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## **REVIEW OF CASE STUDY FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF NETFLIX**

- I'm guessing Diamond was given a huge advance to write this book based on his last success, "Guns, Germs and Steel" - which was a terrific book. Collapse opens up with a completely non-sensical description of Montana based on anecdotal stories. He mentions global warming many times for no apparent reason. The book seems more like incoherent ramblings rather than the careful analysis of a skilled researcher. I rarely put down a book once I start but I

couldn't bear to continue after 3 chapters. Sorry Jared, but terrible book.

- Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed Jared Diamond is a treasure, one of a select group of practicing scientists (others would include Steven Pinker, Richard Dawkins, Brian Greene, and the late Stephen Jay Gould) who can synthesize otherwise dry or dense findings from the academic monographs into informative and entertaining narratives for general readers. His *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1997) stands as one of the most important works of nonfiction published in the past few decades - it won a Pulitzer Prize, among other honors. There he built a persuasive case for the geographic and biologic determinants of the success (or lack thereof) of civilizations. He sought to boost history as a "science," though one whose methods necessarily differ from the non-historical sciences such as physics and chemistry. Diamond is a true polymath. He trained as a physiologist and taught at the UCLA medical school, has conducted extensive field work in ornithology, is now a professor of geography and physiology at UCLA, serves as an esteemed advisor on conservation practices, and has received such awards as the Lewis Thomas Prize honoring the "Scientist as Poet." In *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, he applies his multiple talents to examine the flip side of the big question he raised in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. In the earlier book he emphasized the factors that contributed to the triumph of certain civilizations over others. In *Collapse* he focuses primarily (although not exclusively) on civilizations that failed. It is another Diamond jewel,

though not quite so glimmering as its predecessor. *Collapse* consists of a series of accounts assessing both certain modern societies - Montana, Rwanda, The Dominican Republic and Haiti, China, and Australia - and several societies from the past - Easter Island, Pitcairn and Henderson Islands, the Anasazi, the Mayans, Norse Greenland, New Guinea highlanders, and others. Most of the historical selections represent failures, but some are included to present contrasts or to illustrate the possibly pivotal importance of environmental choices contemporary societies now face. Diamond writes that a more descriptive full title for *Collapse* would be "Societal collapses involving an environmental component, and in some cases also contributions of climate change, hostile neighbors, and trade partners, plus questions of societal responses." These are the five factors he chose to apply in evaluating why most of his selected societies failed. Diamond aims for big conclusions based on comparisons across his cases, but each chapter holds interest on its own. For example, one would not expect to find a disquisition on packrat middens especially fascinating, but Diamond makes it so. These middens - ball-shaped deposits that were built by small rodents and preserved over hundreds of years, containing sticks, plant fragments, mammal dung, food remains, discarded bones, and the rats' own feces and urine - can tell us a great deal of value about Anasazi history in the American Southwest. For the Anasazi and each of his other selected historical cases Diamond relies extensively on archeological studies applying methods both painstakingly detailed and sophisticated, such as those used to analyze the middens. If you did not know

before what a palynologist does, for instance, you will after reading *Collapse* (hint: it might make some people sneeze). Although the chapters are built largely on the findings of highly specialized studies, Diamond's narratives convey a sense of contemporary presence, as if the reader were there as an observer. In both of his books on societal successes and failures Diamond's method has been straightforward, although one all too rarely practiced. He becomes highly familiar with a wide swath of the relevant primary literature, consults extensively with the relevant experts, and then synthesizes broad conclusions that cut across academic disciplines and different cultures. The insights gained are often quite rich, which is why we need polymaths like Diamond. The results are imperfect, however. Diamond may be criticized for under-playing cultural factors in relation to material and environmental ones. This is not a fatal limitation of *Collapse*, since the focus is generally on small subsistence societies, where the availability of sufficient food naturally was a chief determinant of survival. And Diamond does not neglect cultural factors altogether. For example, he ponders why the Norse settlers of Greenland apparently ate so little fish (very few fish bones show up in the archeological sites), since the fish were abundant, other food was not, and the settlers had migrated from a fish-eating society. He speculates that an anti-fish taboo developed, perhaps because people had previously gotten sick from spoiled seafood. The point here, though,

is that his cultural explanation (the possible taboo) is weak and unpersuasive, in contrast to the stronger conclusions he builds for environmental causes of societal collapse. As enjoyable a read as *Collapse* is, its most sweeping message - that we can draw lessons from the past environmental failures to help make better decisions today - is less than satisfying. On the one hand, this message is obvious; we do not need Diamond's book to tell us. On the other hand, Diamond's extrapolation from the experience of less than a dozen failed societies where environmental degradation can be shown to have played a role is not fully convincing as prophecy for post-industrial society. His selected cases were mostly at the subsistence level and were in some instances literally insular, in others practically so (at least compared to global integration today). As Diamond recognizes, if a society dies out from hunger now it will be because we have chosen to let it happen, not because no one else knew about it or was unable to help. And as he is also well aware, now we have developed both new ways to destroy the environment (massive emissions of hydrocarbons are a salient example) and new ways to save it (alternatives to fossil fuels, for instance). The details of what will contribute to our environmental demise or sustainability will undoubtedly differ from the societal stories Diamond relates, but he stands correct on what the primary determinant will be: human beings making either wise or disastrous political choices.