

# LDST 306: Sex, Leadership, and the Evolution of Human Societies

## FALL 2023

<b>TIME:</b>	Mon, Wed 9:00-10:15am
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Jepson Hall 102
<b>WEBSITE:</b>	<a href="https://blackboard.richmond.edu">https://blackboard.richmond.edu</a>
<b>INSTRUCTOR:</b>	Dr. Chris von Rueden
<b>EMAIL:</b>	<a href="mailto:cvonrued@richmond.edu">cvonrued@richmond.edu</a>
<b>OFFICE:</b>	Jepson Hall 235
<b>OFFICE HOURS:</b>	Tues/Thurs 10:30am-12:00pm Or by appointment at a different time

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### **Course Description:**

In this course, we will study how biological and cultural evolution broadly shaped human societies. More specifically, students will investigate why human societies differ from other animal societies, and why leadership and political organization vary across human societies. Some of the questions we consider include: Why do we form families? Why are we prone to adopting leader and follower roles? How are human politics similar to or different from chimpanzee and bonobo politics? Are there any human societies that lack leadership? Are there societies in which, on average, women wield more power than men? Why are some human societies more hierarchical than others? The goal of the course is not only to expose students to the diversity of political organization in humans and other animals but also to stimulate them to think critically about the ultimate causes of human social behavior in general.

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### **Course Format:**

Class time will consist of a mix of lecture and discussion. Lecture and discussion will build off **assigned readings, which must be completed BEFORE the day they are listed** (see Class Schedule below). Readings are available on the class website or in links provided. Readings include several chapters from the following two books (though it is not required you get copies of them):

- Boyer, P. (2018). *Minds Make Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Turchin, P. (2015). *Ultrasociety: How 10,000 Years of War Made Humans the Greatest Cooperators on Earth*. Chaplin, CT: Beresta Books.

I ask that you not leave during class-time unless you are in physical discomfort. **Use the bathrooms before you arrive to class.**

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**How you will be graded:**

1. **Quizzes** (15% of grade)

**By 9am of each class day**, you will take a short quiz (on Blackboard) on the readings assigned for that class day. Quizzes are open-book and can be completed with the assistance of other students currently in the class. Quizzes become available online at the end of the previous class. The quizzes will consist of multiple choice or short answer questions. You will have 30 minutes to complete each quiz, and you **must complete each quiz in one sitting**. You are not able to attempt the same quiz more than once. At the end of the semester, **you may drop your 3 lowest quiz grades**. Missed quizzes (for any reason) count towards the 3 you may drop.

2. **Discussion** (15% of grade)

Your discussion grade will depend on you attending classes on time, participating in discussions on most class days, not leaving to use the bathroom during every class, and presenting on readings and your final paper when scheduled to do so. Students will present on readings earlier in the semester and again later in the semester, according to their presentation number (see bolded numbers following most readings in the Reading Assignments section).

Sign up for your presentation number here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/12WnqnDp3o0sicLooq7Ngu\\_oOSuR8kZer55kenX49Uew/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/12WnqnDp3o0sicLooq7Ngu_oOSuR8kZer55kenX49Uew/edit?usp=sharing)

Requirements of presenters:

- identify and explain main points of the reading
- connect to material we've previously discussed in class
- prepare at least two questions to ask class members; these questions may seek clarification on aspects of the reading or address something unexplained by the reading

Presentations should last **5-10 minutes**. Presentation software is not required. You can contact me before you are due to present if you want guidance, but don't feel like you need to be an expert. I will not grade the accuracy of the presentations per se, but the effort you put into them will factor into your discussion grade.

### 3. Midterm Exam (25% of grade)

The midterm exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions having you compare and contrast material we've read and discussed.

