

# Causes of different country rates of development



**ASSIGN  
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## Guns, Germs, and Steel

### 1. Summary

In *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Jared Diamond is trying to answer his friend, Yali's, question. Yali asked Diamond in New Guinea, "Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo, but we black people had little cargo of our own?" (Diamond, 1998, p. 14). Yali was referring to all of the different advantages certain societies had that resulted in prosperous populations, while others failed. Diamond centers *Guns, Germs, and Steel* around answering Yali's question. Throughout the semester, we were set out to define the "big idea" of each chapter individually. The first half of this book's "big idea" is to show how food production, domesticating plants and animals, and most importantly, how geography itself are the main factors that determined which societies became more powerful than another. Diamond supports his thesis through evidence that he reveals in each chapter.

Diamond's search for an answer to Yali's question started off by looking at the biology of when and how the first humans evolved. Then, he concentrated on more specific societies to further support his research. During his research, Diamond still could not explain why Eurasia became the most advanced continent even though Africa had a head start. What Diamond came to find out, however, is that a society is not successful because of the color of one's skin or how intelligent one may or may not be, but it is the geography that allows a society to either flourish or diminish.

To further defend his geographic explanation, Diamond suggests that the events that took place on the Chatham Islands was, in fact, due to a geographic stand point of the Maori and Moriori people. The technologically advanced Maori society successfully conquered the considerably weaker Moriori society. Further justifying this explanation, he points out that race could not have been a factor between these two groups because the two cultures had come from the same origin and were just separated within an unmindful time frame. Diamond also looked at factors, other than genetics, that determined the differences between the two societies. He then concluded that the Moriori were unable to provide an abundance of food due to the cold climate. The lack of food put the Moriori at a disadvantage because their society was significantly weaker than the Maori's. Aside from the production of food, the Maori people were advanced in other areas that were not possible for the Moriori because of their geographic location. Because the Moriori were isolated on an island, they did not have the means for communication with other people, and technological ideas were unable to spread to their society. Thus, only the Maori people were rich in food production, technology, and communication because of their geographic location.

Geography also has had a major effect in which parts of the world developed food production over others. Areas such as deserts or high mountains are simply not suited for agriculture, while others may support some crops, but not others. Another factor is that there are only a limited number of plants suitable for domestication. According to Diamond, being able to successfully produce food was the start for societies to also develop of guns, germs, and

steel. There are a few components that influenced the adoption of food production: the decline in wild foods, an increase in plants, the development of technology, and change in population density. With less wild food available, people did not have much of a choice but to grow their own. Technology also allowed food to be produced at a quicker pace. Acquiring an abundance of food meant that societies could reach a higher population density that would, in turn, lead to many more advantages. People were able to settle in one place because of farming, which allowed more complex and advanced food production. These more densely populated societies were able to create technology, invent writing, and became immune to epidemic diseases. All three of these remarkable factors is what Diamond found to be the reasons why one society was able to conquer another. Still, there were additional factors that Diamond set out to examine.

Animals also played a key role in certain parts of the world developing quicker than others: the distribution of animals around the world was also a result of geography. Eurasia was home to the most domesticated mammals, which put the people there at an advantage. These domesticated animals not only helped as an additional food source, but also provided many other services for societies. Farming was completed much easier and at a quicker pace because animals were able to pull plows and also serve as fertilizer. Animal fur was used to keep warm, and the bones were converted into various handy tools.

Diamond also analyzed the way plants, food, and ideas were able to spread from continent to continent. Food production spreads most easily if one is moving east to west, because plants and animals didn't have to adapt to a

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drastic change like you would going north and south, as the climate will be either the same or similar going east or west as opposed to north and south. For example, because Eurasia is spread further east and west, it was almost effortless to haul crops and animals from one location to another, which made Eurasia more successful and subsequently advanced than other parts of the world.

In conclusion, there are many reasons why certain societies prospered compared to others; and it all boils down to the geography of the land. Diamond proves that beneficial aspects of geography allows societies to effortlessly grow food than others. On the other hand, there are also geographical explanations as to why food production failed in some parts of the world. Diamond confidently insists that it does not matter who is smarter than who, but rather, that the most prosperous society was blessed by the more dominant environment. In essence, those who lived in more fertile areas had a much greater chance of success.

## 2. Reflection

I strongly believe that Diamond does an amazing job at dissecting how and why certain continents prevailed over others. He manages to go into detail, but not too much detail that would confuse his readers. I like the fact that he keeps his findings slightly broad because it makes the story line easier to follow. The way he presents how geography plays such a major role in history is extremely powerful and intriguing.

There are many critics, however, who do not agree with Diamond's message that geography is the ultimate factor for advanced continents, rather than

racial or intelligence reasons. For example, York and Mancus are more concerned with the social aspects that contributed to the rise of certain continents over others. As quoted from the *Human Ecology Review* :

His position would be strengthened if he more fully recognized that different types of societies have different internal dynamics, and that each era has its own particular processes and contradictions (York & Mancus, 2007, p. 160).

I think that this is too critical of an opinion for Diamond's work. I do not think that Diamond intended his book to be overly specific, but rather a more broad, overall explanation of how and why the world evolved the way it did.

Another critic focuses on the chapter in Diamond's book where latitude is discussed. James Blaut, a geography professor, suggests that Diamond supplies "hardly an explanation" of the development and westward spread of technology and food. According to *The Geographical Review* :

His description fails to mention that diffusion eastward and southward from the Near East via the Indian Ocean, and southward from China through the South China Sea, was as important and as easy, as was diffusion west-ward (Blaut, 1999, p. 400).

I agree with this critic that Diamond should have explored all options for the spread of technology and food before he had stated that east-west movement was the easiest way to do it successfully. However, I do not recall Diamond saying that east-west diffusion was the one and only way.

Although there are critics that do not fully agree with everything that Diamond has found in his research in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* , I think that <https://assignbuster.com/causes-of-different-country-rates-of-development/>

this book is exceptionally educational. The book has an outstanding story line that is easy to follow and is packed with intriguing information that truly gets you thinking. I can't wait to finish the rest of the book to see what else Diamond has to say about the establishment of our world.

### 3. Sources

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