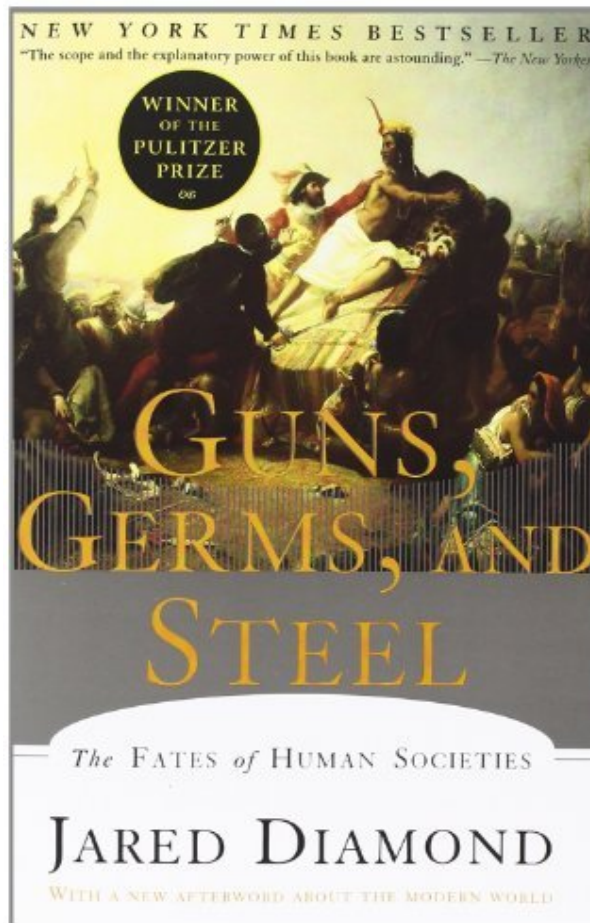


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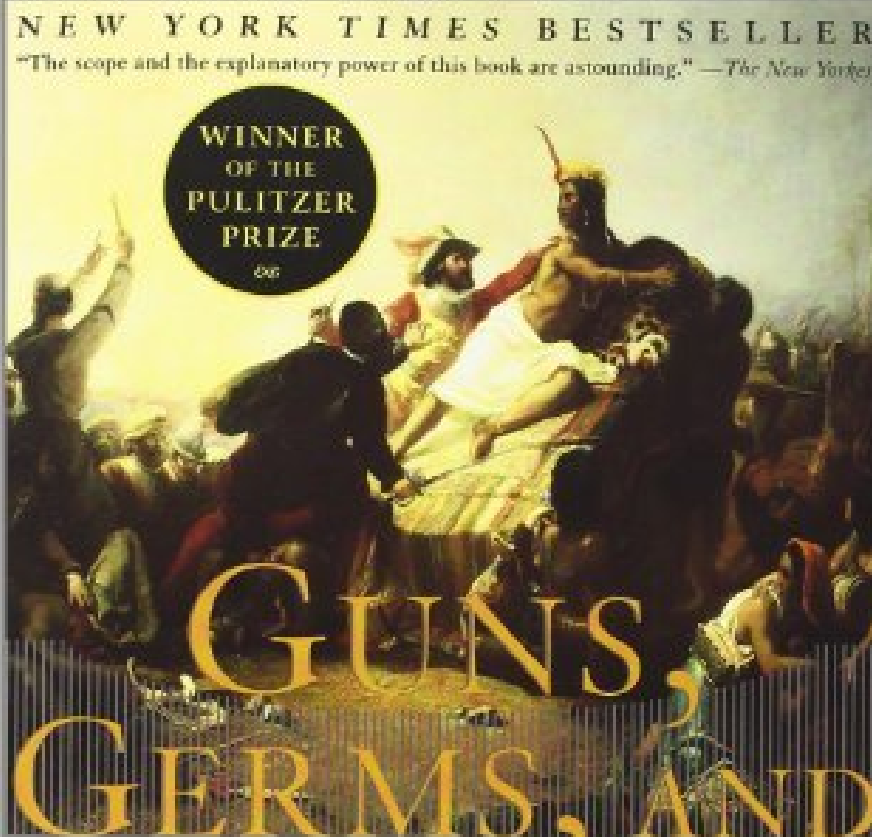
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Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies

By Zachary Ruesch

Recently, I finished this great, broad, historical, and significant endeavor. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation of Jared Diamond's wonderful ability to simplify a very complex topic and related ideas. This alone, makes this read a great one. Too, there a few gems of humor and wit within the pages which caught my eye and mind. Don't get me wrong though. The pages are filled with complex data, examples, and comparisons. Upon more than one occasion, my understanding necessitated the rereading of paragraphs and pages.

