

Project Number: JMW-GID2 *46*

Guns, Germs, and Steel and Global Inequality

An Interactive Qualifying Project

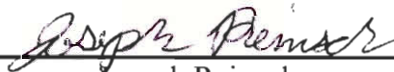
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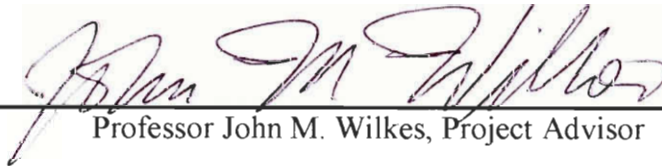
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Abstract:

In his book Guns, Germs, and Steel Jared Diamond seeks to explain global inequality by examining environmental factors in prehistory. By examining these arguments through the use of supplemental works focusing on specific societies, their validity can be judged. By combining study of Guns, Germs, and Steel and these other works into a course, students will be able to examine root causes for global inequality.

1. Introduction

In this project Jared Diamond's book Guns, Germs, and Steel was examined in preparation for the creation of a course. This Book looks at global inequality and seeks to explain this situation by examining environmental factors paralleling the development of societies back into prehistory. Considering the objective of this project, it was important to consider the Diamond's argument. In light of this, specific cases were studied, many of which will be considered for supplemental reading in the course. The analysis of Diamond's work as well as these cases led to the formation of certain key questions. A single important question is key to the project and the course that will be created. Are the arguments presented in Guns, Germs, and Steel fundamentally valid? In order to answer question, it is important to understand these arguments.

2. Guns, Germs, and Steel

In his book Guns, Germs, and Steel, Jared Diamond examines the inequalities evident between modern societies. Diamond looks to prehistory for his explanation, and finds it in the geographical and ecological environment of that period. Diamond argues differences in climate and available resources led to key developments, from which the book gets its name, that made it possible for societies with these developments to out compete the societies lacking them.

The book opens with a prologue illuminating the author's inspiration for this work. While he was traveling in New Guinea, an area that will feature prominently later in the book, a local named Yali posed a fateful question.

"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?"

It is this question that the author hopes to answer in this book.

Guns, Germs, and Steel is divided into a number of parts. The first part, entitled From Eden to Cajamarca, helps to orient the reader by providing a brief historical background on how humanity spread across the planet, accounting for what would eventually become the modern societies of which the book's central theme is concerned. This section then continues with two case studies of conflict between societies. One between two closely related peoples with only a few key differences, and the other between two very different societies, sharing few commonalities. These examples introduce certain important themes and it is these themes that the later parts of the book address.

From here the book returns to history to focus on the basic necessity of food. The second part of the book focuses on food production. The text looks at the development and spread of agriculture in different parts of the world. Rates of development are

compared to frequency of suitable animal and plant candidates for domestication. Rates of spread are compared to local environmental factors in the areas of origin and conclusion of those spreads. Diamond illustrates how agriculture arose earlier in areas with many species of plants and animals suitable for domestication and later if at all in areas of few such species. He also shows how, once developed, agriculture spread quickly through regions with similar climates, but was often unable to pass beyond ecological barriers. These factors meant that only certain areas were able to fully develop this important first step. Later sections illustrate how this initial advantage was used as a springboard to future advancements.

Upon this foundation of agriculture Diamond builds his theory in the next part of the book. Chapters take it in turns to explain how agriculture led to the development of writing, technology, government and even epidemic diseases. These developmental processes are explored both through historical records and modern examples where possible. After each development is examined, Diamond examines the advantages themselves. Diamond explains how these products of agriculture proved to be advantageous to the societies that developed them, often through the use of examples like the ones in the first part of the book.

In the book's final part Diamond shifts his perspective. In the earlier sections he would examine a specific aspect of cultural, like agriculture or writing as it developed across the globe. In this final section, he instead looks at the development of cultures in specific areas of the world. Diamond tracks the process of various cultures while pointing out how guns, germs and steel enhanced or confined their expansions. Chapters are devoted to Australia and New Guinea, East Asia, Polynesia, Eurasia and the Americas

and Africa. In each, developmental factors are examined together instead of individually, allowing the effects of their combination to be observed.

