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Robert D. Kaplan: The Ends of the Earth Study Guide, 2001-2003

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ROBERT D. KAPLAN: THE ENDS OF THE EARTH STUDY GUIDE, 2001-2003 Steven Alan Samson

PART I: WEST AFRICA: BACK TO THE DAWN?

CHAPTER ONE: AN UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

NOTE: Notice how Robert Kaplan's writing echoes some of the familiar motifs of literature – particularly the epic or the quest. This is his personal journey, like Marlow's in *The Heart of Darkness* or Dante's in *The Inferno*. The first chapter title refers to Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768).

Study Questions

1. **Introduction** Why is **tropical abundance** not the blessing many travelers believe? What brief moment marked by the Industrial Revolution may now be closing? What makes Africa the mother continent? What is wrong with maps, particularly those of Africa? What did *Claudius Ptolemy* caution against? [Certain maps, such as those of Arne Peters, offer a dramatic change of perspective]. What kind of “deep time” does the author seek to map? How does the author link history and geography? (3-7)
2. **Initial Hypothesis** What does the author mean by a **paradigm**? [The word was popularized by Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*]. What are some of the popular rationalizations for the present state of Africa? How had the author's theory been refined by the end of his journey? (7-9)
3. **Author's Purpose** Who lives inside Thomas F. Homer-Dixon's stretch limo? How have **African cities** changed since before independence (pre-1960)?
4. **Empirical Evidence** How does the population growth rate of Sub-Saharan Africa compare with the rest of the world? What are some of the causes and consequences? Why has foreign investment declined in many of these places? Why is crime less of a problem in Islamic North Africa than in West Africa, whether Islamic, Christian, or animist? Why is a new strain of malaria “on the offensive”? What is life like in the shantytowns and what threats do they pose? What percentage of Côte d'Ivoire's population originates from neighboring countries? What is the nature of the violence and warfare? (7-27)
5. **Reflections** Why, according to the Kaplan, was the forest partly to blame for the iniquities of humankind there? What role is played by the continuing influence of **animism**? Why has Sub-Saharan Africa been so isolated? How does the character of the violence reflect both the forest culture and its disintegration? (27-30)

Review

what makes it more difficult to control the spread of diseases paradigm
colonialism, corrupt elites, and other reasons for Africa's mess why malaria is spreading again
annual number of new cases of malaria new-age primitivism of the violence
when and why communication between West Africa and the Mediterranean world was severed

CHAPTER TWO: SIERRA LEONE: FROM GRAHAM GREENE TO THOMAS MALTHUS?

Study Questions

1. **Civil Fighting** What is the revenge of the poor? Why do young men become lost? Why do three factors – communalism, animism, and extended families – “provide a poor defense against the corrosive effects of cities,” etc.? What did Joseph Conrad try to show in *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”*? (32-36)
2. **OPTIONAL** Flight to Conakry, capital of Guinea only in the technical sense; hardwood logging; Arab mercantile community (classic “middleman minority”); immigration and customs; Africa’s several realities; feeling of isolation; dramatic city landscape of Freetown. (36-43)
3. **State of the Country** Who ran the government at the time (1994) of Kaplan’s visit? What does Kaplan mean by the government’s “premodern formlessness”? What does he see significant about such “low-intensity” conflagrations”? What are the signs of social and political breakdown amid the population displacement? Environmental degradation? What does the author mean by a **failed society** in the practical sense? How did the “brain drain” here differ from that in Israel, India, and other places? How did the Windward Coast get that designation? (44-47)
4. **History** What was John Newton’s connection with Sierra Leone? What was the origin of Freetown? What purpose did Sierra Leone serve after it became a British colony in 1808? Which groups have done well? (48-51)
5. **Hill Station Club** What is at the heart of Graham Greene’s *The Heart of the Matter*? How did colonialism persist at the Hill Station club? [Hill Stations were a British colonial institution: recreation areas at higher elevations that offered relief from the heat]. What is striking about the anecdote about the anti-cholera vaccine? What was the brutal message conveyed by the Peace Corps’ success in India but failure in Sierra Leone? (51-55)
6. **Michelle’s Dinner Party** Why was the Cold War Africa’s best opportunity? What can’t the West focus on until too late? What is significant about the closure of western embassies in parts of Africa? What makes a tiny country like Sierra Leone “vast”? (55-59)
7. **OPTIONAL** Roadblocks on the road to Bo; village; side effects of Western aid; vanishing forests. (60-63)
8. **Bo** Why does Kaplan live on Coca-Cola in the tropics? What is Jim Ashman’s take on the state of affairs in Sierra Leone? Why are things breaking down? Why does the African social system work against ambition? (64-67)
9. **OPTIONAL** Racial and social attitudes. (67-69)

