**What is Civilization?**

**Discussion Preparation:**

**Directions:**

*Part I*: Use the following quotes to explore the diverse interpretations of the term *civilization*. What are the issues involved in using civilization as an organizing principle in world history? After reading over the various sources below, you will document one observation and one question based on the text. Note that there will be a class set of this document available when we discuss these ideas in class.

**Mark Kishlansky (Professor)**: “When *civilization* first entered the English language in the late eighteenth century, it was used to contrast the society and culture of Europe with what the British saw as the chaotic barbarity of much of the world.”

**Aristotle (Philosopher):** “When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.”

**Peter Stearns (Professor):** “The perception that there are fundamental differences between civilized and ‘barbaric’ or ‘savage’ peoples is very ancient and widespread. For thousands of years the Chinese, the civilized inhabitants of the ‘Middle Kingdom,’ set themselves off from neighboring peoples, including the pastoral or nomadic cattle and sheep-herding peoples of the vast plains or steppes to the north and west of China proper, whom they regarded as barbarians.”

**Sigmund Freud (Psychologist):** “One… gets an impression that civilization is something which was imposed on a resisting majority by a minority which understood how to obtain possession of the means to power and coercion. It is, of course, natural to assume that these difficulties are not inherent in the nature of civilization itself but are determined by the imperfections of the cultural forms which have so far been developed.”

**Lee Ralph (Professor)**: “Discussing the origins of cities is really the same as discussing the origins of *civilization*, which may be defined as the stage in human organization when governmental, social, and economic institutions have developed sufficiently to manage (however imperfectly) the problems of order, security, and efficiency in a complex society.”

**Cynthia Stokes Brown (Professor):** “The word *civilization* apparently first appeared in a French book in the mid-eighteenth century. Since then, it has had close associations with the West’s sense of its own superiority. In order to see the past clearly, we must try to avoid this assumption built into the word. By examining the past in as neutral and value-free way as possible, we can see the past as it actual was; then we can use our understanding of it to make value judgments about what to do in the present.”

**Kevin Reilly (Professor):** “…but civilized life is much more than the capacity to create monuments. Civilized life is secure life. At the most basic level this means security from the sudden destruction that village communities might suffer. Civilized life gives the feeling of permanence. It offers regularity, stability, order, even routine. Plans can be made. Expectations can be realized. People can be expected to act predictably, according to the rules.”

**Richard Bulliet (Professor):** “The tendency of the Mesopotamians, like other peoples throughout history, to equate *civilization* with their own way of life should serve as a caution for us. What assumptions are hiding behind the frequently made claim that the ‘first’ civilizations, or the first ‘advanced’ or ‘high’ civilizations, arose in western Asia and northeastern Africa sometime before 3000 BCE?”

**Jane Addams (Social Reformer):** “Civilization is a method of living, an attitude of equal respect for all men.”

**Lanny Fields (Professor):** “But the concept [of civilization] emphasizes a basic distinction that is useful in the study of the human past: There are fundamental differences between simple, small-scale societies and complex, large-scale societies. Those relatively complex societies which we call ‘civilizations,’ have a different and faster pace of development and change; they are stimulated by economic and political competition; and a greater diversity of events and processes shapes their futures. The smaller-scale societies, in contrast, have a slower pace of change; they have fewer and less complicated factions; and the lifestyles and life histories of their members are more alike. All of these factors distinguish civilizations from other human societies.**”**

**In your notebook, write down one observation/response based on the excerpts above.**

**In your notebook, write down one question that you have after reflecting on the excerpts above.**

**Directions:**

*Part II:* Watch the Crash Course World History II video titled “Rethinking Civilization.” Go to the following URL: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyzi9GNZFMU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyzi9GNZFMU) . After watching the video, please answer the following questions in your notebook:

**1. Why might it be appropriate to equate “civilization” with “state-control?” What are some historical examples of this?**

**2. What is the general argument of James C. Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*?**

**3. What are some of the problems resulting from civilization as listed in the video?**

**4. Why is it hard to PROVE that the Zomia “hill culture” exists?**