In the epilogue Diamond sums up his arguments as well as acknowledging some of its shortcomings. "Compressing 13,000 years of history on all continents into a 400-page book works out to an average of about one page per continent per 150 years, making brevity and simplification inevitable." From here he looks at how the work could be extended as well as at arguments he either dismissed or left out, as though useful were not as important as those on which the book focused. This provides both direction for those further interested in the topic as well as explaining why other theories were omitted and if they could be adapted to the theories presented in Guns, Germs, and Steel.

In order to understand a work, it is important to understand the perspective of the creator of that work. Jared Diamond mentions in the prologue that when he first heard Yali's question, he was working as a biologist. This is an important statement as many of the ideas presented in Guns, Germs, and Steel closely parallel the biological theory of evolution.

An important component of evolution is the role played by the environment. Mutations are random. Organisms with mutations that are beneficial are more likely to survive and breed, passing on their enhancements. Organisms with hindering mutations are less likely to breed. Therefore the role of the environment is to select mutations, it does not promote them. The implications of this are important when considering the development of societies. In certain areas where grain was plentiful agriculture was able to develop. Did early humans decide to begin cultivation in response to grains being available or did humans try agriculture in many locations and were only successful where

resources where plentiful? There is an important difference between these scenarios. The first implies some early humans were able to recognize which plants would be suitable for domestication, even while in their wild forms, an unlikely event, while the second suggests that early agricultural successes were simply fortunate events accompanied by numerous failures. It is an important distinction. Though it is possible to look back and examine the steps in which societies developed, it would have been impossible for these same societies to look forward and recognize these same steps into their futures. It is not that areas of plenty produced gifted innovators, but that gifted innovators were everywhere, but only able to work best in areas of plenty.

Another important part of evolution is the spread of traits. If a mutation, even a beneficial one, does not spread, it will die out. In some forms of bacteria this is accomplished by passing a copy of the genetic material containing the mutant from one cell to another. In order for this to occur, multiple cells must be present in relatively close proximity. An example would be the growth of bacteria on plates containing antibiotics. Not all antibiotics kill bacteria; some merely prevent the cells from reproducing. Some bacteria will contain segments of mutant DNA that will allow them to grow on the plate containing the antibiotic. Most won't contain this DNA and will remain stagnant. However, if contact occurs between individuals and one passes a copy of the mutant DNA to the other, then that second individual will now be able to grow. A parallel can be drawn to societies with traits like agriculture and metallurgy. Even if an advantageous trait is initially rare, those who possess it, whether they be cells or societies will be able to grow and spread out, bringing themselves into contact with other individuals to whom the advantageous trait can be passed. It is also important to have large

numbers of individuals. As mutations are random, the greater the number of individuals that are present, the greater the number and diversity of mutation will be. This greater diversity will mean that it is more likely that advantageous traits will be present. In order to maximize the spread of these traits it is important to have large numbers of distinct individuals, whether cells or societies in close proximity exchanging information, whether biological or technological.

However, simply spreading the information isn't enough. The mutations may be present, but the environment must favor the mutated individuals versus their unmutated relatives. It should be noted, however, that the baseline relatives were already those best adapted to survive in their original environment. As a result, in order to select for different adaptations, the environment will likely have to change. Environments can change in a variety of ways. These changes can include changes in both the variety and quantity of resources available. They can include changes in climate and geography. They can also include changes in other species or groups. For example if a colony of cells was surviving off of glucose, and had been for generations, it is likely that those cells can digest glucose very effectively. However, if that glucose were to become scarce but fructose were to become plentiful it is possible that many of those original cells could not effectively digest this new food source while a few mutants could. This minority would soon out compete those cells unable to adapt and a new group of cells will become dominant. Similar events can occur with societies, with resources like fuels for example. It is even possible for organisms themselves to induce changes into the environment to which they will then happen to adapt. This can often happen when multiple individuals are competing over a limited resource base. As one individual gains dominance over the

resource, the other individuals are forced to adapt new ways of acquiring the resource. If this puts them in a dominant position, the original individual may now have to adapt as well. The cold war is an excellent example of competition leading to development as numerous technological breakthroughs were accomplished as each side sought to acquire advantages over the other.

These ideas of natural selection, and the importance of contact and competition are rooted in Jared Diamond's biological background. They feature heavily in Guns, Germs, and Steel, and it is important to understand these ideas in order to understand this work.