Review

communalism

animism

extended family structure

“premodern formlessness” of West African battlefields

percentage of rain forest

ambitious, talented Sierra Leoneans
founding of Freetown
Lebanese merchants

“Creoles”
cultural differences

John Newton
middle class
village chief system

CHAPTER THREE: ALONG THE GULF OF GUINEA

Study Questions

1. **Togo** Why does Kaplan consider Togo less fact than fiction? How was colonialism at cross-purposes with demography and topography? How did Togo originate? In what ways did Kaplan choose to experience the “curse of the nation-state” first-hand? What was the real purpose of the border? How did Kaplan’s impressions of Accra differ from those of Lome? (70-74)
2. **OPTIONAL:** Sunrise Hotel; Kenny; hardwood forests; stealing of resources. (74-75)
3. **Jerry Rawlings** How could a newspaper editor get away with criticizing the leader of Ghana for trying to overthrow the government of Togo? How does he view the current situation in West Africa? (76-77)
4. **“Coast of Slaves”** Cape Coast Castle, Yaw Mensah, St. George’s Castle. What accounts for some of the attitude differences between American blacks and Africans? (76-81)
5. **Slave Trade** Compare the European with the inter-African slave trade and how they interacted. What effect did the European presence probably have in encouraging warfare? (81-82)
6. **Political Maps** How does cartography create facts on the ground? How was Africa artificially reconceived? What have been some of the unintended consequences of modern development (see footnote)? What was Ben Okri’s point? (83-84)
7. **OPTIONAL:** Westline Hotel; check points; Grand Bassam; United Nations program to eradicate onchocerciasis (river blindness). (85-88)

Review

colonial borders vs. population belts
compare (German) Togo with (British) Ghana
effects of slavery and the slave trade

late 19th century phase of European colonialism
African slavery and the European slave trade

PART II: THE NILE VALLEY: THE HOLLOW PYRAMID

CHAPTER FOUR: “ORIENTAL DESPOTISM”

Study Questions

1. **Aswan High Dam** Why did Kaplan consider the dam “the ultimate totalitarian aesthetic?” Compare its engineering sophistication with the Great Pyramid, then with the office building. (91-92)

2. **Oriental Despotism** How did **Karl Marx** account for the emergence of authoritarian government? What made **hydraulic society**, as **Karl Wittfogel** termed it, distinct from the feudal states of medieval Europe? What are some of the architectural characteristics Kaplan's "totalitarian aesthetic" – of hydraulic societies? How has Islam reinforced these cultural and architectural tendencies? What does Wittfogel's theory, for all its flaws, suggest about the "personality" of such systems? (92-95)
3. **Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley** Compare and contrast the system of basin irrigation with the more recent perennial irrigation regime. What new factors were set in motion with this change? How has the Aswan High Dam affected the larger ecosystem, such as the water table, salinization of the soil, and erosion of the coast line? What are the potential political consequences of growing resource scarcity, population increase, and subsequent engineering schemes? (96-100)

Review

Karl Marx	Karl Wittfogel	hydraulic society
oriental despotism	monumental architecture	personalities of tyrannies
basin vs. perennial irrigation	effects of the Aswan dam	salinization

CHAPTER FIVE: ISLAMIC COKETOWN

Study Questions

1. How do **Coptic Christians** compare with Muslims? Why would the government only privatize a bit? Who are the Copts? Why was **Gamaa Islamiya** shooting tourists? How has the observance of **Ramadan** changed in industrialized towns like Assiut? How do the **ahli** differ from the **houkoumi** mosques? What attracts urbanized peasants to Islamic extremism? (101-08)
2. What is **Ikhwan** (Muslim Brotherhood) and what role does it play in Egyptian life? How has it changed since its founding by **Hassan el-Banna**? What are some consequences of **Gamal Abdel Nasser's** land reforms? [**Latifundia** were the landed estates of the ancient Romans]. What sorts of problems beset the Nasserite state? [It should be noted that Egyptian presidents have been likened to and called pharaohs]. What are the characteristics of "Islamic" or "Koranic" speech? [Remember what Hosnani said about rote learning]. What is Prof. Dr. Habib's view of Jews, Israel, and those who negotiate with Israel? What "type" does he represent? (108-12)
3. Why is the situation of the Coptic minority so vulnerable? What are some characteristics of the architecture and layout of Coptic monasteries? What are some consequences of the failure of Arab nationalism? According to Jack Goldstone, what lies behind so many modern revolutions? (112-18)

