

Guns, germs, and steel: the fates of human societies | review



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Guns, Germs, and Steel Analytic Book Review

Written by Jared Diamond

In the book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* written by Jared Diamond, Diamond analyzes as to why the history of the Earth had unfolded as it did. Diamond was inspired to write this book when he visited New Guinea in 1964 to study and research the evolution of birds. During this visit, Diamond was questioned “ Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo ... but we black people had little cargo of our own?” (p. 14) by a local politician named Yali. In other words, Yali was curious as to why human progression developed differently on each continent. To explain this, Jared Diamond explained that human progression developed differently on each continent due to environmental factors in oppose to physical and mental attributes of a specific race over another, however, most historians claim a large role of why history had unfolded on each continent the way it did was because of a race having the greater advantage of physical and mental attributes over another race. For the next thirty years, Diamond studied the history of the Earth and wrote *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* to fully explain Yali’s questions. In the book, Diamond had described that history had unfolded on each continent due to the advancement of steel, the advancement of the gun., and lastly Diamond stated that history had unfolded on each continent due a lack of immunity to germs.

Supporting his thesis that human progression developed differently on each continent due to environmental factors and advancements in a civilization in

oppose to a race having the greater advantage of physical and mental attributes over another, Diamond explains that steel played a large roll in the Earth's history which was invented with relating to Europe's environmental factors. In Europe, the Europeans were one of the first of many to domesticate animals and harvest crops, establishing a farming society. To support Diamond's thesis, the Europeans were one of the first to establish a farming society due to the environmental components of Europe being larger on the East to West axis, in oppose to North and South like the Americas and Africa. The larger East to West axis territory allowed the Europeans to perform alike activities such as farming and domesticate alike plants and animals as well. However, in Africa farming societies could not be easily established because of the dramatic climate, people, and languages distinctions that existed in the continent, as well most local plants or animals have the inability to be domesticated. Diamond continues to explain agriculture is the key to creating a strong society because it would result in an abundance of food to feed a growing population. This population growth would cause society to become more civilized and organized, this would include establishing a government. As the Europeans continued to become more civilized, they invented new ways of completing daily activities and new technologies that fueled the Europeans to become even more powerful than ever before. Eventually, the Europeans discovered the advancement of steel. Steel played a large part in tools and weapons. Steel was invented around the time of the Roman Empire, who used steel for their armor and weapons. Steel was an advancement that proved that the Europeans were beginning to conquer other societies territory and expand their own territory.

The invention of steel inspired diffusion of European technology

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advancements through interaction amongst neighboring societies to invent stronger and more powerful weapons.

While the Europeans continued to improve their advancements, eventually the gun was invented and it was first used by the Ottomans. It has been recorded that the first firearm was used in 1364, but guns were not used all over Europe until around 1380. Black powder was initially invented in China to be used for fireworks, however, black powder was then later used as gunpowder for weapons. In the 13th century, however, the Silk Road allowed the diffusion of the newly introduced gunpowder weapons from Asia to Europe, which would further then eventually be improved to modern day guns. The invention of guns allowed the Europeans to become more powerful than any other civilizations on the Earth. Additionally, the advanced technology of guns, germs, and steel allowed the Europeans to easily defeat the natives who did not have nearly as an advanced civilization. The invention of the gun also allowed European nations to become stronger and powerful. This is one of many Diamond's examples to prove that human progression developed differently on each continent due to environmental factors and advancements in a civilization in oppose to a race having the greater advantage of physical and mental attributes over another. Guns also boosted the European economy and whereas the top weapon in any situation, including when discovering new territory and involvement of war. The invention of the gun spread all over the world and is still used for multiple uses in current society. The Europeans continued to lead the world with their technology advancements and become the superior race all because of the environmental advantages opposed to other continents.

With the advancement of civilization in Europe along with the advancement of steel and the gun, the amount of germs people were exposed to continued to increase. Diamond described that in the effect of the domestication of animals, many diseases were transported from the animals to humans. Some of these diseases included smallpox, measles, the flu that is believed to have originated from pigs and ducks, tuberculosis from cattle, and AIDS from monkeys. In effect of all these germs being exposed to the Europeans, they had developed immunization to many epidemics. However, those who could not withstand the diseases had died off and those who survived had offsprings with their immunities. This is in relation to Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, in oppose to one a race having the greater advantage of physical and mental attributes over another that most historians claim how history was created. Europeans were also the first to be exposed to new germs and diseases, therefore, they could develop immunity before any other civilizations.