3. Supplemental Readings

Once the arguments proposed in Guns, Germs, and Steel were understood additional questions presented themselves. Diamond ignored the culture of the societies he studied in favor of the environment in which they existed. Can culture be discounted, or does it play a greater role than Diamond acknowledges? As works on various groups that would be considered among the "have-nots" of the world were examined, it initially appeared that they viewed western society as sick, unsustainable or in some other way flawed. However, further examination showed that this was not always the case as other groups sought to emulate the west but were simply unable to do so. It became clear that these societies that had survived in backwards states had done so not because of some insight into the flaws western civilization but because they did not have the means or desire to modernize. It also became apparent that the reasons for this often fell in line with the arguments proposed in Guns, Germs, and Steel.

4. In the Empire of Genghis Khan

The book In the Empire of Genghis Khan follows the trail of its author, Stanley Stewart, as he travels in the ancient footsteps of Friar William of Rubruck as he treks across Asia to see first hand what has become of the people who at one time came close to dominating the entirety of the Eurasian continent. The journey to Mongolia turns out to be as important as his travels within the country in terms of what it reveals about this nomadic society. The breakup of the Soviet Union has left its mark on these lands and much can be learned by contrasting how different nations have dealt with this disruption.

It is the goal of Stanley Stewart to experience first hand the life lived by the people in present day Mongolia. The modern day Mongols are portrayed as the true heirs to the empire of Genghis Khan, and other societies making claims to that title are depicted as having lost a fundamental part of their heritage in their adoption of city dwelling life styles. He traverses much of the country on horseback, traveling from one ger, a tent like structure used by the nomadic people of the area, to another. He eats the local food, drinks the local beverages and learns much about local traditions and culture. This information, coupled with his knowledge of the history of the area, allows Stanley Stewart to clearly illustrate life in Mongolia and how it has changed from the time of its most famous leader.

Mongolia provides a unique case for this study. During the Soviet era Mongolia existed as a puppet state of the USSR. Modernization was forced upon the nation and sustained through Soviet subsidies. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of those subsidies much of Mongolia has reverted to the pastoral lifestyle practiced during the time of its famous leader. Though the modern Mongolian may lead

a life very similar to that of his ancestors, it does not mean that the modern world has passed him by. Stewart provides numerous examples of modern technology being combined with the traditional lifestyle including such anachronistic devices as satellite televisions in gers. Mongolians are very aware of western culture but have chosen to lead a largely traditional lifestyle only incorporating those modern elements that they desire.

At first, this case appears to run counter to the Diamond thesis. Here is a society that, through contact and competition has acquired the elements of modern powers, the guns, the germs, and the steel, and yet has chosen in many cases to discard them in favor of traditional ways. Not only that, but this society is enduring while others in similar situations, who have chosen to keep those modern elements, are collapsing. Stewart provides a prime example early in his journey with the plight of the Kazakhs. Further examination reveals, however, that an explanation exists firmly within the bounds of Diamond's theories.

The key to understanding this bizarre situation relies in understanding Diamond's assertion that societies develop in response to their environment. This means that societies in different environments will develop differently. Ancient Mongolians developed a nomadic lifestyle because it best fit their environment. When a sedentary, western lifestyle was imposed in that environment, it was only able to maintain stability through outside support. Once that support vanished, the imposed society was no longer viable and the people returned to the proven ways of the past. Mongol society has resisted westernization not because of its people are ignorant or opposed to western ways, as they have adopted them in the past, but because it exists in an environment not suited

to westernization. This triumph of the environment over the direction of social evolution is a direct affirmation of Diamond's thesis.

5. Wizard of the Upper Amazon

In Wizard of the Upper Amazon F. Bruce Lamb retells the life of Manuel Cordova-Rios as it was told to him by the man who lived it. Cordova was a young rubber tapper from Peru. During one expedition into the rain forest he was kidnapped by members of Amahuaca tribe. He grew to learn from his captors and was inducted into the tribe. He was groomed to become the tribe's next chief, a position of both political and mystical power. He learns much about life in the rain forest, from methods of farming and hunting to the secrets of certain medicinal plants. He gains the skills necessary to lead the tribe and combines those with the skills of his former existence in order to help the tribe prosper. Eventually he leaves the tribe and returns to the western existence he had left behind. He brings with him knowledge and experiences that seem alien to western observers, such as the mystical rites involving ayahuasca extract. It is this information that appears in Wizard of the Upper Amazon.

