

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

## FALL 2024

**TIME:** Tues, Thu 10:30-11:45am  
**LOCATION:** Jepson Hall 103B  
**WEBSITE:** <https://blackboard.richmond.edu>

**INSTRUCTOR:** Dr. Chris von Rueden  
**EMAIL:** [cvonrued@richmond.edu](mailto:cvonrued@richmond.edu)  
**OFFICE:** Jepson Hall 235  
**OFFICE HOURS:** Fri 9:00am-12:00pm  
Or by appointment at a different time

**ZOOM:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84575502410?pwd=K2E3N2NnZGxVaHpOaU9TVnArbStlQT094wLYKJ> (password)

---

### **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 politics in other ape societies? 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.

---

### **Course Format:**

Most classes 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 and Assignments section 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.

**By 10:30am of the majority of class days, you must also complete a quiz (on Blackboard)** on the readings assigned for that class day. During classtime, I strongly encourage you to comment, ask a question, or provoke discussion at any time. Recent lecture slides will become available on Blackboard as a powerpoint file. I ask that you not leave during class-time unless you are in physical discomfort. **Use the bathrooms before you arrive to class.**

---

### **How you will be graded:**

#### 1. **Quizzes** (20% of grade)

**By 10:30am of the majority of class days** (see Class Schedule and Assignments section), 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 2 lowest quiz grades**. Missed quizzes (for any reason) count towards the 2 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 class, attending Jepson Forum talks (unless you notify me of an outstanding commitment; see Class Schedule and Assignments section of the syllabus), submitting the occasional written reflection, and presenting on readings and your final paper when scheduled to do so. **You may miss 3 classes (for any reason, including illness) without a penalty.**

Students will present on readings according to their presentation number (see bolded numbers following most readings in the Class Schedule and Assignments section). Sign up for your presentation number here:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zLINhdix7akoxGm6QCbt18MgO2y2TsQila\\_GNB2Jmk/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1zLINhdix7akoxGm6QCbt18MgO2y2TsQila_GNB2Jmk/edit?usp=sharing)

Some class days you will read more than one article, but you are only to present on the article after which your number is listed. **If your number is listed first, you are to:**

- briefly identify and explain the main points of the reading
- prepare two questions to ask class members, that ask for clarification on some aspect of the reading or address something unexplained by the reading

**If your number is listed second**, you are to:

- compare and contrast the reading with material you've previously encountered in class
- prepare two questions to ask class members, that connect the reading to current issues or events

**Each presentation should last between 5-10 minutes**, including your leading of discussion surrounding your prepared questions. Also, use online presentation software (paste your presentation link to the presentation sign-up google doc **before the start of class, and make sure you make the link publicly available**). 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.

In general, written reflections and reading presentations will be graded on a three-point scale: didn't complete (0); minimal effort/thoughtfulness and incomplete (1); effortful/thoughtful and completed requirements (2).

### 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** to compare the modern United States with a smaller-scale society (prior to integration with Western, market-based societies). Your options are the following:

- Hadza (foragers, Tanzania)
- Batek (foragers, Malaysia)
- Tiwi (foragers, Australia)
- Martu (foragers, Australia)
- Inuit (foragers, Alaska/Canada)
- Agta (foragers, Philippines)
- Cheyenne (horticulturalists/foragers, United States)
- Puebloans (horticulturalists, United States)
- Yanomami (horticulturalists, Brazil/Venezuela)
- Enga (horticulturalists, New Guinea)
- Tsimane (horticulturalists, Bolivia)

- Mundurucu (horticulturalists, Brazil)
- Turkana (pastoralists, Kenya)
- Himba (pastoralists, Namibia)
- Tuareg (pastoralists, northern Africa)
- Mosuo (agriculturalists, China)

Based on your research and guided by theory we've discussed in class, you will focus your comparison on **one** of the following topics:

- women's leadership beyond the household
- role of religion in politics
- how serious conflicts (e.g. murder) are resolved
- how wealth is distributed

More than just a description of the similarities/differences between the two societies, your paper should defend a thesis that makes an argument about **WHY** the societies are similar or different. The paper must cite **at least two 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. The paper will be **graded based on the following criteria**:

- clear and interesting thesis that is appropriate to the assignment
- logical and well-organized defense of the thesis
- thoughtfulness and originality of your arguments
- accurate use of sources

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:

- create an **Appendix A** in which you describe both the software and prompts you used
- create an **Appendix B** in which you copy the initial AI output **interspersed with your detailed comments** about how you (1) edited and (2) verified for accuracy the AI output
- cite your use of AI in the main text. See here for advice:  
<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

The paper (excluding any Appendices) should include a minimum of 7 pages (double spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins) and be **structured into four sections**:

- (1) Introduction, in which you introduce the small-scale society and present your thesis

- (2) Body of the paper, in which you defend your thesis by describing the small-scale society in more detail - in comparison with the United States – and discussing relevant theory from class
- (3) Conclusion, in which you summarize the evidence for your thesis, and discuss what lessons your comparison may have
- (4) 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 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. 19 (by 9am on Blackboard): tentative thesis due
- Dec. 3/5: in-class presentations on your research
- Dec. 8 (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.

