

Guns germs and steel history essay

[History](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Supervisor: Chris Leonards Student: Shilpi Sen number: i6054140 Email: s.
sen@student.maastrichtuniversity.nl Pigeonhole: 295 Date: 3 May 2013 Word
count: 1917

Diamond, J. (1998). Guns, Germs and Steel

Guns, Germs and Steel written by Jared Diamond are inspired by global diverse cultures. In chapter one, Diamond, a biologist studying the evolution of birds, narrates a conversation with Yali that he had in New Guinea in 1972. Yali was a local politician who was training his people for self – government, resulting in a probing question as to why the white people had so much ‘cargo’ that they brought to New Guinea, whereas, the local black people had little cargo of their own (p. 14). Yali’s question plays a central role in this book that made Diamond to investigate the history of everybody for the last 13, 000 years, that lead him further into investigating the history of human development through an array on relocation, sociological and economic and cultural change to environmental surroundings and technological transmission. The idea behind this is to understand the history since the Pleistocene age, resulting in understanding the future of the history of humans. Diamond claims that mostly the important influences on modern history had already taken place before the birth of Christ. It is worth to mention here that the homo sapiens that evolved in Africa later they migrated to Asia, then to Europe and Australia and finally then to the Americas, resulting in a progression from hunting to settled agriculture, and from wanderers to settled civilisations that could be a because of good environmental conditions of a particular place. Also, where plants and animals could be domesticated, like for example the Fertile Crescent of the

Middle East. The expansion of excess food-producing societies with large population gave an opportunity to the men to resist themselves to various diseases carried by their domesticated flocks and helped them to come up with technological advancement especially in the field of metallurgy, literacy and socio-economic establishment focussing within the Eurasian supercontinent and in the western Pacific and northern Africa because of the large migration from different parts of the world, communication and trade. According to Diamond, diffusion is the key concept as the conditions in some continents were more approving than others due to internal or external facilities. This resulted after 1500, due to trans-oceanic expeditions and commercial capitalism the Old World raiders had an influential benefit over their New World people that lead to the development of guns, germs and steel ensuring that the people from Europe who are settled in the North and South Americas, some parts of Oceanica and South of Africa, reducing local populations who were unable to fight with them. Diamond's main point is to discard any cultural justification of the apparent differences in various regions in the world. Further, he argues that there is no major difference in intelligence between various races; like for example people living in New Guinea under harsh and dangerous surroundings are more intelligent because they require more survival skills than people leading a sheltered and sedentary life in the United States. Sometimes Diamonds has given some sketchy examples like his experience with primitive peoples and their calibre to adapt to harsh environments or respond fruitfully to new expertise. This is a good starting point for a multi-cultural world. Diamonds style is overstated by his desire to identify ultimate explanations of the things rather than simple proximate ones. Therefore, behind the proximate justification of <https://assignbuster.com/guns-germs-and-steel-history-essay/>

the supremacy of Old World civilization and expertise over the last couple of thousand years, lies an ultimate explanation of why did the bronze tools appear early in parts of Eurasia, why it was late and locally found in the New World, and why never before European settlement in Australasia. The widespread of technology and the military conquests and economic transformations that has shaped over the last thousand years, is disregarded as a query of historical accident. Diamond argues that technology is about innovations, and given the right opportunities all people are equally inventive. Even more condensed is the relation of socio-political associations on which many analysis of the modern world depend. Diamond further, covers the historical aspect of political thought and state development from Aristotle mostly devoting to hydraulic theories (pp. 282 - 284). Further, he states that all societies that are more versatile than an classless society are dismissed as ' kleptocracies' that run on literacy and arrange religion to construct power for the creamy layer of the society and in return because of this there is inefficient community services (p. 276). However, Diamond briefly mentions about capitalism (p. 250), listing it as one of ten possible but imperfect justifications of technological growth in Europe. Therefore, the answer to the question as to why so much cargo is manufactured in the United States than the rest of the world remains unsolved to a larger extent. This particular approach distances Diamond's analysis on cultural interactions in contemporary history, he further suggest to skip the books describing imperialism from the historical point of view and post - colonialism, world - systems theories, underdevelopment or sociological and economical change over the past five hundred years. Therefore, the discussion on historical justifications of the wealth and poverty of states in a <https://assignbuster.com/guns-germs-and-steel-history-essay/>

