

Why is Africa So Far Behind?

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Riding a 6:30AM express train from Lincoln to London, England a few years ago, arrayed on every side were businessmen engrossed in laptop spreadsheets or the financial pages. I was on a circuitous route home from Kampala, Uganda. The developed world is pulling ahead of developing Africa, just as those Brits started the work day two hours ahead of businessmen in Kampala. On a few bewildering occasions, Africans have asked me why their continent was so far behind America.

Jared Diamond, in his Pulitzer Prize winning *Guns, germs and steel*: "The fates of human societies," shows that the conquest of Africans by Eurasians was the trajectory destined by factors of geography and biodiversity.

Growing crops, instead of gathering plants and hunting, allowed for between 10 and 100 times the population to an acre of land. "That strength of brute numbers was the first of many military advantages that food-producing tribes gained over hunter-gatherer tribes." Having domesticated animals also fosters higher population densities. Eurasians had horses, sheep, goats and cattle, while no such beasts were available in Africa. Even after the introduction of the horse and cow in northern Africa, the tsetse fly prevented the introduction of these and other species into southern Africa, until significantly later. Population density is roughly correlated to specialization within larger societies (the chiefdom and state). As groups turned from hunting gathering to tending crops, and from subsistence to food storage, other classes besides farmers and herders were able to emerge, such as administrators, police, metal workers, and soldiers. Typically, less-organized societies are no match for complex societies, due to the technological and soldier classes of the latter. Over long periods of time and with the cross-fertilization of ideas and inventions that came with the introduction of a multitude of states, society became increasingly complex. The Eurasian populaces also became gradually more immune to germs, such as measles, tuberculosis, smallpox and flu that were introduced through livestock domestication. Populations that came into contact with Eurasians in warfare, however, did not have such an acquired immunity. Half the Aztecs fighting Cortez died of smallpox.¹

Just as in their encounter with Native Americans, Europeans entering Africa enjoyed the triple advantage of guns and other technology, widespread literacy, and the political organization necessary to sustain expensive programs of explorations and conquest.

As we have discussed, all three arose historically from the development of food production. But food production was delayed in sub-Saharan Africa (compared with Eurasia) by Africa's paucity of domesticable native animal and plant species, its much smaller area suitable for indigenous food production, and its north-south axis, which retarded the spread of food production and inventions

First, as regards domestic animals, we've already seen that those of sub-Saharan Africa came from Eurasia, with the

possible exception of a few from North Africa. As a result, domestic animals did not reach sub-Saharan Africa until thousands of years after they began to be utilized by emerging Eurasian civilizations.²

The same magnitude of delay is true, according to Diamond, of plant domestication. Because Africa is on a north-south axis, plant and animal varieties could not be grown in nearly as large a range, as they were in Eurasia, which extended thousands of miles in the same latitudes. This axis also impeded the spread of literacy.

In short, plant and animal domestication meant much more food and hence much denser human populations. The resulting food surpluses, and (in some areas) the animal based means of transporting those surpluses, were a prerequisite for the development of settled, politically centralized, socially stratified, economically complex, technologically innovative societies. Hence the availability of domestic plants and animals ultimately explains why empires, literacy, and steel weapons developed earliest in Eurasia and later, or not at all, on other continents.³

In the meantime, medieval Celtic monks and scholars preserved for European nations some of the accumulated knowledge of Greece, Rome and the Arab world that is only now widely available to Africa through the Internet.⁴

Christianity also provided the rationale for scientific study, which is lacking in tribal cultures. A rational Creator designed a rational world, whose laws would yield to sufficient examination.⁵

In conjunction with the unequal social/military conflicts that led eventually to colonization that did not end until the 1990s, came the exportation of slaves from the African continent to the New World and Eurasia. An estimated 10-50 million West Africans and another 1.2 - 3 million East Africans⁶ -- the strongest among them--were sold away from their families and tribes to the enrichment of other nations. Africans were complicit in this trade to gain rum, cookware, cattle and seed from Arab and European slavers.⁷ Who knows what statesmen, inventors and businessmen were shipped away to salt ponds, sugar cane and cotton fields?

Western colonialism did provide infrastructure-roads, communications and public utilities, as well as tribal peace within defined borders. It brought health care, bringing longer life, but without economies that could sustain a rapidly growing population, while in the West expanding population brought economic expansion.⁸

After independence beginning in the 1960s, many Africans came to understand that they had one vote, one person, one time. Often white kleptocrats (those governing for personal benefit) were exchanged for African kleptocrats. The French colonies were culturally colonized, while the British colonies were economically colonized, but neither prepared Africans adequately for the transition to independence. Downtown Kampala gradually came to have only one functioning street light in the 1990s, and its passenger trains, as in Kenya, became rusting beasts. Zaire went from 31,000 of paved roads in 1960 to 3,700 miles in 1980. African leaders began

experimenting with governance ideologies and dictatorial styles. Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire from 1965-1997, hoarded three billion dollars in private bank accounts and had eleven palaces. Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic spent 20 million dollars for his coronation as Emperor, while his country had only 176 miles of paved roads. Yoweri Museveni and Jomo Kenyatta are exceptions to rapacious rule.⁹

Diamond also notes that "peace, political stability, and well justified confidence in their own future" encouraged Japanese Tokugawa shoguns to make long-term investments in their countries, while Mayan kings and presidents of Haiti and Rwanda could not expect that their sons would succeed them or even that they themselves would complete their terms of office.¹⁰ Sixty percent of the 50 poorest nations had "civil conflict" during 1990-2001.¹¹ In 2002 there were sixteen military conflicts in Africa, while in 2005 there were just five, which is hopeful.¹² The "rule of law" has the greatest "explanatory power for economic growth and investment" among all current predictors of economic growth.¹³ African wars are inimical to law enforcement and economic development.

