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# Guns, Germs, And Steel - The Fates Of Human Societies

*Jared Diamond*

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**Jared Diamond : Guns, Germs, And Steel - The Fates Of Human Societies** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Guns, Germs, And Steel - The Fates Of Human Societies:

82 of 88 people found the following review helpful. The only persuasive explanation for the wealth gap between the West and the restBy Mal WarwickTwo decades ago a UCLA geography professor named Jared Diamond published Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies. Diamond hypothesized that the arc of human history was dramatically shifted by geographic, environmental, biological, and other factors, resulting in the worldwide dominance of the leading industrial powers during the past 500 years. The book won a 1997 Pulitzer Prize and quickly became a New York Times bestseller. Why is economic development so uneven around the world? Diamond posed questions fundamental to the experience of the human race. Why did wealth and power [among nations] become distributed as they now are, rather than in some other way? [W]hy did human development proceed at such different rates on different continents? [W]hy were Europeans, rather than Africans or Native Americans, the ones to end up with guns, the nastiest germs, and steel? In his award-winning book, Diamond posited a unified synthesis a unified field theory of history. Drawing from his wide-ranging knowledge of medicine, evolutionary biology, physiology, linguistics, and anthropology as well as geography, he surveyed the history of the past 13,000 years and identified plausible answers to the questions he had posed. In the process, he wrote what I consider to be the single most illuminating book on the history of the human race. Academic critics howled However, academic critics howled shortly after the publication of Guns, Germs, and Steel: They referred to supposed errors in geography and history, which I find largely pointless. For example, geographers complained that Diamond referred to Eurasia as a single continent rather than separately to Asia, North Africa, and Europe. Thats nitpicking, as far as Im concerned. And many of these errors could simply be

differences of opinion. Academics are unbearably dogmatic and dismissive of those who reject their pet theories. Some accused him of racism, although he rejected racist explanations early, forcefully, and often. That criticism is not only unsupported by Diamond's book, it's insulting to the reader. The most common and far-reaching complaint was that Diamond had succumbed to the heresy of environmental determinism. Understandably, Diamond grounded his argument in geographic and environmental factors but he repeatedly cited numerous other influences as well. Ultimately, of course, everything we humans do, and everything we've done in the millions of years since our ancestors first climbed out of the trees, has been environmentally determined. There were complaints that Diamond had overlooked the contrast between temperate and tropical zones (he didn't) and that he had only explained what happened 500 years ago but not subsequently (untrue). It might appear that at least some of Diamond's critics never read the book. However, the most aggravating criticism was that he had ignored the motives that led the industrial nations to undertake colonialism and imperialism on a broad scale. Diamond addressed only the means that enabled the colonial powers to dominate, not the reasons why they chose to do so. To my mind, that's no error. He didn't pretend to explain colonialism and imperialism, merely to describe how it had become possible. Is it possible that most of these academic critics were simply bitter that Diamond hadn't cited their own specialized research? The roots of academic criticism

Though the critics undoubtedly uncovered a misplaced fact or unwarranted conclusion here and there through the book, the errors were exceedingly minor in the context of Diamond's expansive hypothesis. It should be clear to any dispassionate reader that the academic reaction stemmed, above all, from narrow-mindedness and jealousy. The world of academia today is atomized. Specialties, sub-specialties, and sub-sub-specialties abound. It's not unusual for a scholar to build a career on the study of a single obscure question that, when answered, will be of interest to virtually nobody. Interdisciplinary studies are frowned upon in most academic circles. Generalists are regarded as not serious. And scholars who write popular books, must less bestsellers, can expect a chilly reception from their peers. A wealth of meaning behind the title

To understand where the academic critics went wrong, it's useful to look at what Diamond signified by his title, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Early in his book, he dwells on the confrontation between the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro and the Inca god-king Atahualpa. The immediate reasons for Pizarro's success included military technology based on guns, steel weapons [such as swords and daggers], and horses; infectious diseases endemic in Eurasia; European maritime technology; the centralized political organization of European states; and writing. The title of this book will serve as shorthand for those proximate factors.

Diamond's argument in a nutshell

In a Prologue, Diamond poses the question at the heart of this book. He quotes a friend in what is now Papua New Guinea from a conversation in 1972, when he was studying bird evolution there: "Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo [goods] and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?" To answer the question, Diamond begins his story around the year 11,000 BCE, when the last Ice Age was drawing to a close and human beings were beginning to form villages in a few places around the world. It's unclear whether the formation of villages preceded the deliberate cultivation and production of food, or vice versa. However, regardless of the sequence, that shift from hunter-gatherer society to agriculturally based settlements set in motion the course of events that have led to the civilization in which we live.

Diamond argues, convincingly, that the much greater availability of domesticable plants and large animals in Eurasia than in sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas. Furthermore, he explains that the east-west orientation of Eurasia from the Bering Strait to the Atlantic Ocean made it possible for the development of agriculture and animal husbandry to spread quickly to distant lands. By contrast, the north-south orientation of the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa and the presence of barriers such as the Sahara Desert, the Panamanian Isthmus, and the deserts of northern Mexico and southwestern United States impeded the spread of these (and, later, other) new technologies to the extremities of those continents. The advent of food production enabled the development of ever-larger settlements. This, in turn, spelled the emergence of labor specialization and eventually the growth of empires as well as the appearance and spread of communicable diseases contracted from domesticated animals. Those differences in historical development eventually led to the guns, germs, and steel that made Eurasian dominance possible and dictated the huge differences in economic development between what today we call East and West.

*Guns, Germs, and Steel* is crammed with facts and densely written. It doesn't make for light reading. But if you have any interest in understanding how the world came to be as it is, you'll find this book highly rewarding.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating! By Daniel K Laszlo Very thought inspiring. There is a section in the middle that gets a little dry discussing plant variations in great detail, but overall an extremely fascinating read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating! By Burning down the house This was a great learning experience. I read this with a map handy and learned much about Indonesia that I never knew before. It's a great book to put present day events into perspective. It also engenders tolerance to all peoples of Earth.

*Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, commonly cited as *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, is a 1997 transdisciplinary non-fiction book by Jared Diamond, professor of geography and physiology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Originally published: 1997 Author: Jared Diamond LC Class: HM206.D48 1997 ISBN: 0-393-03891-2 (1st edition, hardcover) Dewey Decimal: 303.4 21 Awards: Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction, Phi

Beta Kappa Award in Science