Review

Coptic Christians in Egypt	<i>houkoumi</i> and <i>ahli</i> mosques	<i>latifundium</i> system
urban poverty and Islamic extremism	<i>Gamaa Islamiya</i>	
<i>Ikhwan</i>	Nasser's land reforms	Jack Goldstone on causes of revolution
results of the failure of Arab nationalism		

CHAPTER SIX: VOICES OF THE “TORMENTED CITY”

Study Questions

1. Who are the **zabaleen**? According to the diplomat, what group is most dangerous? Why? Why is **Hosni Mubarak** moving slowly toward privatization? Why was the diplomat so defensive? How would you characterize his view of the regime? (119-22)
2. Why did Mubarak’s advisor say that human rights is a joke? What did he think of the terrorists? The role of the CIA? How does Dr. Essam el-Erian’s regard the role of the West? What is his conception of moderate Islam? (122-23)
3. How has Alexandria changed from the day of Cavafy in 1914? What “gravitational force” does Thomas Homer-Dixon see emerging? What might happen to the state? What values, represented by Zia ul-Haq and Lee Kuan Yew, might be combined in the “new pharaohs?” What does the author mean by “corporate authoritarianism” and “socialist kleptocracy?” What is his more pessimistic scenario? (123-26)

Review

zabaleen
Lee Kuan Yew

Thomas Homer-Dixon
Zia ul-Haq

“new pharaohs”

PART III: ANATOLIA AND THE CAUCASUS: THE EARTH’S STRATEGIC CORE?

CHAPTER SEVEN: “THE STILL POINT OF THE TURNING WORLD”

Study Questions

1. What is Topkapi [Top Kapu Saray]? [It is also the title and setting of a 1964 caper comedy]. What is the double meaning (*double entendre*) of **Sublime Porte** [Babussade]? NOTE: The **sultan** was the Ottoman ruler; the **caliph** was a successor of Muhammad as the head of Islam. What makes “Seraglio Point” the “still point of the turning world?” [The church, now mosque, of Hagia Sophia is also located there]. How are Istanbul as a place and the early 21st century as a time linked by the theme of **nomadism**? What is important about the Anatolian peninsula (*Anadolu* = “mother lode”)? (129-31)
2. How do Naipaul and Kaplan characterize the “newly urbanized peasants” that live in shantytowns like Sultanbeyli? How do they establish an identity for themselves? What do the population trends show? How did Sultanbeyli originate? What are **gecekondus**? What sentiments does the Islamic “Welfare” party reflect? What is Altindag? How does it represent both the past and the future of Turkey? How do nomads differ from refugees? (131-37)
3. Who are the Turks? What has been their historic role? What was the Golden Horde of Genghis Khan and his successors? Why have the Russians been on the offensive against the **Tatars** since the 16th century? What made the cultural genius of nomadic

horsemen like the Magyars (Hungarians) and Finns evident? NOTE: The Hungarian kingdom became explicitly Christian a thousand years ago under King (later St.) Stephen, whose crown is a national symbol. What images are evoked by the romance of the court of the “Grand Turk”? [Think of “Turkish delight.” Edward Said is critical of this western fascination with *orientalism*]. How did Topkapi evolve? (137-39)

4. Who was **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk** and why does he enjoy such a favorable image in the West? How did he fashion a Turkish identity? What is Kemalism? What is Anit Kabir? How does the *turbe* of Turgut Ozal differ? What did Turgut Ozal represent? (139-41)

Review

Topkapi

stereotype of the Ottoman court

Sublime Porte

Kemal Atatürk

gecekondulular

Turgut Ozal

CHAPTER EIGHT: MOTHER LODE

Study Questions

1. What makes Anatolia the “mother lode”? What is the origin of the “turquoise” that obsessed the Seljuk Turks? [The color is also common to the glacial lakes of Canada’s Banff]. Who was **Rumi**? What is the **Sufism** he helped define? What did Ozal’s Sufism accomplish for religious Turks? (142-46)
2. [SKIP] What is the Hatay? Who are the Alawites? What is the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP)? Why could there be a Turkish century in this part of the world? How did this project differ from the Aswan High Dam? (146-54)
3. [SKIP] What is Kurdistan? How do Kurds differ from Turks? What makes Dogubayazit a third world town of the future? What is the Ishak Pasa Saray? [Local legend holds that Noah’s wife prepared a pudding there after the ark landed]. (154-62)

Review

Cellaledin Rumi

Sufism

CHAPTER NINE: BY CASPIAN SHORES

PART IV: THE IRANIAN PLATEAU: THE EARTH’S “SOFT CENTER”

