

## Up to 11,000 BCE: Peopling the world with foragers

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- Chapter 1: Up to the Starting Line
  - Diamond sets the stage by discussing how foragers populated the world up to 11,000 BCE
    - at that point, the subsistence base, economics, and social organization of people all around the world was relatively similar
    - no societies had any obvious lead on dominating any others
    - but presumably the stage was set for societies in Eurasia to begin acquiring the advantages that led them to dominate the world
  - extremely simplified account of human evolution
    - [does that matter?]
  - “Great Leap Forward” of modern thinking, either in Africa or in multiple regions
    - about 50,000 years ago
    - no visible change in the bones, but apparently a dramatic change in behavior
    - tools for safely killing at a distance
    - art, etc: symbolic activity
    - due to development of language? brain reorganization?
    - [whether this really was an abrupt change, or is just a fluke of the preserved evidence of a long, slow, gradual evolution of more complex symbolic behavior, is highly debated right now]
  - modern-behaving “Cro-Magnons” replaced Neanderthals in Europe
  - Sea travel to Australia, other isolated islands by 35,000 implies good boats, modern level of thinking
  - Australia/New Guinean megafauna extinctions around 35,000 ya
    - caused by humans?
    - Diamond argues that the large animals (megafauna) in Australia evolved without any human threat, thus never evolved defenses against human-like hunters
      - while African and Eurasian animals coevolved with humans, evolving behaviors that helped them survive hunting
      - so the Australian megafauna were defenseless and quickly hunted to extinction
    - whatever the cause, all the large animals except one kind of kangaroo went extinct, leaving Australia with virtually no large animals that people might domesticate
      - [does it matter to Diamond’s argument *why* there were no potentially domesticable animals in Australia?
      - yes, because he seeks ultimate causes
      - just saying “it happened to turn out that way” is not satisfactory to him
      - so he goes for a clear explanation... but what if it isn’t true?]
  - Diamond argues that the New World was initially populated by Clovis hunters, who caused similar megafauna extinctions in North and South America
    - He is accepting the “Clovis first” model
      - in which the first people to reach the New World were big game hunters
      - they walked across land where the Bering strait is now, when sea level was lower

- then south along an “ice-free corridor” of mountains in Canada that gave passage through the Pleistocene ice sheets
- and into North America, following big game
- hunting with distinctive Clovis style spear points
- Many sites are known in North America with Clovis style points, generally in the range of 11,250-10,500 cal BC
  - Clovis points are large, and are thought to have been spearpoints for hunting big game
  - good evidence for this: some are found stuck between the ribs of mammoths
- But a lot (I believe the majority) of archaeologists now accept that the Clovis hunters were *not* the first people in temperate North America
  - except some die-hard North American “Clovis-first” fans
  - I would say that the debate is actually pretty much over, and "pre-Clovis" won
    - so now we don't know whether big game had anything to do with people spreading throughout the New World
    - or whether this was an adaptation that developed only later
  - [the ice-free corridor model also looking weak these days]
  - [I side with many archaeologists who propose an earlier movement of people into North America along the coast; the first arrivals would have been arctic and coastal fishermen with boats]
- Diamond tries to rule out evidence of pre-Clovis people in the New World
- Diamond cites “Pedro” Furada (actually “Pedra Furada”)
  - Diamond is right: these were outrageously early claimed dates, and almost no one outside of some Brazilian archaeologists accept them
- Meadowcroft rock shelter, Pennsylvania
  - earliest levels, disputed by some: c. 13,150 cal BC
  - slightly later levels, very hard to dispute: c. 12,000 cal BC
  - despite early resistance, many people do buy this one as being solidly pre-Clovis
- Monte Verde, southern Chile
  - numerous radiocarbon dates, starting around 12,750 cal BC
  - Diamond gives no good reason for rejecting this one
  - Monte Verde is now widely accepted as a pre-Clovis site, starting a good 1,500 years before Clovis points were made
- Bottom line:
  - people were widespread in North America by around 11,000 cal BC (that is, Clovis point users)
  - and some people were here, probably in more limited numbers, one thousand, two thousand, or more years before that
- Diamond asks why so few pre-Clovis sites have been found, given that sites of that age and much older are not uncommon elsewhere in the world
  - answer: because there were probably not very many pre-Clovis people, and they were not in North America for very long before the Clovis horizon
  - population may not have grown very large at that point

- in other regions, evidence of humans accumulated for tens of thousands of years before the first pre-Clovis people arrived in North America; naturally there are more known sites
- Diamond points out that North American megafaunal extinctions also correlate to human arrival
  - (actually, to the Clovis hunters, which he probably incorrectly thinks were the first humans here)
  - [does it matter if others were here first?]
  - Another catch: there were few, maybe no, Clovis people in South America
    - so why were there no potentially domesticable animals there?
    - if they were killed off by humans, the South American big game hunters did not leave the same kind of obvious evidence as the North American ones did
    - [again, does the cause of the megafaunal extinctions matter to Diamond's argument?]
- comment: Diamond spends a lot of time arguing for some not really important points
  - like when humans arrived in the New World
  - in order to support a not really important claim, that human hunting is the cause of the lack of potentially domesticable large animals in Australia and the New World
  - and that the ultimate cause of that is that those animals had not evolved together with humans, as the ones in Eurasia had
  - I think he does this because these stories fit nicely with his goal of finding ultimate causes in environmental facts and biological processes
    - that is, in processes that seem scientific
  - but to do this, he has to choose to reject some archaeological evidence with little reason
    - apparently mostly because he prefers the alternative that fits with his clear-cut story
  - this should make us suspicious about
    - how he may be evaluating evidence
    - how he chooses among alternatives in other cases...
  - this illustrates that you should assess your sources for biases!
    - biases don't mean the source is necessarily wrong
    - but they alert you to be cautious and critical
- Diamond's conclusion: at 11,000 BC, there was no way to tell which continent would come out ahead... or was there?
  - isn't that what he claims in the rest of the book?
  - no place had an obvious lead
  - but some had conditions that would soon give them an advantage
  - the Old World's head start in population would not have made much difference
    - models suggest that in just 1000 years at reasonable, low growth rates, a few foragers could multiply to fill the whole New World to foraging density
  - it must have been something else about Eurasia
- point(s)
  - up to about 11,000 BC, no continent had an obvious lead in ability to eventually dominate the others
  - but conditions must have been set for some to evolve faster after that
    - like size of their continent

- topography that allows or restricts interaction
- extinction of potential domesticated animals, etc.
- the stage is set for food production to begin first in the most favored part of the world...
- this is the start of his Grand Narrative of the rise of European societies to global dominance