This account provides a picture of a society first coming into contact with the western world. As an isolated group, this society had previously lacked much of the contact and competition that in Diamond's theory is so important to societal development. What is interesting is the result this contact has on the society. As Cordova begins to teach the Amahuaca about such things as rubber tapping and the use of the firearms and other goods the tapped rubber can be traded for, the people quickly learn to incorporate these skills and items into their lifestyle. This leads to an increase in the power of the tribe bringing it into conflicts with some of its scattered neighbors. It will be these conflicts that will drive Cordova back to the west.

Even though this society had little to no information on the use of firearms or the production of rubber, once this information was provided to them, they readily adapted to it. This is a prime example of a society recognizing the advantages of an alien development and incorporating it into its worldview. This ability to assimilate foreign ideas is critical to Diamond's argument as it explains how once an idea develops, it can spread quickly through the distinct groups that populate an area. Even though the Amahuaca have a distinctly non-western outlook, this does not stop them from recognizing and incorporating an advantageous aspect of western society.

Wizard of the Upper Amazon also provides a look at a society much less advanced than those found in most other parts of the world. This early stage of development provides insight into the past of other more advanced societies. The Amahuaca are well in tune with their environment. They are familiar with enough local flora and fauna to provide for all of their needs. They are even familiar with the medicinal properties of local plants, such as the ayahuasca, even though they have no understanding of western biochemistry or pharmacology. They are even familiar with plants that do not provide any apparent resource, as can be seen in the ability of the Amahuaca to quickly exploit the local rubber tree populations once a use for them is provided. This knowledge of the environment is important, as it shows that a society will be able to recognize natural resources when available. Obviously the Amahuaca weren't immediately aware of all available resources, as can be seen with the rubber trees, but they were aware of enough of them to be able to survive. Diamond maintains that societies are shaped by their environment. This requires a high degree of contact between the society in question and their environment. This contact is clearly evident in Wizard of the Upper Amazon.

6. My Samoan Chief

My Samoan Chief follows its author, Fay G. Calkins, from college life in the United States to village life in Samoa. Calkins meets and eventually marries a Samoan studying in the United States under the G.I. Bill. She returns with him to Samoa where she gains a first hand perspective on Samoan society as ^{she} tries to incorporate her western ways into a Samoan lifestyle. Conflict ensues as her western notions of personal property and economics crash against the Samoan devotion to the good of the family.

My Samoan Chief explores a society with knowledge of western practices and in many cases a strong desire to westernize that still exists in a traditional state. Though ideas such as Co-Ops, exporting craft goods and even developing a plantation are all introduced and enthusiastically accepted by the villagers, implementation of these concepts is never quite successful. Calkins often finds that the Samoan culture proves to be incompatible to these ideas. The Samoans lack the concept of personal property that is central to western economics and it is therefore impossible to build upon other economic principles without this base. Arguably, this could be a product of the Samoan environment. Resources are plentiful so there is no need for hoarding. Indeed, due to the climate and considering the general lack of refrigeration it would be impossible to keep an excess of many food items. More important, however, is the state of modern Samoa. For whatever reason, Samoa has not incorporated many of the western concepts of Guns, Germs, and Steel. This has left them in a relatively precarious position. The population of Samoa is increasing, even though the resource base remains unchanged. It would seem that life in Samoa is advancing to an important impasse. As resources become

more scarce and with western technology readily available the future of traditional life in Samoa is in doubt.

My Samoan Chief provides an example of a society that has adapted to its environment in a distinctly non-western way despite frequent contact with western civilization. This illustrates the importance of environment in shaping the direction of a society despite external pressures. Also important is the questionable stability of the current Samoan environment. If increases in the population were to destabilize the current environmental balance it could easily lead to a shift in the Samoan society, possibly bringing it more into line with its western influences. This scenario is in keeping with the ideas presented in Guns, Germs, and Steel. The future of Samoa may well provide a contemporary test of these theories.

7. Bones of the Master

Bones of the Master follows the author, George Crane, as he accompanies a Ch'an monk by the name of Tsung Tsai through China and Mongolia on a quest to locate and honor the remains of his former mentor. This journey provides Crane with insight into Chinese and Mongolia spirituality, which were often repressed by the communist governments of those areas. In addition to spiritual matters, Crane takes note to the state of the areas he visits. This becomes especially revealing when combined with information on similar areas, like that seen in the pages of In the Empire of Genghis Khan.

