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**More than 200,000 Explore COLLAPSE?—
A Major Exhibition Examining
How Environmental Choices Impact Civilization**

*Innovative exhibition inspired by ideas in new book
by Pulitzer Prize-winning author and UCLA professor Jared Diamond*

LOS ANGELES, August 9, 2005 – More than 200,000 visitors have explored the landmark exhibition, COLLAPSE?, currently on view at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County through January 15, 2006. The exhibition takes visitors on an engaging and thought-provoking adventure to explore how man’s choices positively or adversely affect the success of societies and civilizations.



Photograph by Ben Rogers

Inspired by ideas from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dr. Jared Diamond’s current best-seller, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (Viking Penguin 2005), the exhibition journeys through time and place—from a serene, present-day campground in Montana, to the stoic remains of a Mayan temple—to explore the links between environments and societies, asking why some civilizations decline while others flourish.

Appealing to thinkers of all ages, COLLAPSE? engages audiences and stimulates debate through its mix of immersive theatrical sets that incorporate rare objects of historical importance and remarkable beauty, stunning video footage, kid-friendly displays, detailed historical illustrations and a few surprises.

“In its efforts to educate, engage and inspire audiences, the Museum continues to explore new and exciting formats to present complex issues related to science, natural history, culture and the environment,” said Dr. Jane Pisano, the Museum’s president and director. “COLLAPSE? takes the often complex ideas explored by Jared Diamond and presents them in a compelling and experiential manner, utilizing art, technology and artifacts, that is not only intellectually provocative but also entertaining.”

“COLLAPSE? has made previous types of exhibitions obsolete by radically rethinking what an exhibition can accomplish,” said Jared Diamond, author and professor of geography at UCLA. “Like my book, this exhibition challenges us to consider how we inhabit our world and evaluates factors that can influence why societies succeed or fail.”

COLLAPSE? presents five unique environments in which visitors are invited to consider a series of factors that have and can significantly impact societies and cultures: natural changes in the climate;

environmental damage; a decline in trade or support from neighbors; hostile neighbors; and how society anticipates or reacts to problems.

“As visitors journey through the COLLAPSE? exhibition, they are continuously challenged to make and understand the connections between man and the environment,” said Dr. Vanda Vitali, vice president of public programs at the Museum and the exhibition’s originator. “As the exhibition concludes, visitors are left pondering the question—can our current choices sustain our future?”

Exhibition Walk-Through

Upon entering COLLAPSE?, visitors immediately encounter a large Triceratops skull dating back 66 million years—a reminder of a time when the planet was still unchanged by man. A brief video introduction by Jared Diamond sets the stage for a series of virtual-visits to a range of contemporary and historic environments.

Exhibition components include:

Modern Day Montana—In a stirring example of man’s encroachment on nature, a full-size 1970s era Winnebago, a picnic table and barbeque grill dominate an area of the exhibition representative of the Montana wilderness. Larger-than-life video projections of Montana residents discuss the state’s environmental issues and how a contemporary shift to tourism and recreation has placed increased pressure on the land.

Jared Diamond’s Five Factors—Painted cartoon murals by artist Maurizio Piraccini illustrate the five factors that influence the success or failure of societies. The factors include: natural changes in the climate; environmental damage caused by people themselves (inadvertently or not); a decline in support from neighbors or trading partners; hostile neighbors; and how a society anticipates and reacts to its problems.

The Classic Maya—Punctuated by historical objects, including a jadeite necklace and pendant (A.D. 600-900) from Altun Ha, Belize, and a selection of illustrated tripods and cylindrical vessels from the Peten Region of Guatemala (A.D. 600-900), this section of the exhibition delves into the decline of the Classic Maya civilization after the 9th century. A 13-foot tall re-creation of an ancient Tikal pyramid dominates the center of the room and serves as a reminder of the grand achievements of a society that collapsed in large part because of their impact on the land and climate changes.

Tokugawa Japan—In this section of COLLAPSE?, a symbolic tree circle and period objects (from 19th-century woodworking tools and 18th-century farming almanacs to a full set of 16th or 17th-century samurai armor presented in an exquisitely recreated traditional interior) tell the story of Tokugawa-era Japan, where Shogun society established rigorous forest management efforts to protect the land and to establish sustainable supplies of timber. Tokugawa Japan provides an excellent example of a society overcoming obstacles to achieve a long period of political stability and prosperity.

Australia Today—The significant environmental challenges faced by contemporary Australia are addressed in this section of the exhibition. A diorama depicting the Australian outback demonstrates how non-native species (represented by plush toys of foxes and rabbits) have wreaked havoc on native species (represented by actual examples of koalas, kangaroos, kookaburras, and

others). The introduction of foreign species joins other environmental difficulties threatening Australia, including degraded soils, drought and fire.

Southern California: The Future is Now – The exhibition concludes with visitors entering a futuristic newsroom. Through a dynamic collage of images and data highlighted by commentary from scientists, policy makers and administrators, visitors are confronted with the environmental challenges we face in Southern California. They are asked to consider, “How do our choices affect the future?” The answers lie as much in the present as in the past.

Related Programming/Support

A series of *First Fridays* evening programs drawing inspiration from the COLLAPSE? exhibition will be offered Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2 and Jan. 6. The successful series is designed to bring the Museum’s new exhibitions to life through various means of expression, from music and dance, to film and fashion, to interesting, informed discussion.

COLLAPSE? is made possible by The Annenberg Foundation and supported in part by a generous grant from The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation. Additional support is provided by the Thornton Foundation. The exhibition, which runs through January 15, 2006, is open weekdays, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; and weekends and holidays; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed tickets may be required on weekends and holidays. The exhibition is free for members, and included with the price of Museum admission. Advanced timed tickets are available through Ticketweb at www.ticketweb.com.

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County serves more than 1 million families and visitors annually, and is a national leader in research, exhibitions and education. The Museum is L.A.’s second oldest cultural institution, the first to open its doors to the public in 1913, and has amassed one of the world’s most extensive and valuable collections of natural and cultural history – more than 33 million objects, some as old as 500 million years.

The Museum is located at 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles. Tickets are \$9 for adults, \$6.50 for children. For more information, visit the Museum’s website at www.nhm.org or call (213) 763-DINO.

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