four: Farmer Power

Diamond claims that there is a relationship between farming and societal development. Where does he get the evidence to support his claim? Did humans living at the time create documents (like diaries and newspapers) that survive to this day? In what part of the book does Diamond tell you what his sources of information are?

Chapter Five: History's Haves and Have-Nots

Some areas of the world developed independent food production more quickly than others. Why should Diamond be concerned with this subject? What relationship does this have to his argument?

Chapter Six: To Farm or not to Farm

Settled agriculture replaced hunting and gathering slowly; the transition was neither immediate nor obvious. Doesn't that seem counterintuitive? Why would someone want to continue hunting and gathering when given the choice of settled agriculture?

Chapter Seven: How to Make an Almond

The domestication of plants required years, if not centuries, of trial and error. What is Diamond's evidence for this?

Chapter Eight: Apples vs. Indians

Independent food production fell far short of a "complete food package" in the eastern United States (until the arrival of crops from other regions), but Diamond does not blame the Indians. Aren't people responsible for the situations they create? Couldn't smarter people have created a more complete food package and thereby created a more advanced civilization?

Chapter Nine: Zebras, Unhappy Marriage, and The Anna Karenina Principle

Eurasians—the inhabitants of Europe and Asia—domesticated more animals than other peoples. Why? How does this support Diamond's theory?

Chapter Ten: Spacious Skies and Tilted Axes

According to Diamond, agricultural innovations spread more quickly from East to West, along the orientation of Eurasia's axis, then from North to South. Why? What does this have to do with the fates of human societies?

Now is a good time to ask: Why doesn't this book sound like the history, geography, or biology textbooks you may have read before? Explain.

Part Three: From Food to Guns Germs, and Steel

1. What do you expect Diamond to tell you in this part of the book?
2. How do you think he will advance his argument?

Chapter Eleven: The Lethal Gift of Livestock

Farmers transmit more powerful germs than hunter-gatherers: Diamond, in this chapter, draws on conclusions that he made in the previous sections. What are they? Do you find him persuasive?

Chapter Twelve: Blueprints and Borrowed Letters

According to Diamond, food production precedes the development of writing. Think back to points that Diamond made earlier in the book: How can he say *with any certainty* that food must precede writing? Why might not people develop writing earlier?

Chapter Thirteen: Necessity's Mother

According to Diamond, we have some misconceptions about how societies develop and use innovations: "Invention actually creates necessity." Do you share these "misconceptions"? Can you think of an example from your own life that disproves Diamond's claim?

Chapter Fourteen: From Egalitarianism to Kleptocracy

What is kleptocracy? Do you live in a kleptocracy now?

Diamond says that societies, as they develop, pass through four stages. Who can he make such a generalization about every society?

Part Four: Around the World in Five Chapters

Read *at least one* chapter from part four. Note which chapter you chose and explain how it supports Diamond's argument.

Epilogue: The Future of Human History as a Science

1. Diamond returns to Yali's question. Do you think Yali would believe his answer?
2. Do you believe his answer?
3. In this chapter, Diamond tries to address some objections to his theory (e.g., China, Great Men of History). Does he convince you? Why or why not?
4. Diamond proposes a "science of human history." What does he hope to learn from looking at history as a science?
5. Looking back at the book, do you think Diamond is a historian, geographer, biologist, anthropologist, archaeologist, or zoologist? Explain.

**Email and Print a copy of your
Summer Assignment to turn
in to your instructor (Dr.
Lyles) on the first day of
school! Be prepared to test on
book on day 1!!!!**