Although the Europeans were not dramatically affected by germs and epidemics, non-Europeans were highly affected due to having a small amount of exposure and immunity to these diseases, resulting in large epidemics all over the world. Because the animals that may have had the ability to be domesticated in Australia, the Americas, and Africa were hunted to extinction by hunter-gatherer societies, these civilizations could not develop any immunity to animal-borne diseases. Therefore, civilizations in the Americas, Australia, and Africa were impacted the worst to theses animal-borne diseases. The exposure of germs to a civilization who had not developed immunity to it dramatically affected the society and has resulted

in the fall of a civilization to its conqueror. An example of this was the fall of the Inca Empire and the fall of its city of Cajamarca to Francisco Pizarro. The Incas outnumbered Francisco Pizarro and his men, however, the Incas suffered from animal-borne diseases, lack of steel weapons, Pizarro's advancement of horse transport, and procedure to defeat a civilization.

To furthermore answer Yali's question Diamond explains germ in New Guinea was a major factor as to why it was very popular to be conquered in oppose to its neighbor Australia because of its diseases and inability of domestication of plants and animals in the area.

In the book *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* written by Jared Diamond, Diamond describes why the way the history of the Earth played out the way it did on each continent in an effort to best explain Yali's question the best possible way he could. In his book, Diamond describes history played out the way it did due to human progression developing differently on each continent because of environmental factors in oppose to a race having the advantage of physical and mental attributes over another. However, most historians claim a large role of why history had unfolded environmental on each continent the way it did was because of a race having the greater advantage of physical and mental attributes over another race. Diamond goes on to explain that Europeans may have had physical and mental advantages over the other, but because of the environmental factors of Europe, this is the main reason as to why Europeans were so powerful throughout history.

An example of a race being inferior to another due to technology advancements that Diamond had written about was the defeat of the Bantu tribe in Africa. Diamond had stated, " Rhino-mounted Bantu shock troops could have overthrown the Roman Empire, It never happened"(p. 399) The Bantu tribe had been able to domesticate the Rhinos that were native to Africa. This is one of the few animals that could be domesticated due to the conditions. However, rhinos not yet been domesticated beforehand or after this point in time because of their lack of reaction to commands and aggression. The rhinos possess certain factors that had allowed them to be domesticated. This also is an example of the Anna Karenina principle adapted by Jared Diamond in his book *Guns, Germ, and Steel* that explains that falling to complete an activity can be the result of a number of factors, but to become successful in an activity those necessary factors must be present. Diamond states the Bantu tribe could have defeated the Roman Empire due being successful of domesticating rhinos, however, the Europeans had the advantage of immunity of the germs they spread, as well as more advanced weapons of steel. Although, most historians claim the Africans were defeated by the Europeans because of the dramatic difference in body structure and mental capacity. Diamond then once again explains that the of Africa is the reason the Africans had been defeated. With the advantage of immunity to European germs and steel weapons, the Europeans were unstoppable and are one of the factors as to their success of colonizing Africa.

The book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* has helped tremendously understand the Earth's history significantly. This book by Jared Diamond has allowed me to

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educate myself a little more by digging into the Earth's history and learn as to why the history of the Earth occurred the way it did. I can apply his views on history into the modern world, which explain why the United States is the leading country in the world. Countries like Japan, China, Russia, Germany, and the United Kingdom are in the top ten leading countries in the world, who each have traits that make them so industrialized. China may be the top producer for the United States and are much more intelligent than us Americans, the United States economy is so large and its military is so powerful which makes this country undefeatable. This proves Diamond's point that intelligence and structure of the body do not affect the history of the Earth, but instead its technology advancements such as guns, germs, and steel.

In conclusion, the book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* by Jared Diamond have allowed me to understand the larger implication as to why history the way it did. Diamond's book taught me that the biggest reason as to why history occurred the way it did was all because of environmental factors. I learned that the Europeans just so happened to have the richest soil and alike weather conditions in the continent that allowed the Europeans to use similar techniques and have such strong interactions with each other. Additionally, I learned the core of any civilization are the farmer who produce the crops who are the reason a society becomes civilized. Because the Europeans gave up the traditional hunter and gathering society thousands of years ago by force, it allowed the development of farming and began building the first civilizations known to man. These civilizations became more organized politically, a developed language, and began to advance in its

technology. In addition, this civilization had domesticated animals who had developed immunity to animal-borne diseases that caused epidemics in other countries. Therefore, this allowed the Europeans to become the superior race and has helped me learn the concept as to why Europeans had become the superior race. I had not previously known that environmental factors played such a large roll in history.

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