Before I proceed into deeper thoughts, I must admit the duration of this read as being conducted well over an extended timeframe. I began reading it years ago, stopped, and then started again. Over the course of the last several months, I recommitted and achieved.

In thoughtful detail, Diamond seeks to explain why certain groups of people have been successful over the course of human events and history, while others, in comparison, are not. It should be noted, the idea of "success" is very subjective. So, success in this case, is related to Western ideas of technological development, exploration, and conquest - generally described as one group of people gaining control or influence over another. An effective description of this is the Spanish conquest and colonization of the "New World," especially the Aztecs and Incas. This example, though quite large in scope, and as pointed out by Diamond, has occurred throughout human history in large and small ways involving a multitude of others groups of people, both known and unknown.

In short, I believe Diamond does well in addressing the impact and luck of geography and resources, as well as, the influences of more innate human characteristics and variety. The debate of nature versus nurture is here too contained. In the past, and not only in recent history, humans have expressed understandings of success in terms of innate differences which must exist between people - obviously though, those in power and dominate are able to define and express such ideas. However, Diamond looks beyond this and recognizes the complexity, and ultimately more profound influence of reality, nurture. In this sense though, it is not simply human nurturing and choice, it is the opportunities presented to humans, in difference places, at different times, to take advantage of their earthly surroundings and the ability to nurture developments, or not.

This read is filled with a plethora of well detailed examples which come to show how access, or not, to certain elements leads to the success and superiority which has been described and known by those in power, throughout history. So, today, when certain people look down upon others and their lack of some qualities or characteristics, Diamond's historical analysis provides engaging insight beyond and through the bias.

Who we are presently is the result of all the past experiences of the human ancestors who preceded us, and furthermore, our development and success, in comparison to other humans, is simply more so the result of the access we have had to a confluence of resources and circumstances which allowed us to dominate other groups of humans with less access to the same. As groups of humans defined through sociological processes, we are no more intelligent, healthy, or physiologically better than the whole of humanity understood to exist through anthropology, biology, and any other area of study.

"We all know that history has proceeded very differently for peoples from different parts of the globe...Those historical inequalities have cast long shadows on the modern world, because the literate societies with metal tools have conquered or exterminated the other societies. While those differences constitute the most basic fact of world history, the reasons for them remain uncertain and controversial." In this work, Diamond splendidly explains how, "History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples' environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves."

Please give the ideas of these pages the opportunity to share with you a detailed perspective of human experience which reaches far into the depths of history, beyond even the earliest written language. Diamond's words will likely cause you to become lost in thoughts of the past. However, at the same time, he'll take you to definitive places of demonstrable purpose leading to a better future understood through the context(s) of human experience.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By Eric and Cassie F.

As described. Book was purchased as required summer reading for an AP Human Geo class

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Great stories, controversial for some

By David Deaven

This book contains a number of fascinating historical stories and studies on the evolution of civilized society. The opening discussion of the battle at Cajamarca between the Spaniards and Incas, including translated first-hand accounts, is both riveting and thought-provoking.

The book suffers from two main defects. First, the author spent most of his career working in New Guinea and too frequently uses this direct and narrow experience to add credibility to a more general assertions about other societies. These provincial interruptions sometimes interrupt the flow of an otherwise fine exposition.

Second, the author seems intent to refute the idea that the current state of human society - with widely varying adoption of technology and social standards in different geographical areas - is the consequence of mathematically closed-form natural laws which can be employed to predict not only history from first principles, but future societal trends. This may be a commonly held belief in some backwards social science departments, but has already been widely discredited. The authors tilting at this windmill is sometimes tedious.

It's worth mentioning the contrast between this book and Darwin's Origin of Species. The latter still seems

intellectually fresh, despite its elaborate detail and minor errors in thinking. Darwin's thoughts are shaped by his travels but not limited by them.

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