

****Prospective Syllabus****

Collapse and Resilience in the Ancient World

Upper-Level Undergraduate Class

Semester:
Dates:
Class Time: Tuesday, Thursday
Classroom:

Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Mendelsohn
Office:
Office Hours:
Email: mendelsohnr@si.edu

Course Description

What drives civilizations to collapse or succeed? This course takes a comparative approach to the collapse of societies around the world. Taking an in-depth view of collapses from Europe, the Americas, and Asia, students will critically evaluate the concept of cultural collapse and its representation in the media. We will discuss the different triggers for collapse, including natural disasters, warfare, disease, poor resource management, political unrest, economic decline, and colonialism. Finally, we will explore how processes that contributed to collapse in the past are related to processes occurring today and discover what we can learn from the ways ancient peoples addressed these problems. This is a writing intensive class.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Compare and contrast episodes of collapse in the ancient world
- Critique oversimplified representations of collapse
- Draw parallels between contemporary events and past processes
- Develop effective verbal and written arguments using data

Texts

1. Diamond, Jared. 2013 [2005]. *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. Penguin, New York.
2. McAnany, Patricia A. and Norman Yoffee. 2010. *Questioning Collapse: Human Resilience, Ecological Vulnerability, and the Aftermath of Empire*. Cambridge University Press, New York.
3. Cooper, Jago and Payson Sheets. 2012. *Surviving Sudden Environmental Change: Answers from Archaeology*. University Press of Colorado, Boulder.
4. Supplemental readings will be available through Blackboard.

Grade Breakdown

In-Class Participation 20%
Film Response Paper 15%
Current Event Projects 30% (15% each)
Final Presentation 10%
Final Paper 25%

In-Class Participation (20% of final grade)

Participation is an important part of this class and students are expected to actively participate during all class sessions. This means contributing to in-class discussions and activities and active listening during lectures and films. Un-excused absences will result in a deduction of participation points.

Film Response (15% of final grade)

Select a film from the following list (TBD). How is collapse portrayed? What causes the collapse? How do the actors respond? Were the actions of the principal characters wise? Unwise? How does the scenario relate to other examples we have discussed in class? Do you believe the film is a good depiction of the concept of collapse? Why or why not? Responses should be three double-spaced pages.

Current Event Project-Two Assignments at 15% each (30% of final grade)

Find a current event related to one of the following collapse themes: warfare, disease, collapse of a political regime, economic decline, environmental disaster (e.g. volcanoes, droughts, weather events), man-made environmental degradation (e.g. deforestation, over-farming). I encourage you to discuss your topics with me in advance. Approval is required for topics not explicitly on the list. Responses should be three double-spaced pages

- Consult at least three different news sources (consult handout on finding reliable news sources)
- What happened? How did people respond? Do you believe this was a successful response? Why or why not?
- How does this compare to other cases we have learned about?

Final Presentation (10%) and Paper (25%) (35% of final grade)

For your final presentation you will present a detailed case study of your choice on either a specific collapse in history or collapse theme that encompasses multiple cultural case studies (e.g. Volcanoes, Warfare). Presentation topics must be approved by the end of Week 6. You will present your findings to the class in Week 12. Your final paper should be seven double-spaced pages. Grading rubrics will be distributed in advance.

Part I: Introduction to Collapse and Resilience

Week 1: Introduction	Readings
Introduction to Collapse and Resilience	Diamond, Prologue
What's the Debate?	Diamond, Chapter 14; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 1
Collapse Cycles	Marcus 1992 or 1998; Cowgill 2012
Week 2: Warfare and Disease	
Warfare	TBD
Disease	Diamond 1996, Chapter 11
Week 3: Environmental Disaster	
Volcanoes	Cooper and Sheets, Chapter 2
Drought	TBD
Week 4: Political and Economic Collapse	
Political	Blanton et al. 1992
Economic	Frank 1993
<i>**Current Event Assignment 1 Due**</i>	

Part II: Case Studies in Collapse

Week 5: Easter Island , Peru	
The Rapa Nui	Diamond, Chapter 2; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 2
Coastal Peru	Cooper and Sheets, Chapter 5; Jennings 2011, Chapter 6 of <i>Globalizations and the Ancient World</i>
Week 6: The U.S. Southwest	
The Anasazi	Diamond, Chapter 4; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 5
Other Southwestern Civilizations	Cooper and Sheets, Chapter 8
<i>**Presentation Topics Must Be Approved**</i>	
Week 7: The Ancient Maya	
The Classic Maya Collapse	Diamond, Chapter 5; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 6
The First Maya Collapse	Dunning et al. 2014 in <i>The Great Maya Droughts in Cultural Context</i>

Film Response Assignments Due	
Week 8: The Bronze Age Mediterranean	
Mesopotamia	McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 7; Cooper and Sheets, Chapter 7
The Minoans	TBD
Week 9: Vikings, Ancient Rome	
Vikings	Diamond, Chapter 8; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 3
Ancient Rome	Excerpt: Gibbon 1776 <i>The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire</i> ; Excerpt: Heather 2009 <i>The Fall of Rome and Birth of Europe</i>

Part III: Collapse and Modernity

Week 10: Contemporary Collapse	
Rwanda	Diamond, Chapter 10; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 9
The Caribbean (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico)	Diamond, Chapter 11; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 10
Current Event Assignment 2 Due	
Week 11: Learning from Collapse	
Environmental Lessons	Diamond, Chapter 16; Cooper and Sheets, Chapter 10; McAnany and Yoffee, Chapter 13
Connectivity and Collapse	Excerpt from Jennings 2011, <i>Globalizations and the Ancient World</i>
Week 12: Presentations	
Final Presentations	
Final Presentations	
Final Exam Week **Final Papers Due**	

Supplemental Readings:

Blanton, Richard E., Gary M. Feinman, Stephen A. Kowalewski, and Peter N. Peregrine

1996 A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization. *Current Anthropology* 37: 1-14.

Cowgill, George L.

2012 Concepts of Collapse and Regeneration in Human History. In *The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeology*, edited by Deborah L. Nichols and Christopher A Pool, pp. 301-308. Oxford University Press, New York.

Diamond, Jared

1996 Lethal Gift of Livestock: The Evolution of Germs. In *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Norton & Co.

Dunning, Nicholas, Timothy Beach, John Jones, Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach, and Carmen McCane
2014 The End of the Beginning: Drought, Environmental Change, and the Preclassic to Classic Transition in the East-Central Maya Lowlands. In *The Great Maya Droughts in Cultural Context: Case Studies in Resilience and Vulnerability*, edited by Gyles Iannone, pp. 107-126. University Press of Colorado, Boulder.

Frank, Andre Gunder

1993 Bronze Age World System Cycles. *Current Anthropology* 34: 383-405.

Gibbon, Edward

1776 *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Strahan & Cadell, London.

Heather, Peter

2009 *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Jennings, Justin

2011 *Globalizations and the Ancient World*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

Marcus, Joyce

1992 Political Fluctuations in Mesoamerica: Dynamic Cycles of Mesoamerican States. *National Geographic Research and Exploration* 8: 392-411.

1998 The Peaks and Valleys of Ancient States: An Extension of the Dynamic Model. In *Archaic States*, edited by Gary M. Feinman and Joyce Marcus, pp. 59-94. School of American Research Press, Santa Fe.