China is already a rather westernized nation. Even though philosophical differences may exist, as can often be seen between Tsung Tsai and George Crane, the country does possess the guns, the germs, and the steel that can be found in the nations of North America and Europe. However, the geography of China is very diverse, and while areas of the coast, like Hong Kong, may resemble the coastal areas of other modern nations, the vast expanses of Inner Mongolia more closely resemble Mongolia itself. The key difference is found in how the peoples of these regions live. As China is a modern nation, its people generally attempt to lead western lifestyles no matter where in the nation they live. Descriptions of those attempting such an existence in Inner Mongolia provide a striking sense of poverty. This contrasts greatly with the view of those living a traditional Mongolian lifestyle as seen in In the Empire of Genghis Khan. It is perhaps from this contrast that Bones of the Master provides its greatest support for the ideas of Jared Diamond. Here are two different societies living in roughly the same environment. One society leads a traditional lifestyle encouraged by the local conditions and appears to

live well by doing so. The other society leads a life based upon societies that developed in very different conditions. Forcing this lifestyle into an alien environment has met with poor results. This failure of a modern society to succeed while other traditional societies in the environment prosper proves that it is not just the presence of guns, germs and steel themselves that are responsible for modern inequalities, but that it was the presence of diverse environments, only some of which were able to support the development of these advantages that would lead to the modern political climate.

8. Of Water and the Spirit

Of Water and the Spirit tells the story of how its author, Malidoma Patrice Some, grew up to be a child of two worlds. A member of the Dagara from the country of Burkina Faso, Malidoma is kidnapped at a young age and is raised by French Jesuits. Trained to become a priest, he escapes as a young adult to return to his village. There he undergoes the initiation rite he had missed during his absence in order to once again be accepted as a member of his people. The knowledge he gains of both cultures allows him to act as an emissary for his people, a role that had been prophesied for him prior to his birth.

Of Water and the Spirit shows a society on the brink of change. This is a society with a very non-western worldview, a society where spiritual insight is valued over material wealth. Western influences are present however and they have a profound and formative effect on the author. The violence with which he is forced into western culture causes him value greatly the traditional values he has to work so hard to reclaim. It is therefore understandable that he is distressed by the increasing pressure to westernize that his people feel, a pressure that will send him back into the world he had tried so hard to return from.

Of Water and the Spirit presents a society that developed in an environment that did not promote the development of guns, germs, and steel but that has come into contact with societies that do possess these elements. The author is forced to westernize against his will and eventually returns to a traditional lifestyle. Despite his attempt to abandon western civilization, however, he does return as the inevitability of westernization becomes apparent to his people. This raises a point about the role of culture in the spread

of ideas. Initially the author wishes to remain in his traditional society. It becomes obvious to his people, however, that the some of the advantages promised by westernization cannot be ignored. Things like writing are simply too useful and too necessary, in this case for communicating with those members of the tribe who have chosen to embrace a western lifestyle, for the tribe as a whole to abstain from them. This immense pressure to adapt would be felt by all societies when faced with such advancements. The Dagara have the luxury of time, at least for the moment, in that they can choose to maintain their traditional lifestyle. In places where competition between groups is greater such a choice may not exist, as the advancement may give a group who accepts it too great an advantage over other groups who do not. In this way Of Water and the Spirit illustrates the inevitable ~~of the~~ spread of certain ideas and technologies, even in the face of cultural reluctance.

9. Analysis of Supplemental Readings

Though all the books examined here have merit for use in the course, some will prove more valuable than others. In the Empire of Genghis Khan is likely the most useful of the supplemental works as it presents arguments directly useful to the understanding of Guns, Germs, and Steel while providing its own counter examples. The other works studied are still valuable for the insight provided into foreign cultures.

Diamond argues that the prehistoric environment sent some societies on the road to acquiring guns, germs and steel and that these advantages allowed the societies that possessed them to gain dominance over those that did not. These works allow a view into those few societies that have survived into the modern day without westernizing. This is important because as Diamond argues that it is the environment that shapes the development of the society, it stands to reason that there is something about the environments in which these exceptions exist that makes them so resistant to westernization. This does indeed appear to be the case. Two distinct environments appear. Regions are presented that appear to lack the resources to sustain a western lifestyle. These societies are depicted as having information about western practices but are unable to successfully incorporate these practices into daily life as to do so proves disadvantageous. Alternatively a society, as is apparent in My Samoan Chief may also find itself with plentiful resources, providing little incentive to westernize. If a lack of competition exists in the region, then there is no need to adopt the guns, germs and steel as the environment provides what is needed. This leads to an important conclusion. Though western society is dominant on the world stage, it is still a product of the

environment in which it developed and cannot always be successfully transplanted into environments that vary too drastically from that for in which it was nurtured.