global scenario is condensed to a subset of the crucial question on the connection of bronze tools and the rest of the world. Further, in explanation to this, Diamond states that ‘ technology’ may have developed speedily in regions in ‘ Europe’, ‘ China’, ‘ India’, (p. 416). Further, Diamond uses ‘ cultural idiosyncrasies’ in describing the different progress in material culture and are the most important factor in making history unpredictable. For example the Chinese resolution in the early fifteenth century to prohibit merchant convoys as a result of court scheme, which supposedly damaged her medieval technological leadership in Eurasia, grouped as simply misfortunes of history on level with the failed attempt of the July Plot to kill Hitler in 1944. As shown by various reactions by other people to the onset of European expertise in the 19th century, therefore, marking the societal variation in the level of openness to innovation, however, this describes that, on a wider extent, some civilisations in the various parts of the world would have had identical chances to attain technological development if their environments had been equally encouraging (p. 411). In comparison to the compact groups of the sociological, economical and political record of the urbanized world, Diamond’s frequently describes his personal experiences in New Guinea bringing his opinion into sharper focus. They also suggest overwhelming assessments with events nearer home. The fascinating reaction of diverse tribes to get in touch with the modern world for the previous fifty years provides astonishing viewpoint on the various occasions in other remote and ingenuous communities. We can identify the Chimbu tribe, that came in contact with the outside world by growing coffee as a cash - crop, setting - up saw-mills and companies related to trucks to grow wealthy and their neighbours, the Daribi, who are illustrated as ‘ especially

<https://assignbuster.com/guns-germs-and-steel-history-essay/>

conservative and uninterested in new technology', failed to change even after the various pressures of the developing world. The Chimbus have taken over the Daribi now (p. 252). One of the best examples is the Fayu tribe of around 400 hunter gatherers living as single family units, meeting seldom to arrange marriages. Such meetings are scary since killing and vengeance killings are a common incidence and therefore, decreasing the tribe from almost 2, 000 to 400. Diamond, states that in a meeting one Fayu man spotted another man who had killed his father and so he raised his axe and went towards his direction, however, his friends stopped him. Both the men shouted at each other with rage till they were exhausted and were released. The other men also shouted periodically to insult each other and then pounded the ground with their axes (p. 266). The Old World expertise and diseases in the New World are described as the typical event of human diffusion and coalescence. Nonetheless, the impact of Eurasian diseases accompanied by enslavement and harsh dilapidation in existing circumstances on the native inhabitants of the New World is considered as a devastating historical incident but it was not entirely without precedent in another place. In the fourteenth century, the effect of plague particularly the Black Death on Asia, Europe and North Africa was similar in some aspects when compared to the nineteenth century cholera and smallpox in eastern and central Africa. More commonly, the use of Eurasia as a significant geographical phrase in historical terms is a characteristic of a transatlantic focus. Such a perspective over simplifies a large body of composite human understanding, since much of the history of invasion, establishments and utilization in the contemporary globe is in fact connected with what might be termed as Eurasian civil wars from the Neolithic assault of Europe, through <https://assignbuster.com/guns-germs-and-steel-history-essay/>

the actions of Gengis Khan and his descendants, to the collapse of Constantinople, the onset of armed European merchants in the East during the sixteenth century, and the European imperialism after 1750. The invasion of Asia by European empires, especially in India by the British empire and in Java by the Dutch, were neither placed on technological dominance in artillery, nor on the spreading of disease, however, produced a sense of uniqueness and an outlook of cultural and racial dominance at least as powerful as that was provoked by colonisation in the New World. Also, in Africa, European imperial troops, which were often of African or Indian origin, subjugated only a partial and short lived technical dominance in artillery that lasted from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century.

Diamond's most controversial argument is in the closing paragraph that the reasonable reliability and accuracy of existing discoveries in the past history make it possible to forecast the prospect of human history as a science.

However, there are various difficulties to achieve this. Any science of human history is quite possible to be based on a hunt for laws, procedures and justifications that are engraved in the schedule of the new technology. Such approaches have now been damaged by other theoretical approaches which reject the prospect of establishing general laws, socio - cultural and gendered nature of archaeological information and description, and seek to discover the historical aspects of the mind and the spirit. Diamond's use of modern ethnographic annotations of some people to provide explanations of the ancient past of all people can be challenged on methodological grounds, and his rejection of the information he uses in its historical and geographical milieu fades the force of his influence as chronological descriptions.

However, there are some problems also. The history of humans cannot

<https://assignbuster.com/guns-germs-and-steel-history-essay/>

appropriately be compared glaciers, dinosaurs or galaxy because these incidents do not deliberately create the facts on which we try to comprehend them, nor can we detect a human awareness in their activities. One of the most important aspects of human history is to study history with a human dimension, so that we can identify with the past and see it with a perspective of our present civilization. Guns, Germs and Steel is considered as an important book to understand the past and to unite the present in a way that can influence the future. Though, the book has some trivial flaws, still it remains as a striking book to read as it tells us about the relations between prehistoric and cultured societies during the end of the Christian period of second millennium. Further, it is believed that historians like Diamond, himself, cannot force the social scientists or other scientists to follow them and to influence their research or thoughts.