### 4. Final Paper (20% of grade)

Over the semester, you will work in **groups of two-three** to complete an assessment of a society that suffered collapse. Your options are the following:

- Catalhoyuk (collapsed ~8500 BP)
- Akkadians (collapsed ~4200 BP)
- Mycenaeans (collapsed ~3200 BP)
- Hittites (collapsed ~3200 BP)
- New Kingdom of Egypt (collapsed ~3100 BP)
- Tiwanaku (collapsed ~1000 BP)
- Anasazi (collapsed ~750 BP)
- Angkor Wat (collapsed ~600 BP)
- Ming Dynasty (collapsed ~375 BP)

Based on your research and guided by theory we've discussed in class, you will write a paper that draws conclusions about the causes of the society's collapse. More specifically, **the paper should include the following content:**

- description of the economy and social organization, including leadership structure, at the society's height
- description of the society's collapse and its purported causes
- discussion of what societal leaders could have done differently to avert collapse
- discussion of relevance to modern world

The paper must cite readings from class and at least two readings not from the class reading list. Wikipedia and non-scholarly websites are not valid bibliographic sources for papers written in this class. In addition, you must **reference a work of art/artifact on display at the VMFA**, which has relevance for your chosen society and your thesis. The paper will be **graded based on the following criteria:**

- inclusion of the required content bulleted above
- clear and interesting thesis
- logical and well-organized defense of the thesis
- accurate use of sources from class and from own research
- incorporation of artwork from the VMFA

You are permitted to use generative AI for your final paper (generative AI includes tools such as ChatGPT, Bard, DALL-E, AlphaCode, Stable Diffusion, Synthesia, Cohere Generate, and other emerging technologies), subject to the following conditions:

- explain in the Methods section the prompts you used
- explain in the Methods section how you evaluated and edited the AI output
- cite your use of AI. See here for advice: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

The paper should include a minimum of 10 pages (double spaced, 12-point font) and be **structured into five sections**:

- (1) Title page
- (2) Introduction, in which you introduce the society and present your thesis
- (3) Body of the paper, in which you present your evidence
- (4) Conclusion, in which you summarize the evidence for your thesis, and discuss the implications for the modern world
- (5) References, in which you list your cited articles (in-text citations and the reference list should be in APA format: <https://www.mendeley.com/guides/apa-citation-guide>)

Two additional assignments (ungraded) will accompany your final paper: a peer review of your research partner, and informal presentations on your research to the class. Further details about the final paper will be provided throughout the semester, but key dates to remember are:

- Nov. 15 (by 9am on Blackboard): tentative thesis due
- Dec. 4/6: in-class presentations on your research
- Dec. 9 (by 10pm on Blackboard): final paper due

#### 5. **Final Exam** (25% of grade)

The final exam will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions having you compare and contrast material we've read and discussed. The final exam is cumulative but will emphasize the latter half of the course.

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#### **Notes:**

1. **COVID-19 Policy:** Masks are optional when in class. However, if you have any symptoms that may indicate COVID-19 (e.g. cough, sore throat, aches, unusual fatigue) do not come to class that day and get tested for COVID-19. I will help you make up the material you missed.

2. **Laptops/Phones:** computers, phones, and other electronic devices are **not allowed** during classtime (excepting a disability accommodation requiring use of a computer to take notes). Restriction of laptops in particular may present a challenge, but there are benefits: more robust classroom discussion and better retention of information through handwritten-notetaking.
3. **Awarding of Credit:** To be successful in this course, a student should expect to devote 10-14 hours each week, including class time and time spent on course-related activities.  
[registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html](http://registrar.richmond.edu/services/policies/academic-credit.html)
4. **Religious Accommodation:** Students should notify me within the first two weeks of classes if they will need accommodations for religious observance.  
[registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html](http://registrar.richmond.edu/planning/religiousobs.html)
5. **Disability Accommodation:** Students with a Disability Accommodation Notice should contact me as early in the semester as possible to discuss arrangements for completing course assignments and exams.  
[disability.richmond.edu](http://disability.richmond.edu)
6. **Plagiarism/Honor System:** When writing your final paper and when studying for and taking the exams, be aware of the provisions of the Honor System:

“I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work.”

This means that no student is to use, rely on, or turn in work that was paid-for, copied, excessively summarized without citation, created in collaboration (without permission), or is otherwise not the original work of the student for the specific assignment. Unauthorized assistance also includes consulting tests provided by students from past classes. You **can use generative AI, but only for the final paper and per the restrictions detailed in the final paper requirements.**

[studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html](http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html)

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### **Campus Resources:**

If you experience difficulties in this course, do not hesitate to consult with me. There are also other resources that can support you in your efforts to meet course requirements.