CHAPTER TEN: A COUNTRY OF FLOWERS AND NIGHTINGALES

Study Questions

1. What is the **Hosseiniyeh**? What purposes does it serve? [Making “corruption egalitarian,” p. 179, is all very democratic but not what Frederic Bastiat recommended in *The Law*]. How did the martyrs’ cemetery reveal Persia, as opposed to revolutionary Iran? (175-80)

2. What is the place of women in Iranian society? How is it different is other Muslim countries? What is “subtle” about relations with the Azeri Turks? What factors help account for Iran’s low crime rate and how it differs from place like Iraq? What contrasts are evident in the Iranian character? (180-87)

Review

Hosseinieh
crime and civil society

Ayatollah Khomeini

status of women

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE REVOLUTION OF “THE HAND”

Study Questions

1. What are the Five Fingers of the Holy Mantle? What was the battle of Karbala? What is an *imam*? Identify four persistent themes that began a thousand years ago on the Iranian Plateau? How is the competition between Turkic-speakers and Persian-speakers reflected in Iranian political history? Why have the clerical regime turned out to be less repressive than the Shah’s? In what country are the chief Shi’ite sites? Why, according to Ryszard Kapuscinski, is the village the key to modernity? What were the weaknesses of the Pahlevi shahs? What undid their regime? (188-95)
2. How did the oil boom contribute to the shah’s downfall? What circumstances made foreign embassy compounds such an insult to Iranians? What was the significance to Iranians of the “Mosadeq episode?” (195-98)

Review

imam
oil boom and its consequences

umma
spheres of economic influence

persistent themes in history
Mohammed Mosadeq

CHAPTER TWELVE: BAZAAR STATES

Study Questions

1. Who is Mohsen Rafighdoost? What is the Bonyad Mostazafin? [See also pp. 204-06]. What is a *bazaar*? [Bazaar and souk are here used interchangeably]. Why are they a threatened class? What is the Egyptian Ikhwan’s relationship with the *bazaaris*? Why are the **Baha’is** persecuted in Iran? Characterize the unique symbiotic relationship between Iranian *bazaaris* and the *ulama*. How is Bonyad organized and for what purposes? What makes it a state within a state? What does its existence suggest about future economic and political trends? (199-208)
2. What are some of the evidences of social disintegration and economic stagnation? What are Iran’s two demands of the United States? What differences did Kaplan find between the *bazaaris* and the American-educated Iranians? What interest does Iran have in the unstable, often violent Caucasus and how is it at odds with Turkey? (208-14)

Review

Mohsen Rafighdoost

Bonyad Mostazafin

bazaaris

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: QOM'S LAST TREMORS

Study Questions

1. What is the historic and spiritual significance of Qom? What is distinctive about such holy cities? Why might one think that time had stopped? Why does Iran not seem to be a very religious country? (215-20)
2. What sort of education is featured at the Faizieh School? What works are studied? What is the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun? What was V. S. Naipaul's observation about such education? Why are Iranians fascinated by Jews? What are some of the ethnic, political, and religious contradictions of the Middle East? Characterize the historic relationship between Jews and Persia. {Consider the books of Esther and Isaiah}. (220-24)

Review

Qom burial place of Fatima Ayatollah Khomeini
Saudi Arabia vs. Iran V. S. Naipaul on Muslim education
contradictions and cross-cutting loyalties

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE HEART OF PERSIA

Study Questions

1. How does Kaplan's chat with a young woman illustrate Iran's and America's mutual misperception of each other? How did Iran remind Kaplan of Bulgaria in the mid-1980s? Note various cultural holdovers of pagan antiquity? How does Isfahan differ from Teheran? (225-29)
2. Check websites showing the Sheikh Lutfullah Mosque, the Friday Mosque, and the Chehel Sotun. What are *ghanats*? Why is the attitude about Persepolis ambivalent? (229-33)
3. [OPTIONAL] Hafiz and Sufism. (233-26)

Review

Zoroastrianism No Ruz *ghanats*

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE TOWER OF QABUS

PART V: CENTRAL ASIA: GEOGRAPHICAL DESTINIES

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: RUSSIAN OUTPOST

Study Questions

1. What is the geographical extent of Turkestan? Who are the peoples that populate the area? What civilizations were connected by the strategic caravan network of Central Asia, which includes the Silk Road? What rendered it obsolete? What is the character of Stalin's imprint on the region? How does Central Asia differ from the age-old riverine civilizations? (245-47)
2. What are some of the visible evidences in the Tashkent area of the period of Soviet misrule? [Soviet-era architecture also deserves the epithet "giantism"]. How serious is the pollution problem? [A marchland is the vanguard or staging area of an advancing imperial power; Berlin and Vienna were in the eastern marches of Germany]. When did Russia's drive to obtain warm water ports gain momentum? How did this affect Turkestan? How does the ethnic diversity of Tashkent differ from that of New York? How does the Dombabard cemetery reflect old ethnic rivalries as well as shifting realities? (247-55)

