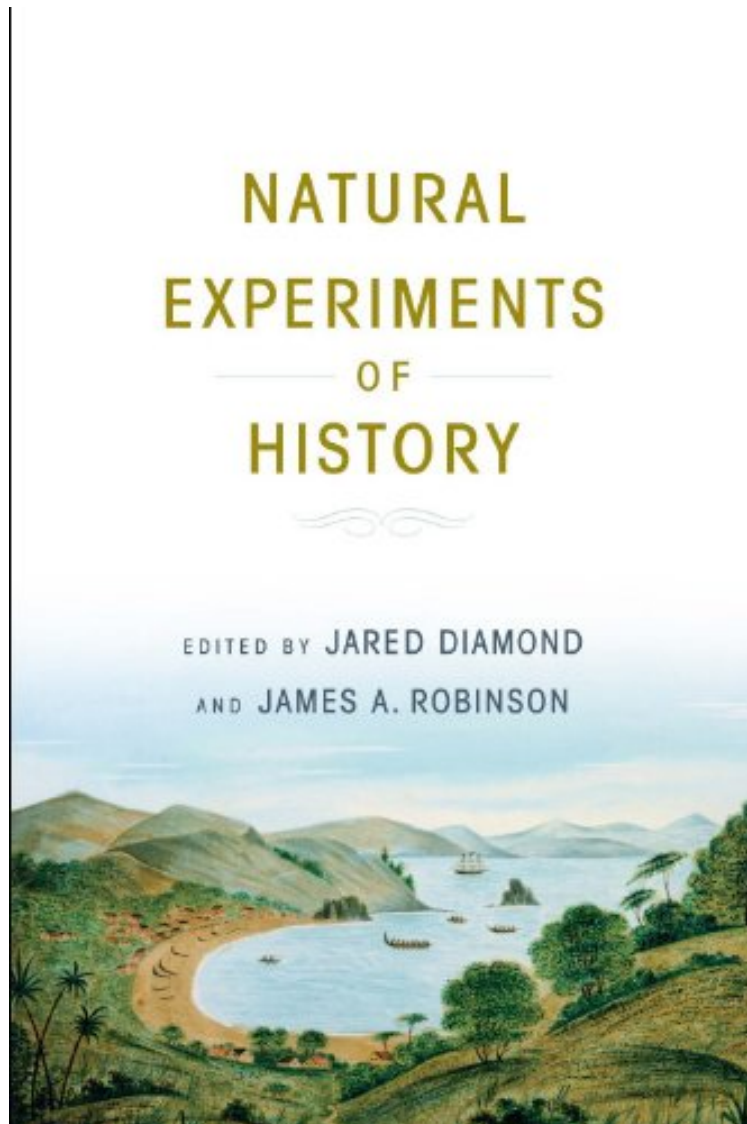


Natural Experiments of History

From Harvard University Press
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From Harvard University Press : Natural Experiments of History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Natural Experiments of History:

89 of 90 people found the following review helpful. Dry, but worth the read if you're into the subject matter. By Don Hogle Jared Diamond has written brilliant books (Guns, Germs and Steel; Collapse; The Third Chimpanzee among others) that triangulate data from an array of different fields to reach conclusions about our history on this planet. His belief in that methodology for understanding our species and our history is what is at the heart of this collection of essays, which he edited along with a colleague. Indeed, the book is a defense of those methodologies. Some of the

essays are more interesting than others: notable is the one which quantitatively correlates the extent of the slave trade in various African countries with the state of their modern-day economic development (or rather, the lack thereof.) It's a bit of a dry read -- in some essays more than in others. But if this methodology for understanding our past interests you, it's worth the read. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Tough read. By MATT What a tough read... be ready to dig in. Diamond is famous (with me) for accessibility, this is not that. This book is for a doctoral candidate to site and has best comprehension in a context of a pretty specialized education. If you a fan of the author because of Guns, Germs, and Steel, Collapse, and/or Third Chimpanzee (all super recommended), this book is not those... 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Not as interesting as I hoped. By D A Booth A collection of essays by elsewhere interesting authors on a topic that should be stimulating. Unfortunately for me they read like a collection of papers delivered at a conference that nobody found exciting.

In eight case studies by leading scholars in history, archaeology, business, economics, geography, and political science, the authors showcase the "natural experiment" or "comparative method" -- well-known in any science concerned with the past -- on the discipline of human history. That means, according to the editors, "comparing, preferably quantitatively and aided by statistical analyses, different systems that are similar in many respects, but that differ with respect to the factors whose influence one wishes to study." The case studies in the book support two overall conclusions about the study of human history: First, historical comparisons have the potential for yielding insights that cannot be extracted from a single case study alone. Second, insofar as is possible, when one proposes a conclusion, one may be able to strengthen one's conclusion by gathering quantitative evidence (or at least ranking one's outcomes from big to small), and then by testing the conclusion's validity statistically.

A superb collection of eminently teachable essays bound together by a common methodological framework that connects it directly to cutting-edge theoretical and empirical research across the disciplines of anthropology, archeology, history, political science, and sociology. --John Coatsworth, Columbia University
Natural Experiments of History reaches across a wide variety of disciplines, in ways that should be accessible to just about every educated reader. It is tied together not by topic or region but by the idea that we can make useful and insightful comparisons in ways that are not casual or sloppy, but actually contribute to our understanding of human life. --Jeffry Frieden, Harvard University
Natural Experiments of History is a short book packed with huge ideas. Its collected essays advocate how controlled experiments can be applied to the messy realities of human history, politics, culture, economics and the environment. It demonstrates productive interdisciplinary collaborations but also reveals gulfs between different cultures of academia... All of the essays in Natural Experiments of History will trigger debate. --Jon Christensen (Nature 2010-03-25)
This ambitious, at times challenging, book aspires to contribute new ways of historical thinking and historical research by drawing attention, on the one hand, to the similarities between science (including social sciences) and history, and on the other, by using social sciences methods, especially statistical analysis, to study history. The editors argue that though the difference between studies of nature and human history is obvious, there are clear overlaps. They can be viewed through studying comparative history or by conducting "natural experiments of history" and analyzing the "perturbations" and their causes (exogenous or endogenous) in the involved cases. The book offers a broad array of case studies to illustrate and explain the argument, ranging from nonliterate to contemporary societies and from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico to Brazil, India, and tropical Africa. The comparative methods showcased are quite versatile, from two-way to multiple-way comparisons. All the case studies are interesting and help demonstrate how, via comparative study, one society's, region's, or country's situation is better displayed and explained by juxtaposing it with other, similar ones. A useful read in macro, global history. --Q. E. Wang (Choice 2010-11-01)
Natural Experiments of History is a thought-provoking collection of essays that covers an impressive array of topics and would make an excellent text for a course on comparative studies of human history." --Thomas E. Currie (Cliodynamics)
About the Author
Jared Diamond is Professor of Geography, University of California, Los Angeles. His books include Guns, Germs, and Steel. James A. Robinson is Professor of Government, Harvard University.