

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ROBERT W.
STRAYER:**

Chapter 1 covers most of human history in a single chapter. Chapter 1 spells out briefly something of the earliest human ways of living during what we call the Paleolithic era, the period when human beings lived by gathering wild foods and hunting or fishing wild animals. It then describes how some of these nomadic foraging people settled down, learned to domesticate plants and animals, and became farmers and herders. This was the agricultural revolution, perhaps the single most transformative process in all of human history.

Now, modern human beings have used this early history in various ways. For some people, it highlights the progress of more recent centuries when our control over nature became far more extensive. For others, the distant past has become useful for criticizing, rather than celebrating, modern life. After all, Paleolithic societies lacked the sharp class and gender inequalities of later civilizations and they emphasized values of sharing and cooperation over those of competition and hierarchy. Both population and economic growth were glacially slow, making the explosive growth of modern times, with its massive environmental impact, look abnormal or even pathological.

All of this is a reminder that history is always about the present, even when it deals with the distant past.