Review

historic and geographical characteristics of Central Asia strategic caravan network
Vasco da Gama Peter the Great the Great Game
seizure of Tashkent Stalin's ethnic relocations

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: PRE-BYZANTINE TURKS AND CIVILIZATIONAL CLASHES

Study Questions

1. [SKIP] The Registan, Samarkand, Uzbek-Tajik tensions, Gul Emir, Tamerlane, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Uzbek Khan, Islam Karimov. (256-69)
2. What is Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis? Where does Fouad Ajami find fault with it? What is some of the evidence in Central Asia that supports Huntington's thesis? How are rivalries in the region playing out today? (269-72)

Review

Samuel P. Huntington clash of civilizations

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: CLEAN TOILETS AND THE LEGACY OF EMPIRES

CHAPTER NINETEEN: CHINA: "SUPER-CHAOS" AND "PHYSICAL-SOCIAL" THEORY

Study Questions

1. What is Sinkiang (Xinjiang) and when did it become part of China? Why does the Turkic Moslem population use Arabic characters? How did the **Uighurs** originate? Why has the

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: JOURNEY IN A PLAGUE YEAR

Review

Thomas Malthus
Julian Simon
social ingenuity

Marquis de Condorcet
Amartya Sen

Paul Ehrlich
Thomas Homer-Dixon

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: RISHI VALLEY AND HUMAN INGENUITY

Study Questions

1. What is it about the Rishi Valley experiment that Kaplan finds so hopeful? What role was played by Jiddu Krishnamurti, the renowned philosopher, and the elite boarding school he and friends established in the 1930s? What is wrong with India's celebrated Green Revolution? How did Daniel Patrick Moynihan see the relationship between culture and politics, conservatism and liberalism? What about the school impressed Kaplan? How did Y. A. Padmanabha Rao and his wife reinvent what a school is? What role is played by the garden? (354-65)
2. What view does Sri Naidu take of technology in agriculture? How does he keep the organic farm self-sustaining? (365-68)

Review

Jiddu Krishnamurti
irrigation in the developing world

Green Revolution

School in a Box

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: BANGKOK: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SEXUAL LIMITS

Study Questions

1. How do Calcutta and Bangkok compare, both the cities and their airports? How did the various peoples of Southeast Asia originate and become distinguished from each other? (369-73)
2. What made Kaplan recognize that capitalism is a belief system? Identify some distinguishing features of the Thai people. What has made the neo-authoritarian Lee Kuan Yew so successful a leader? (373-78)
4. What is TDRI and how does it reflect a reality of sustainable wealth? What are some of the demographic (population) changes and how do they affect Bangkok's ecological future? For Dr. Twatchai Yongkittikul, what does democracy require? (378-83)
5. [OMIT] (383-86)

6. What is the significance of the growing disparities of wealth and poverty regionally as well as worldwide? Identify some of the changes wrought by prostitution and the spread of AIDS. (386-89)

Review

Lee Kuan Yew

ecological challenges

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: CAMBODIA: BACK TO SIERRA LEONE?

Study Questions

1. What were the consequences of Khmer Rouge rule, 1975-79? [The death toll has been estimated as high as 30% of the population]. Who was Khieu Samphan and what did he argue in his Sorbonne doctoral thesis? How have the geography and history of Cambodia contributed to its present circumstances? What made the Khmer Rouge uniquely savage? [cf. with William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*]. What happened to Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975? What were the Khmer Rouge's blueprints for a better future? What brought this utopian experiment to an end? What role did the United Nations play afterwards? (401-07)
2. What about Phnom Penh reminded Kaplan of Sierra Leone? What are some of the "unlucky accidents" that have helped shape circumstances? How do the circumstances of Cambodia today differ from those of Sierra Leone? What did Kaplan find at Tuol Sleng? (407-20)

Review

Kampuchea
occupation of Phnom Penh

Pol Pot

Khmer Rouge: army of children

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: JUNGLE TEMPLES AND THE "MILK OF CHAOS"

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: ONE DEATH AT THE EDGE OF THE EARTH

Study Questions

1. What were the NGOs accomplishing in the Kratie region? (429-35)
2. Why are the problems Kaplan saw around the world problems for Americans to think about?

Review

lessons that Kaplan draws