

Societies in the World

SYP 3456 – U02

VH 133, T/Th, 9:30-10:45 am

Prof. A. Douglas Kincaid
Office Hours: Tues./Thurs. 2:00-3:00 pm

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Course description

The comparative study of societies is one of the foundations of sociology. But societies can only be understood within wider contexts. This course seeks to deepen your understanding of human societies by examining them within a series of “world” perspectives: historical, environmental, global, and systemic. It will introduce you to some of the key concepts and ideas underlying a comparative, historical, and ecological perspective on our social world, including:

- How societies have been shaped by such forces as the agricultural revolution, the rise of cities, states, and empires; epidemic diseases; human migration; and the development of capitalism and globalization;
- How social hierarchies of class, gender, race, and ethnicity are created and perpetuated within and among societies; and
- The prospects and challenges for sustainable and equitable societies in the contemporary world.

The course readings and other assignments will introduce you to or broaden your knowledge of a wide variety of societies all over the globe.

Course learning objectives

This course will enable you to:

1. Discuss how human societies have grown and changed from small-scale hunter-gatherers to large-scale, complex, and stratified social organizations.
2. Describe:
 - a. the societal impact of the rise of cities, states and empires;
 - b. variations in social stratification systems based on class, gender, and race and ethnicity over time and across different societies;
 - c. the societal consequences of epidemic diseases; and
 - d. the reshaping of societies through the development of capitalism and globalization
3. Compare and contrast how ancient and modern societies have managed their environments with greater or lesser success.

The course also partially fulfills FIU’s Global Learning requirement.

Readings

The following books are required for the course and available for purchase in the FIU bookstore:

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed. Jared Diamond. Penguin Group. New York. 2006.
ISBN 0-143-03655-6

Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire. Patricia McAnany and Normal Yoffee, eds. Cambridge University Press. New York. 2010.
ISBN 978-0-521-73366-3

SYP 3456 U02 Coursepack (available from FIU bookstore). Includes the following readings:

Yuval Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, pp. 3-39

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, pp. 85-103

James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, pp. 116-149

Frank M. Snowden, *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*, pp. 28-39.

Lawrence Wright, "Crossroads: A scholar of the plague thinks that pandemics wreak havoc—and open minds," *The New Yorker* (July 20, 2020)

David Quammen, "The warnings: Why we should have known how to prepare for Covid-19," *The New Yorker* (May 11, 2020)

Daniel K. Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts*, pp 11-63.

On e-reserve at the library:

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Wonders of the African World*, pp. 27-63

Jack Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Quest for God: How the World's Greatest Conqueror Gave Us Religious Freedom*, pp. 151-206.

Recommended

Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies. Jared Diamond. W.W. Norton & Co. New York. 2003.
ISBN 0-393-31755-2

Other readings may be assigned over the course of the semester.

Requirements

- Final Exam (30% of course grade, 120 points). A list of short essay questions will be posted a week before the exam. The exam will contain selected questions from the list to be answered during the scheduled period.

- Quizzes (25%, 100 points). These will be short answer quizzes taken online and each will be based on the reading assigned for the week of that quiz. There are 10 quizzes in all and the two lowest scores will be dropped from the final calculation.
- Class presentation (20%, 80 points). Each student will participate in a small group presentation in class based on assigned topics and readings.
- Online discussions (15%, 60 points). Discussion topics will be posted on the course website, and each student will be expected to contribute comments or responses to each discussion. Additional postings are encouraged and usually rewarded.
- Class participation (10%, 40 points). This will be based on class attendance and contributions to classroom discussions and activities.

Course Grading Formula

Maximum of 400 points (100%)

Letter	Range (%)	Letter	Range (%)	Letter	Range (%)
A	92 - 100	B	82 - 87	C+	78 - 79
A-	90 - 91	B-	80 - 81	D	60 - 69
B+	88 - 89	C	70 - 77	F	< 60

Course Schedule

Week	Topics/Lectures	Readings and Assignments
Week 1 Aug. 22-28	<u>Beginnings</u> Introduction to the Course	
Week 2 Aug. 29- Sept. 4	<u>Origins of Society</u> An Evolutionary Perspective Out of Africa	Harari
Week 3 Sept. 5-11	<u>The Rise of Food Production</u> Geographical Variations The Early State	Diamond, <i>GGG</i> , Chapters 4-5 Scott, pp. 116-128
Week 4 Sept. 12-18	<u>Societies Grow</u> Agrarian Societies The African Legacy	Scott, pp. 128-149 Gates (e-reserve)
Week 5 Sept. 19-25	<u>World Histories</u> Early Empires The Mongol Expansion	Weatherford, pp. 151-206

Week 6	<u>The Impact of Epidemic Diseases</u>	
Sept. 26- Oct. 2	Plagues and Society The Context of Covid	Snowden, pp. 28-39; Wright; Quammen
Week 7	<u>Societies Before the Conquest</u>	
Oct. 3-9	North America Europe	Richter, pp. 11-63
Week 8	<u>Collapse and Society</u>	
Oct. 10-16	A Model for Analysis; Montana California	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Prologue, Ch. 1
Week 8	<u>Revisiting Past Civilizations</u>	
Oct. 17-23	Mesopotamia Peru	McAnany and Yoffee, Chapters 7, 8
Week 9	<u>Successes and Failures</u>	
Oct. 24-30	New Guinea and Japan Iceland and Polynesia	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Chapters 3, 6, 9
Week 11	<u>Diamond vs. critics</u>	
Oct. 31- Nov. 6	Easter Island The Anasazi	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Chapters 2, 4; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapters 2, 5
Week 12	<u>Diamond vs. critics</u>	
Nov. 7-13	The Mayans Greenland	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Chapter 5, 7, 8; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 3, 6
Week 13	<u>Diamond vs. critics</u>	
Nov. 14-20	Rwanda Haiti	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Chapters 10, 11; McAnany and Yoffee, Chs. 9, 10
Week 14	<u>Diamond vs. critics</u>	
Nov. 21-27	Australia <i>Thanksgiving holiday (Nov. 24)</i>	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Chapters 12, 13; McAnany and Yoffee, Chs. 4, 11
Week 15	<u>Wrapping Up</u>	
Nov. 28- Dec. 4	China Course conclusions	Diamond, <i>Collapse</i> , Chapters 14-16; McAnany and Yoffee, Chs. 1, 13
Week 16	FINAL EXAM -----Bring Blue Books	
TBA		