These works can also answer one other question. Though it would seem that the environment has kept these societies from westernizing, the same cannot be said for the cultures themselves. It is almost universally the case that, when presented with some western advantages, some members of each society attempt to incorporate them into their lives. This adoption is not always successful, and the advancements are sometimes abandoned, but the point is that an attempt was made. This illustrates how, despite differences of culture, humans will recognize potential advantages and will attempt to adopt them for themselves. This shows how advancements will indeed spread from one group to another once sustained contact between societies occurs.

10. Course Development

In putting together a framework for a course on global inequality it quickly became apparent that Guns, Germs, and Steel was of sufficient merit to be used as a core text. However, as the ideas presented in the book are theories, it is important that students are given a background in which the merits of these theories can be examined. For this reason the supplemental texts were included.

Obviously, there are more supplemental texts than each student can be expected to read, therefore it became necessary to break the class up into groups in order to study the different works. The groups can then present the information to the class in a process reminiscent of that seen in Guns, Germs, and Steel. Where one homogenous group would find it difficult to develop an understanding of all these works, numerous smaller groups can devote their attentions individual texts and then pool their knowledge.

Originally it was intended to divide the class into groups based upon the area of interest and the stage of development of the society being studied. This proved difficult, however, as societies rarely developed in exactly the same way making quantifiable stages impossible to determine. Looking back at Guns, Germs, and Steel, however, provided an answer. The book attempts to answer the question of global inequality. In order to do this, a definition for what is unequal must be provided. Diamond chooses to look at material wealth and therefore takes a materialist viewpoint. It became apparent that other viewpoints might provide different insights into the same regions. These traditional viewpoints often took a spiritual form. It was therefore decided to attempt to find works to provide both material and spiritual views of different regions. Hopefully, by comparing and contrasting these views, insight into the societies being studied and

their development could be gained. A format for the course was then chosen to allow both an in depth study of Guns, Germs, and Steel as well as a study into the information provided in these supplemental works.

11. Course Description

This is a sample course description to appear in the WPI catalogue.

SS 22???. The Global Inequality Debate

This course will investigate the root causes of modern inequalities of wealth. The ideas presented in Jared Diamond's Pulitzer Prize winning book Guns, Germs, and Steel will be examined as students work in groups focusing on the development of societies on the various continents. Groups will be subdivided to focus on the material or cultural aspects of their assigned region. Students will be expected to educate the class on their area of expertise and each group will be responsible for a final paper. Emphasis will be placed on events from prehistory up until the industrial revolution.

The course will be organized into two parts. The first will be spent on Guns, Germs and Steel with in-class discussions used to examine ideas presented in the text. The second part will see the previously mentioned groups using supplemental texts to investigate if and how these ideas can be applied to their assigned region. This course will expand on ideas present in SS 1202 *Introduction to Sociology and Cultural Diversity* ~~Course Name~~, though it should be noted that this is not a prerequisite.

11. Class Setup

What follows is a sample paper to be giving to students at the beginning of the course to explain how the class will be setup.

It is the goal of this project to create a course in which the content of Jared Diamond's Guns, Germs, and Steel will be discussed. The course will be divided into two parts. The first will deal directly with this core text, and the second will deal with supplemental works.

The first three weeks of the course will focus on Guns, Germs, and Steel. The book will be divided into sections. The first week will cover "Prologue: Yali's Question" and "Part One: From Eden to Cajamarca." Just as these sections form a good beginning for the book, they will help to introduce students to the course. The prologue explains Diamond's inspiration and his background, providing context that will become important later. Part One examines a specific moment in time and analyzes it briefly in parallel to the more in depth methods that are used later in the book.

