

ANTH 2200 HUMAN ORIGINS FINAL-ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Write the name of your choice below in bold at the top of your assignment.

1 SELF-DOMESTICATION (HOMO ERECTUS)

Henrich argues in *Secret of Our Success* that we essentially domesticated ourselves. Through culture we repeatedly adapted to a changing environment by modifying our behavior and aspects of the environment in a direction that gave us innovation and diversity of solutions. A key period in our development is the Middle Paleolithic where *Homo erectus*, *ergaster*, and *heidelbergensis* moved away from simple stone tools and began to create a complex culture.

Explore one aspect of this cultural change which drove selection for different traits in humanity, e.g., control of fire, language, Acheulean handaxe, or cannibalism. Find a scientific article related to a fossil discovery in this period and review more detailed evidence on this cultural trait and its significance.

HOW TO DO THE ASSIGNMENT

1. Select a scientific article about *Homo erectus*, *Homo ergaster*, *Homo heidelbergensis*, or “archaic *Homo sapiens*”. Library reference can help you. The article must at least partially relate to evidence or speculation about a cultural trait as mentioned above. Give the full reference of the article.
2. Summarize the main points of the article in your own words in one or two paragraphs. Don’t just copy an abstract if one is provided. Show that you read the article and understood its main points. Focus on the cultural trait discussed.
3. Provide a reaction and analysis in the second half of your paper. How does this evidence or argument change your view of human evolution? What questions or criticism do you have? What direction for further research? Does this connect with any other themes in the course?

2 PUZZLING ANCESTORS

While linear thinking (past/present/future, high/middle/low, good/ok/bad, child/adult/senior) is structured and clear, nature does not follow “the line.” Rivers wander and streams interwind, come together, separate again, etc. Broccoli branches out in fractal sections, and churches form, split apart, rejoin, go extinct, etc.

This is relevant to the challenge that anthropologists and the public feel when we discover a new fossil that doesn’t seem to “fit” our current schema. Should we wait for more evidence or fossil samples or is it time to shift the paradigm or model of human evolution? How does this fossil or cultural evidence relate to what we know already?

In this assignment, you will choose ONE puzzling ancestor we reviewed, including Neanderthals, and present some aspect of that ancestor in more depth.

HOW TO DO THE ASSIGNMENT

1. Find a scientific article, website, or at least 45 minutes documentary about one of the ancestors. Give the exact citation for the article or video.
2. Summarize the article or video in a half-page single spaced. What are the main points, interpretations, or criticisms?
3. Provide a half-page or so of your analysis and reaction. What is so significant about this find? What does it tell us about the many paths of our development or the effects of social isolation? Can human ancestors have very different features but still be “human”? Should they be separate species or grouped together?

3 THRESHOLD

In the last chapters of Secret of our Success, Henrich tries to summarize his arguments and mark the threshold of becoming human using mostly cultural achievements and benchmarks. Review these boundaries and review, yourself, the journey we have taken in this course. When we take course material together, where would we place this threshold of becoming human? With the early bipeds? With fire or language? With representational culture?

In this option, you will focus on when YOU think we crossed the threshold to being human.

HOW TO DO THE ASSIGNMENT

1. Choose a scientific article or at least 45 minute video on human evolution that focuses on representing our evolution in stages. It can cover any period but must relate to Henrich's argument. Give exact reference.
2. Summarize the article or video in a half-page single spaced. Where does that article place the threshold for traits that are not modern but seem human enough to claim?
3. Provide a half-page or so of your analysis and reaction. What hominin model for our origins does it offer? Is there any evidence of thinking that builds on ape capacities? If apes have so much of our cultural foundation, what key changes did our species undergo? Finally, what is YOUR takeaway from this course? How did it amplify or change your view of human evolution?