---

#### **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. **Electronic Devices:** laptop computers and phones are in general **not allowed** during classtime (excepting a disability accommodation requiring use of a laptop computer to take notes). You may use a tablet if it is kept flat on your desk/table, for purposes of notetaking or to refer to notes when presenting. On some occasions I may ask everyone to bring a laptop or tablet to class, if we have an activity planned that requires their use.
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 who are approved for academic accommodations must: 1) Submit their Disability Accommodation Notice (DAN) to me via the Disability Services Student Portal ([sl.richmond.edu/be](http://sl.richmond.edu/be)), and 2) Talk with me to create an accommodation implementation plan within the first two weeks of classes.
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 or quizzes 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 above.** [studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html](http://studentdevelopment.richmond.edu/student-handbook/honor/the-honor-code.html)

---

### **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.

**Weinstein Learning Center** (<https://wlc.richmond.edu/>):

- **Academic Skills Coaching** Meet with a professional staff member who will collaborate with you to assess and develop your academic and life skills (e.g., critical reading and thinking, information conceptualization, concentration, test preparation, time management, stress management, and more).
- **Content Tutoring** Peer consultants offer assistance in specific courses and subject areas. They are available for appointments (in-person and virtual) and drop-in sessions. See schedules at [wlc.richmond.edu](http://wlc.richmond.edu) for supported courses and drop-in times.
- **English Language Learning** Attend one-on-one or group consultations, workshops, and other services focused on English, academic, and/or intercultural skills.
- **Quantitative and Programming Resources** Peer consultants and professional staff offer workshops or one-on-one appointments to build quantitative and programming skills and provide statistical assistance for research projects.
- **Speech and Communication** Prepare and practice for academic presentations, speaking engagements, and other occasions of public expression. Peer consultants offer recording, playback, and coaching for both individual and group presentations. Students can expect recommendations regarding clarity, organization, style, and delivery.
- **Technology Learning** Visit our student lab dedicated to supporting digital media projects. Services include camera checkout, video/audio recording assistance, use of virtual reality equipment, poster printing, 3D printing and modeling, and consultation services on a variety of software.
- **Writing** Assists student writers at all levels of experience, across all majors. Meet with peer consultants who can offer feedback on written work and suggest pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies.

**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](#)): Students who are experiencing a barrier to access due to a disability and/or temporary condition are encouraged to apply for accommodations. Disability Services can be reached at [disability@richmond.edu](mailto:disability@richmond.edu) or 804-662-5001.

---

## **Class Schedule and Assignments**

### **PART 1: HUMAN EVOLUTION**

- Aug 27      **NO CLASS**
- *Reading:* this Syllabus!
- Aug 29      **Ape Societies**
- *Viewing:* Episode 1 of *Chimp Empire* on Netflix  
<https://www.netflix.com/title/81311783>
  - *Viewing:* Episode 2 (“Rainforest Queens”) of *Queens*  
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/tv/episode/f7ffcba5-f303-4645-bf91-09231ecaf1d9/playlist/PL554408064>
- Sep 3      **Ancestral Hominids and Race**
- *Reading:* Longrich, N. (Mar. 26, 2024). Why did modern humans replace the Neanderthals? *The Conversation*.  
<https://theconversation.com/why-did-modern-humans-replace-the-neanderthals-the-key-might-lie-in-our-social-structures-195056>
  - *Reading:* Goodman, A. (March 13, 2020). Race is real, but it’s not genetic. *Sapiens*. <https://www.sapiens.org/biology/is-race-real/>
  - *Quiz*

### **PART 2: BUILDING BLOCKS OF HUMAN SOCIETIES**

- Sep 5           **Coalitions and Group Violence**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pg. 33-65. **1, 2**
  - *Quiz*
- Sep 10           **Social Learning and Intelligence**
- *Reading:* Henrich, J. & Muthukrishna, M. (2023). What makes us smart? *Topics in Cognitive Science*. **3, 4**
  - *Quiz*
- Sep 12           **Social Learning and Intelligence (continued)**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pg. 66-92. **5, 6**
  - *Quiz*
  - *Attend:* Jepson Leadership Forum, 5pm, Queally Center:  
<https://jepson.richmond.edu/signature-programs/forum/index.html>
- Sep 17           **Religion**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pg. 93-124. **7, 8**
  - *Written Reflection:* religious experience (see Blackboard for instructions and to submit)
- Sep 19           **Mating and Marriage**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pg. 125-149. **9, 10**
  - *Reading:* Singh, M. (Mar 31, 2020). Is marriage over? *Aeon*:  
<https://aeon.co/essays/marriage-is-dead-long-live-marriage-how-will-we-couple-up>
  - *Quiz*
- Sep 24           **In-class game (bring laptop)**
- Sep 26           **Cooperation**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pg. 163-186. **11, 12**
  - *Viewing:* <http://ncase.me/trust/>
  - *Quiz*
- Oct 1            **Leadership**
- *Reading:* King, A., Johnson, D. and van Vugt, M. (2009). The origins and evolution of leadership. *Current Biology*. **13, 14**
  - *Quiz*
  - *Attend:* Jepson Leadership Forum, 7pm, Queally Center:  
<https://jepson.richmond.edu/signature-programs/forum/index.html>
- Oct 3            **Gender and Leadership**