The second week will be devoted to "Part Two: The Rise and Spread of Food Production." Diamond sees the acquisition of food production as the first step down the road to civilization. This section therefore describes how food production came to various parts of the world and looks into the significance of these events. This is a key section of the book because Diamond argues that the environment is responsible for modern inequalities of wealth and it is at this stage of development that the influence of the environment is most directly evident.

The third week of the course will be spent focused on "Part Three: From Food to Guns, Germs, and Steel." In this section some of the more familiar aspects of society;

writing, technology, political organizations and even diseases are examined. Diamond show how all of these facets of modern living could have developed as the products of agricultural societies. This section bridges the gap between the earliest human settlements and modern nation states.

At this point in the course, the first exam will be taken. It will be on the information covered up to this point, the first three parts of Guns, Germs, and Steel.

Now that the ideas put forth in Guns, Germs, and Steel are understood, the course will shift to examine these ideas in the context of other works. It should be noted that Guns, Germs, and Steel is written from what could be considered a "western" viewpoint. Diamond has looked for the origins of global inequality. What has to be considered is what exactly isn't "equal." In the prologue, Diamond's friend Yali refers to it as "cargo." It is this inequality in material goods and industrial power that has led to the rise of western political power that are examined in Guns, Germs and Steel. Western civilization has these goods and power, many societies in what is considered the "Third World," do not. It must be pointed out, however, that western society also considers these things to be valuable, and has done so throughout its history. It is only natural that a society would become dominant in areas it feels are important, especially if other societies focus on other areas. It is possible that the reason western societies have more material goods, more industrial power and a greater political presence in the world is simply because western societies are the only ones who wanted these things. In order to determine if this is true, it is important to examine other societies in different areas of the world. The second half of the course will do this.

Different geographical areas will be examined. These regions will be examined from both a western, materialist viewpoint, and what could hopefully be considered a more indigenous viewpoint. This will be accomplished through the use of a variety of supplemental works. In the Empire of Genghis Khan provides an excellent western viewpoint of Asia that will be complimented well by that given in Bones of the Master. Similarly, the indigenous view of South America provided in Wizard of the Upper Amazon will contrast with that seen in Savages. The South Pacific areas of Australia and Polynesia will be examined through My Samoan Chief and Mutant Message Down Under, while Africa will be examined through Of Water and the Spirit and The Forest People. North America will be examined through Call of the Great Spirit and a book providing a material perspective on North America.

The class will be divided into groups to cover these various works. In addition to their individual works these small groups will occasionally meet in larger groups. Meetings between groups studying the same region through different viewpoints will provide the opportunity to compare and contrast these views, hopefully illuminating how the values of the area compare to those of traditional western society. Meetings between groups studying different areas through similar viewpoints will hopefully provide insight into themes that span the different regions. This will hopefully be helpful in further identifying why western societies see themselves as dominant and potential providing common themes for the those societies that do not agree with the direction the west is taking.

During the forth week of class, groups will be decided. While students read the supplemental works, class time will be devoted to "Part Four" of Guns, Germs, and Steel:

"Around the World in Five Chapters." This section examines Diamond's theories in the context of different geographical areas and will provide a model upon which the work of the small groups can be based and expanded.

The fifth week of the course will provide time for the previously mentioned group meetings. Presentations from the small groups will take place in the final weeks of the course. These presentations should provide information on the account studied by the group and examine how the ideas presented in Guns, Germs, and Steel apply to the region of interest. The groups should use the information they have gathered to come to a decision on the validity of Diamond's assertions. Discussion following presentations should allow the class to at least debate if not come to a consensus on the ultimate value of Guns, Germs, and Steel.

At the end of the course a final examine will be held on the material covered in the second half of the course. Additionally, each student will provide a paper on the region and viewpoint that student studied in the latter half of the course as well as the student's personal assessment of the theories put forth in Guns, Germs, and Steel.

13. Conclusions

In Guns, Germs, and Steel Jared Diamond seeks to explain global inequality. He does so using insights based upon his experience as a biologist. Though he may examine the world from a distinctly materialist viewpoint, this proves acceptable, as it is at inequalities in material wealth that he is looking. Jared Diamond asserts that the environment shaped the development of societies, giving rise to the key advantages of guns, germs, and steel, which proliferated through contact and competition. Examinations of supplemental works on areas lacking these advantages lend support to Diamond's theories. In the end, it does appear that the ideas present in Guns, Germs, and Steel are valid, and are of sufficient merit on which to base a course.

14. Bibliography

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