

# Study Guide for College-level Courses



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## **Introductory Sections**

**Preface (pp ix-xv) by Bob Bain and Lauren McArthur Harris**

- What are some of the problems teachers face in organizing a world history course?
- What are some tactics that teachers employ in creating a world history curriculum?
- Why do Bain and McArthur Harris believe that *This Fleeting World* transcends traditional historical narratives and may help teachers develop their courses?
- What are some of the criticisms that teachers have made of Christian's book? After you have read the book, consider whether you agree or disagree with these criticisms.
- According to Bain and Harris, how can *This Fleeting World* help teachers recognize large-scale patterns of change in time and space, create course designs, and stimulate student thinking?

## **Introduction (pp xvii-xix)**

- On page xvii, Christian states that many students and teachers are often overwhelmed by the plethora of narratives and human groups that are examined in traditional world histories. How does he plan to rectify those problems in *This Fleeting World*?

## **Prequel (pp xx-xviii)**

- Why do you think Christian characterizes the narrative of history he presents as a "modern creation story?"
- How do modern scientists believe the universe began and expanded? What were some of the basic elements in the early universe?
- Explain the origin and characteristics of stars and supernovae.
- How did the sun and its dependent planets, including Earth, first form?
- What was the early earth like? Could humans have lived there?
- How did life first appear on earth? When did the first multi-cellular organisms appear? What were some of the first multi-cellular organisms?
- When did mammals first appear? Who was Lucy and why is she important to the human story?

# **Chapter 1: Beginnings, The Era of Foragers (pp 1-22)**

## ***Section 1: Studying the Era of Foragers (pp 2-5)***

- Why have world historians often had a difficult time integrating the era of foragers into their histories?
- What are the three main types of evidence used to study early human history?
- What are some of the techniques that archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians use to study the past? What peculiar challenges do their techniques and evidence present to the traditional study of world history?

## ***Section 2: Beginnings of Human History ( pp 5-9)***

- What are the main features of the "Out-of-Africa hypothesis"?
- How do the analyses of Sally McBrearty and Alison Brooks differ from those of Richard Klein?
- What are the main ways in which "symbolic language" separates humans from other animal species?
- What is collective learning, and why is the idea so fundamental to understanding human history?

## ***Section 3: Foraging Lifeways (pp 9-13)***

- How and why did foraging communities limit population growth?
- How were foraging communities organized, and how did their organization dictate the nature of their economies?
- According to Christian, foraging societies tend to think of the natural and spiritual worlds as parts of a large extended family. Can you see any similarities in the beliefs associated with contemporary world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism, Judaism, or Islam?
- Why do some anthropologists and paleobiologists suggest that foragers led relatively affluent and leisurely lives? Based on their findings, would you want to live in the era of foragers?

## ***Section 4: Major Changes during the Era of Foragers (pp 13-22)***

- When did humans begin migrating out of Africa? What is the significance of human migration to both Australia and Siberia as indicators of the depth, speed, and quality of technological progress during the era of foragers?
- How did the acceleration of humans' technological capabilities affect the environment?
- What is the distinction between "extensification" and "intensification?" Compare and contrast modes of extensification and intensification in Australia 10-15,000 years ago.

## ***Section 5: The Era of Foragers in World History (pp 22-23)***

- Do you agree that the era of foragers should be regarded by historians as one of the major periods of human history? Why or why not?

## **Chapter 2: Acceleration, The Agrarian Era (pp 23-57)**

### ***Section 1: Origins of Agriculture (pp 24-32)***

- What are the main features of an agricultural economy? How do they differ from a foraging economy?
- How did the domestication of plant and animal species alter humans'?
- When and in which parts of the world did agriculture first appear?
- The author offers some ideas (page 27) about why agricultural ways of life were adopted independently and at different times in several parts of the world. Can you think of any other reasons why humans might have undertaken this striking new adaptation?
- Outline how changes in foraging techniques, climate, and population growth might explain the emergence of agriculture.

### ***Section 2: General Characteristics and Long Trends (pp 32-37)***

- What were the main characteristics of agrarian communities?
- What was the "secondary-products revolution,"

### ***Section 3: Agrarian Communities before Cities: 8000-3000 BCE (pp 37-41)***

- Why did social hierarchies appear in agrarian societies?
- Why was political power so important in agrarian societies?
- In what ways did agrarian aristocracies enforce and display their power?

