**GEOGRAPHY 107 HUMAN DIETS**

In this unit we will look at that ever important cultural subject: food. This is a hugely significant topic for a number of reasons:

1) What could be more important in our livelihood than food?  Fundamental in what we learned in Guns, Germs, and Steel--our ability to produce our food in surplus led to early societal development and complexity, and eventually, the regions that got ahead in the world (and for the most part, are still ahead).

2) As our diets change, so do we.  With our bodies, our brains, our health, our social relations, our relationship with the larger environments we live in -- it all connects with food.

3) As regions transitioned from hunting and gathering to food production, it didn't necessarily mean that we were all better fed and healthier, as we learned with Diamond.  And with the more recent rise in the so-called Western Diets, we have seen more chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers.  The most recent manifestation of this process, the rise of obesity and diabetes, has been sharp and pervasive in upper and middle income countries.  Why?

So we will look at what has been going on, particularly since about World War II, with what, and how much, we eat.  (there are other factors that affect our health too, of course).  Our goal is to try to identify the factors that have led to us eating in increasingly unhealthy ways.  We will be working to develop a framework of explanation to get at the **proximate** and especially the **ultimate factors** driving the bad health outcomes that we are seeing today.  So in a sense we are going to develop a model sort of like we saw on page 87 of Guns, Germs, and Steel.  It will have text boxes, arrows, and so on.  While I will guide you all a bit in this process, I am hoping that after seeing how such a model of causation can be developed for Guns, Germs, and Steel - you will be able to do something similar to answer the basic question:

***Why are we developing more chronic disease problems in urban societies throughout much of the world?***

Only if we can identify the ultimate (root) causes of these changes do we have much hope to take the actions necessary to stay on track with the ever upward climb in life expectancy that has been happening for over a century.  If we allow ourselves to only look at proximate factors, our efforts to reverse the recent trends will likely meet only limited success.  As such then, since we are looking for ultimate (root) causes, we are looking for radical explanations and actions.  Such actions go against the grain and challenge the current political-economic order.