HIV/AIDS has been almost as catastrophic as slavery in Africa. According to the World Bank, about 24.5 million Africans were HIV positive at the end of 2005, which is 64% of the earth's total, while another 22.9 million Africans have died of AIDS. Twelve million AIDS orphans aged 0-17 live in Africa, 79% of the total population.¹⁴ This costs 24 African countries between .5% and 1.2% of per capita economic growth per year, as part of the tragedy.¹⁵ I've walked through a remote Ugandan village uncharacteristically silent, littered with AIDS graves.

What can we do? My answer is to assist church leaders in Africa to evangelize and disciple Africans, as well as to help them with development projects. Today the biggest issues facing Africa are moral. If African rulers and bureaucrats had a biblical worldview, they would be servant-leaders. Reform is necessary at the national and regional level, but governments are led by individuals. If African men, in particular, obeyed biblical morality, AIDS would not be the African pandemic. If Africans followed the book of Proverbs, they would produce more and save for the future, instead of trying to get a \$100 loan from a development organization charging 25-35% interest, or from an informal loan shark. The Japanese modernized in about 30 years and forced their people to save.¹⁶ Today savings ratios in the "Tiger" countries of Pacific Asia are around 40 percent.¹⁷ Women would not need to be empowered in the market place, because their men would provide. Crime would decline, and money for security could be invested in research and production. Security guards outnumber police by almost three to one in South Africa.¹⁸ In South America, by analogy, crime has cost an estimated loss of 3.2 to 8.4 percent of gross domestic product.¹⁹ The Tentmaker Project (www.tentmakerproject.org) offers interest-free, church-based micro-development loans to those attending local Ugandan churches. African Americans have an annual buying power in excess of 680 billion dollars by which to help.²⁰

Why should Africa be the burden of both black and white? For a Christian, whatever is done "for the least of these brothers," is done for Christ (Matt. 25:40, NIV). Half of Africa's 700 millions earn less than \$1.00 per day.²¹ Funneling funds through born-again churchmen of excellent character has the best chance of reaching the truly needy. Long and short-term missionaries can identify these partners.

A single wealthy US church has done this, working with Africans and missionaries: built a Christian secondary school, provided funding for three Sudanese elementary schools, planted a viable Ugandan church, and provided a 10-acre campus for a new African seminary with accredited masters level training. She provided \$10,000 for famine relief and water development last year in northeast Kenya, and provided \$10,000 for the African Bible Commentary. She provides scholarships for 6 Sudanese students to obtain a 3-year theological education, and is providing a 5-ton all-terrain vehicle for development of churches in southern Sudan. An African American nurse who visited Kenya with us has since raised several thousand dollars for mobile pediatric health clinics. What could thousands of American, Asian, South American, and European churches and individuals do to help Africans, who wonder why they are still so far behind? Contact us for suggestions.

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2. Guns, p. 398
3. 3 Guns, p. 92
4. How the Irish Saved Civilization, Thomas Cahill, 1996, ISBN: 0385418493
5. Even literate cultures such as in India and China didn't pursue scientific inquiry due to a supposed illusory world (maya) in Hindu India's case, or due to Confucian prejudices that developed due to alchemy and the search for immortality. Tribal societies have no real science. See The rich nations and the poor nations, Barbara Ward, 1962, p. 47-48, ISBN: 0393007464
6. The Africans, David Lamb, 1987, p. 147-148, ISBN: 0394753089
7. http://www.ariakah.com/encyclopedia/History_of_Africa#African-slave-trade Accessed 11/15/06
8. Ward, p. 53
9. Lamb, pp. 160, 47, 44-45, 50.
10. Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed, Jared Diamond, 2005, p. 305, ISBN: 0670033375
11. "World's 50 Poorest Countries" www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0908763.html Accessed 11/16/06
12. "Has Africa finally turned a corner?" Scott Baldauf, The Christian Science Monitor, 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/print?id=2639644>, accessed 11/9/06
13. "Recent developments in endogenous growth theory," by Robert J. Barro, ch. 1 in "The determinants of economic growth," M. Oosterbaan, T. Van Steveninck & N. Van Der Windt, eds., 2000, p. 18, ISBN: 0792378857 http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICA_EXT/EXTAFRHEANUTPOP/EXTAFRREGTOPHIVAIDS/0,,contentMDK:20415756~menuPK:1830800~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:717
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16. Ward, 58-59
17. "Financial markets, financial flows, and economic growth in LDCs," by Maxwell J. Fry, ch. 4 in "The determinants of economic growth"
18. "Security guards outnumber police," Wyndham Hartley, BusinessDay 11/9/06
19. "High crime stifles Latin economies," Jens Erik Gould, New York Times, 10/17/06
20. Target Market News
21. USAID "Strategic Framework for Africa" 2/24/06 at http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDAG573.pdf Accessed 11/15/06.