- *Reading:* Benenson, J. & Abadzi, H. (2020). Contest versus scramble competition: sex differences in the quest for status. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. **15, 16**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pp. 150-162.
- *Written Reflection:* gender differences in competition (see Blackboard for instructions and to submit)

Oct 8 **Introduce Group Projects / Review for MIDTERM EXAM**

Oct 10 **MIDTERM EXAM (in the classroom, on Blackboard)**

Oct 15 **NO CLASS**

### **PART 3: ORIGINS OF POLITICAL INEQUALITY**

Oct 17 **Egalitarianism**

- *Reading:* Boehm, C. (2000). Conflict and the evolution of social control. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*. **17**
- *Quiz*

Oct 22 **Egalitarian Societies**

- *Reading:* Venkataraman, V. (July 15, 2024). The Ju/'hoansi protocol. *Aeon*: <https://aeon.co/essays/what-the-ju-hoansi-can-tell-us-about-group-decision-making>
- *Reading:* Lewis, J. (2014). Pygmy hunter-gatherer egalitarian social organization: the case of the Mbendjele BaYaka. From *Congo Basin Hunter-Gatherers*. **2, 1**
- *Written Reflection:* status-signaling and status-leveling (see Blackboard for instructions and to submit)
- *In-Class Viewing:* [The Meat Fight](#)

Oct 24 **NO CLASS**

- *Reading:* Cashdan, E. (1980). Egalitarianism among hunters and gatherers. *American Anthropologist*.
- *Quiz*

Oct 29 **Aggrandizers and Patrons**

- *Reading:* Smith, E. & Coddling, B. (2021). Ecological variation and institutionalized inequality in hunter-gatherer societies. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA*.
- *Reading:* Hayden, B. (2021). Foragers or feasters? Inequalities in the Upper Paleolithic. *Paleo*. **4, 3**

- Quiz

Oct 31

### **Fraternal Security**

- *Reading:* Rodseth, L. (2012). From bachelor threat to fraternal security: male associations and modular organization in human societies. *International Journal of Primatology*. **6, 5**
- Quiz
- *In-Class Viewing:* Ongka's Big Moka

Nov 5

### **Managerial Mutualism**

- *Reading:* 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*.
- *Reading:* Fukuyama, F. (2011). Tribal societies: property, justice, war. From *The Origins of Political Order* (pp. 64-79). **8, 7**
- Quiz

## **PART 4: STATES**

Nov 7

### **The Rise of God-Kings**

- *Reading:* Turchin, pg. 1-22 and 131-147. **10, 9**
- Quiz

Nov 12

### **The Iron Law of Oligarchy**

- *Reading:* Turchin, pg. 149-180. **12, 11**
- Quiz

Nov 14

### **The Axial Age**

- *Reading:* Turchin, pg. 181-209. **14, 13**
- Quiz

Nov 19

### **Patriliney, Primogeniture, and Patriarchy**

- *Reading:* Boone, J. (1986). Parental investment and elite family structure in preindustrial states: a case study of late Medieval-early Modern Portuguese genealogies. *American Anthropologist*. **16, 15**
- Quiz
- *Submit:* Final paper thesis (on Blackboard)
- *Attend:* Jepson Leadership Forum, 7pm, Queally Center:  
<https://jepson.richmond.edu/signature-programs/forum/index.html>

## **PART 5: DEMOCRACY AND MODERN POLITICS**

- Nov 21      **Origins of Democracy**
- *Reading:* Wade, L. (2017). Unearthing democracy's roots. *Science*. **17**
  - *Reading:* 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/>
  - *Quiz*
- Nov 26      **Political Polarization**
- *Reading:* Boyer, pg. 186-202, 237-244.
  - *Reading:* (Mar 13, 2024). Why young men and women are drifting apart. *The Economist*.  
<https://www.economist.com/international/2024/03/13/why-the-growing-gulf-between-young-men-and-women>
  - *Quiz*
- Nov 28      **NO CLASS**
- Dec 3        **The Future of Democracy / Group Presentations**
- *Reading:* Acemoglu, D. (Jul/Aug 2023). The end of democratic capitalism? How inequality and insecurity fueled a crisis in the West. *Foreign Affairs*.  
<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/end-democratic-capitalism>
- Dec 5        **Group Presentations / Review for FINAL EXAM**
- Dec 8        **FINAL PAPER due** (by 10pm, on Blackboard)
- Dec 10      **FINAL EXAM** (2pm-5pm, in the classroom, on Blackboard)