### ***Section 4: The Earliest Cities and States, 3000-500 BCE (pp 41-47)***

- What are some of the reasons why cities and states began to emerge between 3000 and 500 BCE?
- Do you agree that taxation can be characterized as "formalized looting"?
- What were some of the first imperial states, and what was the scope of their power and influence?
- Did nomadic communities contribute to technological developments in agricultural societies? If so, how?

### ***Section 5: Agriculture, Cities, and Empires: 500 BCE-1000 CE (pp 47-52)***

- Briefly describe some of the developments that led to the Eurasian landmass becoming the largest exchange network on earth.

- Do you agree with Christian that the emergence of world religions was connected to the increasing size of imperial states and the need of those states “to reconcile the beliefs of diverse populations over large areas”? Why or why not?
- Identify and describe some imperial states and federations in Mesoamerica, North America, the Pacific islands, and the Eurasian steppes.
- Identify some of the places beyond the zone of agrarian civilization where populations grew and social hierarchies developed during the agrarian era? Why do you think population was able to grow in those areas?

### ***Section 6: Agricultural Societies on the Eve of the Modern Revolution: 1000–1750 (pp 52–57)***

- Describe some of the large-scale changes that took place in the world between 1000 and 1750 CE.
- Why do you think larger global networks of trade and cultural exchange emerged between 1000 and 1750 CE? Trace some of the main arteries in these networks.
- How, according to Christian, did Europe shift from “a marginal borderland” of Afroeurasia in 1000 to the hub of the world’s “largest and most vigorous exchange networks” by 1750?
- How does the period between 1000 and 1750 compare with the modern era in terms of population and economy?

### ***Section 7: Agrarian Era in World History (pp 57–58)***

- What do you regard as the most distinctive features of the agrarian era of world history?

## **Chapter 3: Our World, The Modern Era (pp 58–91)**

### ***Section 1: Major Features and Trends of the Modern Era (pp 59–64)***

- Explain major reasons for increases in productivity and population in the modern era?
- Compare and contrast the power of states during the modern and agrarian eras.

### ***Section 2: Explaining the Modern Revolution (pp 64–68)***

- What were some of the accumulated changes of the agrarian era that helped spawn the modern revolution?
- Did all areas of the world experience the modern revolution at the same time and in the same manner? If not, why?

### ***Section 3: Industrial Revolution: 1750–1914 (pp 68–74)***

- Describe the first three waves of the Industrial Revolution.
- How did the economic changes of the Industrial Revolution influence political, social, and cultural transformations in the modern era?

#### **Section 4: Twentieth-century Crisis: 1914-1945 (pp 74-83)**

- What were some of the factors that led to the decreases in global economic growth rates between 1913 and 1950?
- Why does David Christian label World War I as an "industrialized war?"
- What were some of the major political, economic, and social consequences of the two world wars of the twentieth century?
- In the nineteenth century, many socialists predicted that capitalism would eventually fail. Why do you think were they wrong?

#### **Section 5: Contemporary Period: 1945-Present (pp 83-91)**

- Explain some of the factors leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union. How was the Peoples' Democratic Republic of China able to introduce market reforms successfully?
- Why do you think there has been an intense backlash against Western influence in many parts of the world?
- What are some of the environmental challenges posed by rising populations and increased economic consumption?

#### **Section 6: Modern Era in World History (pp 91-93)**

- What are the most distinctive features of the modern era of world history?

#### **Periodization in World History (pp 97-105)**

- What is periodization? Why is periodization necessary to making sense of the past? Why does Christian seem to distrust traditional periodization in world history?
- Christian discusses four systemic problems in the periodization of world history. What are the four problems and how are they interconnected?
- What are some of the common periodization schemes in world history?
- What are differences between cyclical and linear periodization schemes? What are some examples of linear periodization?
- What are the three major periodization schemes that Christian proposes? How are those major periods further subdivided?
- How do Christian's schemes address the organizational and ethical dilemmas of historical periodization? Why does Christian state that the agrarian era presents the "most intractable" organizational problem for periodizing world history?