

## **The Fates of Nations: A Biological Theory of History – Paul Colinvaux**

In this book, Paul Colinvaux develops an interesting ecological theory - which I try to summarize in the next paragraph – that he then uses to explain the rise and fall of the Greek and Roman empire, the success of the mongol empire under Genghis Khan, the colonization of America by Europeans, the independence of the US from Europe and the empire-building endeavors of the various European nations. Finally, he uses his theory to make some projections for the future.

The ecological theory he has developed is not hard to understand. Its implications are far reaching so you may sometimes have to think a bit through but that is what makes it interesting. Once I saw the obvious relation between his theory and the social developments it explains I realized the power of this theory. Basically he applies two ecologic concepts known as the 'breeding strategy' and 'niches' onto the human species to explain why every society has to undergo the problems associated with growth and decay. The breeding strategy tells us that animals will always try to have as many offspring as the parents can provide for. The many evils of human history are a direct result of this primitive breeding strategy and as long as humans do not change their breeding strategy our species will continue to have hard times. Niches are the available 'slots' nature has available to harbor its many creatures, the numbers of niches give us an idea of the carrying capacity of a certain ecological system (it doesn't make it sustainable but makes it temporarily stable). The niches and the breeding strategy must be in balance. For example, the large technical evolution of the last century created many new niches in society which were filled up by the exploding human population in that same period of time. If the balance is gone, problems arise. If the population rises but the number of available niches remains constant poverty and decay start to appear.

He for example concludes that social oppression is an inevitable consequence of a continuous rising population. Crowding suppresses individual freedom and creates an enormous pressure on the available niches. This means that society will have to develop means to control this situation and a caste system, trade, colonization and empire building are all means of a society to comply to the rule of balance between the available niches and the breeding strategy. These 'fixes' are not sustainable and mostly not humane. Other conclusions made during this book such as 'all expansion causes bureaucracy' and 'aggressive war is caused by the continued growth of population in a relatively rich society' are all logic consequences of this ecological theory. The more stress on the niches and the less 'freedom of movement' individuals have means more social control and an increasing growing policing force to keep the masses under control. It also means less available resources and possibilities per individual so concluding that 'all poverty is caused by the continued growth of population' appears to be obvious and convincing to me. You might think that today's complex socioeconomic system has fixed these 'primitive' problems but don't be fooled, the underlying mechanisms are still based on the very ecological principles explained in this book, it must be because it is science (it is universally applicable). We can only delay the symptoms.

I really liked this book because it confirmed my assumption that overpopulation is the main cause of all evil developments in human history. It has caused imperialism, colonization, social suppression, 'hardcore' economic systems such as capitalism and many other things that continuously limit our potential and deplete our spirits. Now my assumption is backed by a very simple but powerful ecological theory and it certainly has increased my interest in ecology and its effects on society. From now on, I will take a look into Paul Colinvaux's other books. The last chapter – where he makes projections about the future - might be the least convincing part, but keep in mind that this book is more than 30 years old. For example, he emphasizes the danger of nuclear war which was an hot topic back then (it might still become a reality though). It would be nice to see a new edition of this book appear on the market (with perhaps an updated finale), the topic and theory is timeless and today's people need to read this kind of stuff. It tells us why a simple tweak in our primitive breeding strategy can make us so much better, a simple solution to what people like to call a very complex problem.