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This week, readings included two excerpts, “Active Reading” (Rampolla) and “How to Read” (Rael), as well as several pages from *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (Diamond) and the Catawba Document.

In “Active Reading”, Rampolla draws a distinction between passive reading and active reading; in a subject with reading at its core, passive reading involves a reader-follow-author mindset in which words are read and perhaps absorbed, but not *understood* (especially in the greater context of the text). On the other hand, active reading is the relentless, dialogue-driven interaction and interrogation with the text; arguments are not merely acknowledged or memorized but instead interpreted and assembled in the context of the greater thesis.

Similarly, Rael elaborates on the notion of ‘active (predatory) reading’ in the realm of text annotation and note-taking: notes should not merely be summaries - taken directly from the text or even paraphrased, but rather interpretations and connections to a thesis. Reading informative texts should be done from a hierarchical perspective, rather than in a sequential manner more fit for novels.

In Chapter 18, “Hemispheres Colliding”, of Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, Diamond explores why Europeans had the capability to take over Native American civilizations, and not vice versa. He attributes this to several natural factors that give Eurasia the advantage, including large potential for domestication, a head-start in terms of human settlement and initial placement of humans, as well as a terrain more suitable for cross-continental dispersal of goods, ideas, and technology. The epilogue, entitled “The Future of Human History as a Science”, sums the thesis of the book – that the histories of

different groups of people are determined primarily by environment rather than the people themselves, which arguably are also shaped by natural factors.

The Catawba Document was a map describing the situation of several Native American nations northwest of South Carolina, drawn and painted by the Native Americans and presented to South Carolina's governor, presumably as a gift. The map displays Charlestown to the left, drawn with straight, vertical lines; in the middle as the centerpiece, an assortment of Indian nations represented as circles with interconnecting paths; and to the bottom right, Virginia, drawn with three bold, straight lines. Because of annotations such as "English Path to Nasaw", one can assume the map is meant to be geographical (but not necessarily oriented correctly).

In *Germes, Guns, and Steel*, Jared Diamond argues that it is not cultural, racial, or economic factors that contribute to the rise and fall of civilizations (specifically, in Chapter 18: "Hemispheres Colliding" the colonization of the Native Americans by the Europeans), but instead purely geographic factors: "the striking differences between... peoples... [are] due not to innate differences in the people themselves but to differences in their environments." (Diamond, 1997, p. 405) Primarily, it appears that this is a well-warranted rebuke against arguments of racial superiority, but his points are, in many cases, questionable. For one, a logical continuation of his ideas yields that certain groups of people have no control over their inherent weakness and are *destined* to become enslaved, which many could argue is racist in itself. It seems foolhardy to disregard culture – an aspect not, like many may suggest, tied to race – as an important factor in the dynamics of societies. It is important to acknowledge culture in the sense of general thought and the political state; this makes it fluid across time regardless of inherent attributes of peoples. For example, Diamond attributes the historical decline of China, given its large technological lead, to "one decision [that] stopped fleets over the whole of China." (Diamond, 1997, p. 412); this one decision was the result of a fundamentally political (and hence, cultural) internal dispute. Throughout history it seems that culture, among other factors, is a fundamental role in the success of states. It should be noted, however, that the development of culture arguably *can* be tied to geographical factors; hence,

from this, two acceptable theses emerge: a) success of societies is determined by culture, geography, and other factors; and b) the success of societies is determined purely by geography in that culture and other auxiliary factors are dependent, at a root-level, on environment.