

Name _____

Date _____

The Neolithic Revolution: A counterclaim

Historical Context: We all know what the Neolithic Revolution brought to humans – agriculture, domesticated animals, surplus amounts of food that could feed a growing population, and with large populations, we could have specialized jobs like tailor, carpenter, blacksmith, engineer, writer, priest, president, etc. So everything we have today that makes our lives organized and comfortable was possible because we invented farming during the Neolithic Revolution.

Directions: While reading this excerpt by Jared Diamond, SCUBA the text (Scan for headings, graphics, and special fonts, Circle confusing words, Underline important facts, Box names, dates, amounts, and places, and Annotate). Annotate for Diamond’s claims, his arguments, and evidence. Wherever he writes a claim, put a “C” next to it. Then, when you read his arguments that support the claim, put an “A” next to them. Finally, he will use evidence (facts) to prove each argument, so write an “E” next to those facts.

Excerpt from “The Worst Mistake in the Human History of the Human Race” by Jared Diamond

There are at least three sets of reasons to explain the findings that agriculture was bad for health. First, hunter-gatherers enjoyed a varied diet, while early farmers obtained most of their food from one or a few starchy crops. The farmers gained cheap calories at the cost of poor nutrition. (Today, just three high-carbohydrate plants – wheat, rice, and corn – provide the bulk of the calories consumed by the human species, yet each one is deficient in certain vitamins or amino acids essential to life.) Second, because of dependence on a limited number of crops, farmers ran the risk of starvation if one crop failed. Finally, the mere fact that agriculture encouraged people to clump together in crowded societies, many of which then carried on trade with other crowded societies, led to the spread of parasites and infectious disease...Epidemics couldn’t take hold when populations were scattered in small bands that constantly shifted camp. Tuberculosis and diarrheal disease had to await the rise of farming, measles and bubonic plague the appearance of large cities.

Besides malnutrition, starvation, and epidemic disease, farming helped bring another curse upon humanity: deep class divisions. Hunter-gatherers have little or no stored food, and no concentrated food sources, like an orchard or a herd of cows: they live off the wild plants and animals they obtain each day. Therefore, there can be no kings, no class of social parasites who grow fat on food seized from others. Only in farming populations could a healthy, non-producing elite set itself above the disease-ridden masses. Skeletons from Greek tombs at Mycenae *c.* 1500 B.C. suggest that royal skeletons were two or three inches taller and had better teeth (on the average, one instead of six cavities or missing teeth). Among Chilean mummies from *c.* A.D. 1000, the elite were distinguished not only by ornaments and gold hair clips but also by a fourfold lower rate of bone lesions caused by disease.