

Citation metadata

Author: Robert Lawless

Date: Nov. 2009

From: Journal of International and Global Studies (Vol. 1, Issue 1)

Publisher: Center for International and Global Studies, Lindenwood University Press

Document Type: Book review

Length: 1,830 words

Main content

Article Preview :

Jared Diamond. Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed. New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 2005.

Diamond's 2005 book has been reviewed in The New York Times, The Christian Science Monitor, The Washington Post, and The London Review of Books, as well as in many academic publications. Most of the reviews have been favorable, though, some have questioned, the book's organization into two seemingly disparate parts. The first part of the text concentrates primarily on the collapse of societies on relatively isolated islands, such as Easter Island, Pitcairn and Henderson Islands, and the country of Greenland and secondarily on the collapse of the ancient societies of the Anasazi and the Maya. Diamond contrasts these societal failures with the successes of island societies in New Guinea, Tikopia, and Tokugawa Japan. The second part of the book concentrates on the demise of societies in Rwanda, Hispaniola, China, and Australia.

The primary problem most critics cite with respect to Diamond's Collapse is the unclear connection between the first and second parts of the text. Some reviewers more pointedly question the relevance of the first part of the book altogether. For instance, Gregg Easterbrook, in The New York Times Sunday Book Review section published on January 30, 2005, pointed out, "Most people do not live on islands, yet 'Collapse' tries to generalize from environmental failures on isolated islands to environmental threats to society as a whole." Likewise, Michiko Kakutani wrote in The New York Times Books of the Times section on January 11, 2005, "Diamond's selection of failed civilizations from the past seems arbitrary in the extreme: Why Easter Island and not ancient Rome? Why the Anasazi of the American Southwest and not the Minoans of ancient Crete?" I submit that the collapse of Rome and the Minoans is not so easily traced to deforestation, which, in Diamond's view, is the major cause of the collapse of the several societies he does investigate.

Beyond these critiques of the organization or relevance of the societies analyzed in Collapse, however, lies a more fundamental problem with the credibility and accuracy of the analyses Diamond provides. Diamond is certainly a major figure in scholarly circles. He has a Ph.D. in physiology and membrane biophysics from the University of Cambridge and is currently Professor of Geography and Physiology at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is well known for his ornithological work in New Guinea and also for his work in environmental history. He speaks several languages and has written popular science books in a number of different fields, including human evolution and human sexuality. He is probably most widely known for his 1999 Guns, Germs, and Steel, which sought to give an ecological explanation of why Europe dominated the world in recent history....

[Access from your library](#)

This is a preview. Get the full text through your school or public library.

Source Citation

Source Citation

Lawless, Robert. "Jared Diamond. Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed." *Journal of International and Global Studies* vol. 1, no. 1, 2009, p. 151+. Accessed 6 Nov. 2020.

Gale Document Number: GALE|A359999249

Explore

This is a preview. Get the full text through your school or public library.

[Access from your library](#)

Footer

- [About](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Accessibility](#)