**Academic Skills Center** ([asc.richmond.edu](http://asc.richmond.edu)): Academic coaches assist students in assessing and developing their academic and life-skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, etc.). Peer tutors offer assistance in specific subject areas (e.g., calculus, chemistry, accounting, etc.) and will be available for appointments in-person and virtually. Peer tutors are listed on the ASC website. Email [Roger Mancastroppa \(rmancast@richmond.edu\)](mailto:rmancast@richmond.edu) and [Hope Walton \(hwatson@richmond.edu\)](mailto:hwatson@richmond.edu) for coaching appointments in academic and life skills.

**Boatwright Library Research Librarians:** ([library.richmond.edu/help/ask/](http://library.richmond.edu/help/ask/) or 289-8876): Research librarians help students with all steps of their research, from identifying or narrowing a topic, to locating, accessing, evaluating, and citing information resources. Librarians support students in their classes across the curriculum

and provide individual appointments, class library instruction, tutorials, and [research guides](#) ([libguides.richmond.edu](#)). Students can [contact an individual librarian](#) ([library.richmond.edu/help/liaison-librarians.html](#)) or ASK a librarian for help via email ([library@richmond.edu](mailto:library@richmond.edu)), text (804-277-9ASK), or [chat](#) ([library.richmond.edu/chat.html](#)).

**Career Services:** ([careerservices.richmond.edu](#) or 289-8547): Can assist you in exploring your interests and abilities, choosing a major or course of study, connecting with internships and jobs, and investigating graduate and professional school options. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a career advisor early in your time at UR.

**Counseling and Psychological Services:** ([caps.richmond.edu](#) or 289-8119): Assists currently enrolled, full-time, degree-seeking students in improving their mental health and well-being, and in handling challenges that may impede their growth and development. Services include brief consultations, short-term counseling, skills-building classes, therapy groups, crisis intervention, psychiatric consultation, and related services.

**Disability Services:** ([disability.richmond.edu](#)): The Office of Disability Services works to ensure that qualified students with a disability (whether incoming or current) are provided with reasonable accommodations that enable students to participate fully in activities, programs, services and benefits provided to all students. Please let your professors know as soon as possible if you have an accommodation that requires academic coordination and planning.

**Speech Center:** ([speech.richmond.edu](#) or 287-6409): Assists with preparation and practice in the pursuit of excellence in public expression. Recording, playback, coaching and critique sessions are offered by teams of trained student consultants. During scheduled [appointments](#), consultants assist in developing ideas, arranging key points for more effective organization, improving style and delivery, and handling multimedia aids for individual and group presentations. We look forward to meeting your public speaking needs.

**Writing Center** ([writing.richmond.edu](#) or 289-8263): Assists writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Students can schedule appointments with trained writing consultants who offer friendly critiques of written work.

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## **Class Schedule and Reading Assignments**

### **Aug 28 Chimpanzee and Bonobo societies**

- Watch Episodes 1 and 2 of *Chimp Empire* on Netflix
- Pusey, A. (2022). Warlike chimpanzees and peacemaking bonobos. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 119, e2208865119.

### **Aug 30 Ancestral Hominins**

- Watch *Unknown: Cave of Bones* on Netflix
- Gorvett, Z. (Jan. 13, 2021). Here's what we know sex with Neanderthals was like. *Best of BBC Future*: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210112-heres-what-sex-with-neanderthals-was-like>

### **Sep 4 Race and Ethnicity**

- Goodman, A. (March 13, 2020). Race is real, but it's not genetic. *Sapiens*. <https://www.sapiens.org/biology/is-race-real/>
- Moya, C. (Aug. 4, 2016). Why chimpanzees don't stereotype, we do, and whales might. *This View of Life*: <https://thisviewoflife.com/why-chimpanzees-dont-stereotype-we-do-and-whales-might/>

Sep 6      **Group Conflict**

- Boyer, pp. 33-65.

Sep 11      **Social Learning and Intelligence**

- Henrich, J. & Muthukrishna, M. (2023). What makes us smart? *Topics in Cognitive Science*. **1**

Sep 13      **Social Learning and Intelligence (continued)**

- Boyer, pp. 66-92. **2**

Sep 18      **Mating and Marriage**

- Boyer, pp. 125-149. **3**
- Singh, M. (Mar 31, 2020). Is marriage over? *Aeon*: <https://aeon.co/essays/marriage-is-dead-long-live-marriage-how-will-we-couple-up>
- In-Class Debate: should the state incentivize marriage?

