

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

By Jared Diamond Ph.D.

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"Fascinating.... Lays a foundation for understanding human history."?Bill Gates

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* is a brilliant work answering the question of why the peoples of certain continents succeeded in invading other continents and conquering or displacing their peoples. This edition includes a new chapter on Japan and all-new illustrations drawn from the television series. Until around 11,000 BC, all peoples were still Stone Age hunter/gatherers. At that point, a great divide occurred in the rates that human societies evolved. In Eurasia, parts of the Americas, and Africa, farming became the prevailing mode of existence when indigenous wild plants and animals were domesticated by prehistoric planters and herders. As Jared Diamond vividly reveals, the very people who gained a head start in producing food would collide with preliterate cultures, shaping the modern world through conquest, displacement, and genocide.The paths that lead from scattered centers of food to broad bands of settlement had a great deal to do with climate and geography. But how did differences in societies arise? Why weren't native Australians, Americans, or Africans the ones to colonize Europe? Diamond dismantles pernicious racial theories tracing societal differences to biological differences. He assembles convincing evidence linking germs to domestication of animals, germs that Eurasians then spread in epidemic proportions in their voyages of discovery. In its sweep, *Guns, Germs and Steel* encompasses the rise of agriculture, technology, writing, government, and religion, providing a unifying theory of human history as intriguing as the histories of dinosaurs and glaciers. 32 illustrations

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
Explaining what William McNeill called *The Rise of the West* has become the central problem in the study of global history. In *Guns, Germs, and Steel* Jared Diamond presents the biologist's answer: geography, demography, and ecological happenstance. Diamond evenhandedly reviews human history on every continent since the Ice Age at a rate that emphasizes only the broadest movements of peoples and ideas. Yet his survey is binocular: one eye has the rather distant vision of the evolutionary biologist, while the other eye--and his heart--belongs to the people of New Guinea, where he has done field work for more than 30 years.

From Library Journal
Most of this work deals with non-Europeans, but Diamond's thesis sheds light on why Western civilization became hegemonic: "History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples' environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves." Those who domesticated plants and animals early got a head start on developing writing, government, technology, weapons of war, and immunity to deadly germs. (LJ 2/15/97)
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From Kirkus Reviews
MacArthur fellow and UCLA evolutionary biologist Diamond (The Third Chimpanzee, 1992, etc.) takes as his theme no less than the rise of human civilizations. On the whole this is an impressive achievement, with nods to the historians, anthropologists, and others who have laid the groundwork. Diamond tells us that the impetus for the book came from a native New Guinea friend, Yali, who asked him, ``Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?" The long and short of it, says Diamond, is biogeography. It just so happened that 13,000 years ago, with the ending of the last Ice Age, there was an area of the world better endowed with the flora and fauna that would lead to the take-off toward civilization: that valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers we now call the Fertile Crescent. There were found the wild stocks that became domesticated crops of wheat and barley. Flax was available for the development of cloth. There was an abundance of large mammals that could be domesticated: sheep, goats, cattle. Once agriculture is born and animals domesticated, a kind of positive feedback drives the growth toward civilization. People settle down; food surpluses can be stored so population grows. And with it comes a division of labor, the rise of an elite class, the codification of rules, and language. It happened, too, in China, and later in Mesoamerica. But the New World was not nearly as abundant in the good stuff. And like Africa, it is oriented North and South, resulting in different climates, which make the diffusion of agriculture and animals problematic. While you have heard many of these arguments before, Diamond has brought them together convincingly. The prose is not brilliant and there are apologies and redundancies that we could do without. But a fair answer to Yali's question this surely is, and gratifyingly, it makes clear that race has nothing to do with who does or does not develop cargo. (Book- of-the-Month Club/History Book Club/Quality Paperback Book Club selection) -- *Copyright ©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Maribel Davenport:

The ability that you get from Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies will be the more deep you searching the information that hide inside the words the more you get interested in reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to understand but Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies giving you buzz feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in particular way that can be understood simply by anyone who read it because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. Therefore it is easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having that Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies instantly.

Leigh Brown:

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Ruth Barr:

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Vera Pinckney:

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