

Chapter 8: There is No Justice in History

Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind • Yuval Noah Harari

Part 2: Caste & Hierarchy

1 The Vicious Circle of Hierarchy

- ✓ Every complex society in history has organized its population into hierarchical castes, classes, or racial tiers, falsely claiming these divisions are divinely ordained or natural laws.
- ✓ Social hierarchies originate from chance historical accidents (such as military conquest or economic shifts), which are then justified by newly invented myths and cemented by laws.
- ✓ In the American colonies, European settlers brought African slaves due to geographic proximity and slave-market availability, later inventing racial myths claiming Black people were biologically inferior to justify eternal bondage.



Apartheid restriction sign: racial segregation justified through fabricated biological hierarchies.

2 Purity and Pollution: The Disgust Reflex

- ✓ Ruling castes routinely maintain social barriers and prevent intermarriage by exploiting the biological human reflex of disgust, labeling lower castes as "polluted" or "diseased."
- ✓ By framing social status as a matter of hygiene, aristocrats make the oppression of lower classes feel like a necessary defense against physical contamination.
- ✓ In the traditional Hindu caste system, Dalits ("Untouchables") were forbidden from drinking from common village wells or entering upper-caste homes out of fear that their physical contact would transmit ritual pollution.

3 "Biology Enables, Culture Forbids"

- ✓ Whenever people claim a social behavior is "unnatural," they are confusing biology with cultural taboos; biology allows whatever is physically possible, while culture defines what is permissible.
- ✓ From a biological standpoint, nothing that exists can be unnatural—evolution has no sense of sin, and human nature encompasses all physically achievable behaviors.
- ✓ Modern legal arguments historically branded homosexuality as "unnatural," yet thousands of mammalian species engage in homosexual behavior, proving the objection was a cultural judgment rather than a biological rule.

Chapter 8: There is No Justice in History

Part 2: Gender, Patriarchy & Summary

Part 2: Patriarchy & Summary

4 The Unsolved Riddle of Patriarchy

- ✓ Across almost every human agricultural society in history, men held dominant political, legal, and economic power over women, yet none of the common biological theories fully explain why.
- ✓ The "Muscle Power" theory fails because women have higher endurance and pain tolerance, and historical rulers rarely ruled through raw physical strength; the most powerful men were often elderly monarchs who never fought.
- ✓ In ancient Greece, Athens celebrated democracy and philosophy, yet women had zero voting rights, could not own property, and were legally treated as minors under the control of their fathers or husbands.

5 Gender as Cultural Performance

- ✓ Biological sex (male and female) is determined by chromosomes and biology, but gender (masculine and feminine) is an artificial cultural performance that changes dramatically over time.
- ✓ What one society considers the height of masculine power, another society views as absurdly effeminate.
- ✓ King Louis XIV of France wore powdered wigs, silk stockings, high-heeled shoes, and bright makeup as the ultimate symbol of imperial manhood, whereas modern presidents like Barack Obama signal masculine authority through dark suits, short hair, and athletic restraint.



Louis XIV vs. Obama: how cultural ideals of masculine authority transform across eras.

Chapter Summary

- ✓ Human societies have universally organized themselves into hierarchical ranks and caste systems, falsely justifying historical accidents as divine or biological truths.
- ✓ Elites entrench social divisions by weaponizing the instinct of disgust, labeling subordinate classes as "polluted" to prevent social mixing and intermarriage.
- ✓ The concept of the "unnatural" is a cultural weapon; from a biological standpoint, whatever is physically possible is natural, while cultural taboos dictate what is socially allowed.
- ✓ Gender roles are dynamic cultural scripts rather than fixed biological realities, demonstrated by how definitions of masculinity and femininity have shifted radically throughout history.