

The history of leadership

[Business](#), [Management](#)



The society we exist in today has only been around for two thousand years; which consist of prime ministers, presidents, parliaments, congresses, cabinets, governors, mayors and much more other people in leadership positions. But there was a time in history, about 98 percent of our existence as a species as well as the four million years before then, where our ancestors lived in small, largely nomadic hunting-and-gathering bands each containing about 30 to 50 people. Leadership positions were nonexistent during this time. It was an egalitarian society; instead, where everyone was equally important and knew each other. These groups practiced reciprocal exchange where the amount given and received was not considered. The headman would then redistribute all that was collected equally and taking less for himself.

Quickly, this image changed for the worst when the headman turned to eventually chiefs. It was from this social context where human nature evolved into the society we live in today; creating these leaders throughout time. With the creation of leaders, such as chiefs, came inequalities in rank, power, wealth, and eventually the creation of world hunger. Marvin Harris connects the beginnings of human nature and humanity to what it has become today. According to Marvin Harris' article, " Life Without Chiefs", reciprocity was not the only form of exchange practiced by these egalitarian bands but also redistribution played a crucial role in creating distinctions of rank during the evolution of chiefdoms and states. Redistribution occurred when people turn over food and valuables to a prestigious figure such as the headman, to be pooled, divided into separate portions, and given out again. These headman-redistributors worked harder than their followers as well as reserved smaller

and less desirable portions for themselves. The headman was compensated with admiration and given bigger feasts. This left the door open for other people in the village desiring to be headman by providing a bigger feast, the most lavish food, and other valuables to measure one's legitimacy as a headman. These headmans evolved into "big man". The larger the feast became meant that the big man demands were more irksome but people remained loyal as long as the big man was still the "great provider".

The ascent toward social status gained momentum whenever extra food was produced and stored for redistribution. The more concentrated and abundant the harvest meant there was greater potential for endowing the big man with power. When food was scarce, people would come to the big man for food in exchange for special requests. These requests would be making clothes, pots, canoes, or even a fine for his own use. Eventually, these redistributors no longer needed to work in the fields; allowing them to surpass the big man status. Management of the harvest surpluses, given to the big man for use in communal feasts and other communal projects, was sufficient to validate their status. People started to view the status as an office and the rules of hereditary succession set in. No longer was the big man providing for small villages but rather a large political community. The big man becomes a chief. With this new profound status, chiefs could have many wives, rule over thousands of people, collect voluntary donations, have bigger and finer houses, wear different clothing or accessories representing the difference in status, and receive favors of any sort. Soon after these chiefs would live and eat more lavishly than everyone else, keeping the meat and fat for themselves while giving nothing but bones and stale cakes to

their followers. From chiefdoms, the actions of chiefs encouraged and shaped humanity into today's political organization known as state. This widened disparities among people as time went along, resulting in masses of people not getting enough food gradually progressing to, known in today's society as, world hunger. Based on the article, hoarding is not of human nature. The want for recognition, importance, greed, and power drove humanity away from peaceful origins. Hoarding was the resultant of wanting those things.

In the article, " Why Can't People Feed Themselves?" by Frances Moore Lappe and Joseph Collins, the main theme was that there is more than enough food to go around for the seven billion people on Earth but, oddly enough, world hunger exist. World hunger exist, not because of overpopulation but the socio-political factors that adds to poverty and difficulty of access to food and other resources to everyone. Lappe and Collins, such as Marvin Harris, goes back in history to understand the development of human nature to explore the reasoning behind world hunger in the present world. They described how " colonialism destroyed the cultural patterns of production and exchange by which previously traditional societies in ' underdeveloped' countries previously had met the needs of people". The misconception of the " underdeveloped" countries are perceived by most as countries unwilling to progress. They furthered that the meaning of " underdeveloped" countries " evokes the picture of a static society but, in reality, is the process by which the minority of the world has transformed–often robbed and degraded–the majority". They described the " Colonial Mind" as colonizers using places like Africa, Asia, and Latin America

as a way to increase wealth through gold. In order for these colonizers to provide goods to the larger community they serve, they grew only “cash crops” causing many other foods to be eliminated which were important to the local population living in that region. The connection between the two articles is that they both discuss that world hunger is the resultant from a(n) historical past that continues to shape today’s society.

Mainly, how greed and power drove away the origins of egalitarian societies; creating disparities among people. Marvin Harris’ article goes into depth of the evolution of political organizations as compared to Lappe and Collins, who focused on a more recent time in history to describe an uneven amount of distribution and power. Both articles conveyed lessons to learn or understand about human nature and human culture that might shed light on how we deal with problems in our world today. The lesson from Marvin Harris was that chiefdoms created a dangerous society in terms of power and greed. That so many people are consumed with the idea of ‘modernized’ chiefs that it could possible lead us to our downfall. A society once brought together by one thing (food) can also be separated by it due to the development of people’s true intentions for power. He believes that it is essential that we understand our past to create the best possible future for everyone. As for Lappe and Collins, they end with answering the question “Why can’t people feed themselves?” with “must begin with an understanding of how colonialism actively prevented people from doing just that”. They wanted to eliminate people’s perception of “underdeveloped” countries and how these countries are abused and taken advantage of by center/core countries such as United States and Europe.