Sep 20      **Cooperation**

- Boyer, pp. 163-186. **4**
- Play game at: <http://ncase.me/trust/>

Sep 25      **Leadership**

- King, A., Johnson, D. and van Vugt, M. (2009). The origins and evolution of leadership. *Current Biology*, 19, R911-R916. **5**

Sep 27      **Gender and Leadership**

- Benenson, J. & Abadzi, H. (2020). Contest versus scramble competition: sex differences in the quest for status. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 33, 62-68. **6**
- Boyer, pp. 150-162.

Oct 2            **Gender and Leadership (continued)**

- Rodseth, L. (2012). From bachelor threat to fraternal security: male associations and modular organization in human societies. *International Journal of Primatology*, 33, 1194-1214. **7**
- Robinson, A. & Gottlieb, J. (2019). How to close the gender gap in political participation: lessons from matrilineal societies in Africa. *British Journal of Political Science*, 51, 68-92. **8**

Oct 4            **Origins of Egalitarianism**

- Boehm, C. (2000). Conflict and the evolution of social control. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7, 79-101. **9**
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Oct 9            **Introduce Group Projects / Review for MIDTERM EXAM**

Oct 11           **MIDTERM EXAM** (in the classroom, on Blackboard)

Oct 16           **NO CLASS** (fall break)

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Oct 18           **Egalitarian Societies**

- Lewis, J. (2014). Pygmy hunter-gatherer egalitarian social organization: the case of the Mbendjele BaYaka. From *Congo Basin Hunter-Gatherers* (pp. 219-244). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. **10**
- Venkataraman, V. (Mar. 2, 2023). Lessons from the foragers. *Aeon*: <https://aeon.co/essays/what-hunter-gatherers-demonstrate-about-work-and-satisfaction> **11**

Oct 23           **In-Class Film: N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman**

Oct 25           **Transitions to Political Inequality: Wealth Accumulation**

- Cashdan, E. (1980). Egalitarianism among hunters and gatherers. *American Anthropologist*, 82(1), 116-120. **12**

Oct 30           **Transitions to Political Inequality: Aggrandizers and Patrons**

- Hayden, B. (2021). Foragers or feasters: inequalities in the Upper Paleolithic. *Paleo*, 36-49. **1**



- Smith, E. & Coddig, B. (2021). Ecological variation and institutionalized inequality in hunter-gatherer societies. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 118, e2016134118. **2**

Nov 1      **In-Class Film: Ongka's Big Moka**

Nov 6      **Transitions to Political Inequality: Managerial Mutualism**

- Carneiro, R. (2000). The transition from quantity to quality: a neglected causal mechanism in accounting for social evolution. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*, 97, 12926-12931. **3**
- Fukuyama, F. (2011). Tribal societies: property, justice, war. From *The Origins of Political Order* (pp. 64-79). New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. **4**

Nov 8      **Cultural Evolution of States**

- Turchin, pp. 1-22. **5**

Nov 13     **Cultural Evolution of States (continued)**

- Turchin, pp. 131-180. **6**

Nov 15     **The Axial Age**

- Turchin, pp. 181-209. **7**
- In-Class Debate: Do human societies benefit from religion?
- Final paper thesis due (on Blackboard)

Nov 20     **NO CLASS** (Thanksgiving break)

Nov 22     **NO CLASS** (Thanksgiving break)

Nov 27     **Origins of Democracy**

- Wade, L. (2017). Unearthing democracy's roots. *Science*, 355, 1114-1118. **8**
- Shulevitz, J. (Oct, 2020). A new theory of Western civilization. *The Atlantic*: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/10/joseph-henrich-weird-people/615496/> **9**

Nov 29     **Modern Politics**

- Boyer, pp. 186-202, 237-244. **10**

Dec 4            **The Future of Human Societies / Paper presentations**

- MacAskill, W. (Sep/Oct, 2022). The beginning of history. *Foreign Affairs*:  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/world/william-macaskill-beginning-history> **11**  
**11, 12**

Dec 6            **Paper presentations / Review for FINAL EXAM**

Dec 9            **FINAL PAPER due** (by 10pm, on Blackboard)

Dec 11          **FINAL EXAM** (9am-12pm, in the classroom, on Blackboard)