

Module 1, Discussion 1: Guns, Germs and Steel

Main Topic

Having watched the video yesterday, and presently reflecting on it, according to Jared Diamond the three major elements that separate the "haves" from the "have nots" were the titular elements: guns, germs and steel. Guns and steel reflect technological advancements, while germs emphasize the remoteness of different areas of the world at times in the past (and present). I suppose that's only two categories, so for me geography is the third, which is perhaps represented in the title by the reasons he selected these three particular things instead of so many others that are also relevant.

The people of New Guinea are considered diverse and adaptable people because they have subsisted for so long with very little resources compared to other areas of the world. Crops existed, but none with the high production, high protein qualities found in rice, corn or wheat. Until European travelers visited and brought pigs, none of the 14 domesticatable animals mentioned in the program were available to New Guinea's people. Cattle, horses, water buffalo, sheep, goats, llamas and other animals that benefited so many other civilizations were not available in this place or in Australia. While I don't believe it was mentioned by Diamond, I would guess this has to do with the geologic history of this part of the world.

I agree with the claims made by Jared Diamond in the program. It seems so trivial, but it makes sense that never having access to a plow would completely cripple a civilization's capabilities and subsequent advancements. To grow and thrive, there is a need to support a growing population. Plows, along with farming developments in general, are the advancements that allow for this to happen. It also allows people to take on unique roles in a society involving art, science and government. Their time does not need to be spent producing food for themselves and their families.

Re: Guns, Germs and Steel (by Cody Miracle)

I suppose it depends on what is meant by "productive." If getting the most out of the available resources is what we're talking about, then the people of New Guinea are very productive--maybe even more so than most other civilizations. However, if we are instead discussing food production for a population, which I think is a little more in line with the points of the Guns, Germs and Steel program, then the people of New Guinea are not "productive" at all.

Usually we associate production with energy and effort. What makes the people of New Guinea unique is that their geography severely limits their ability to produce. Working from sunup to sundown and growing 10 more fields of local crops wouldn't do as much as one infrequently tended wheatfield.