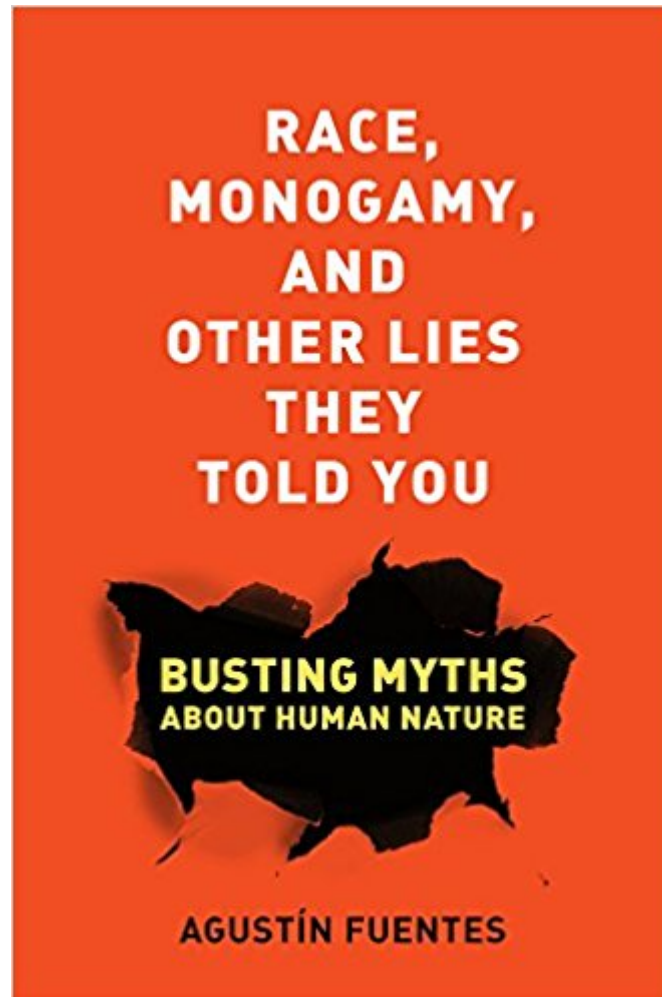


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Race, Monogamy, And Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths About Human Nature



Synopsis

There are three major myths of human nature: humans are divided into biological races; humans are naturally aggressive; men and women are truly different in behavior, desires, and wiring. In an engaging and wide-ranging narrative Agustín Fuentes counters these pervasive and pernicious myths about human behavior. Tackling misconceptions about what race, aggression, and sex really mean for humans, Fuentes incorporates an accessible understanding of culture, genetics, and evolution requiring us to dispose of notions of ‘nature or nurture.’ • Presenting scientific evidence from diverse fields, including anthropology, biology, and psychology, Fuentes devises a myth-busting toolkit to dismantle persistent fallacies about the validity of biological races, the innateness of aggression and violence, and the nature of monogamy and differences between the sexes. A final chapter plus an appendix provide a set of take-home points on how readers can myth-bust on their own. Accessible, compelling, and original, this book is a rich and nuanced account of how nature, culture, experience, and choice interact to influence human behavior.

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Customer Reviews

Yeah so if I could rate this a 0/5 I would. I've been having to read and report on this book for my Anthro class and I've read the whole thing and it seems to me that he NEVER EVER for NEVER EVER gets to his point. All the book does is say "these thoughts on this subject are incorrect" and then proceeds to give examples of what he finds to be incorrect but then never tells you why it is. It a pile of opinionated garbage backed up only by the author's degrees, which don't do him much justice. I feel as if I'm meant to just take his word for it. Sorry I'm not a sheep and if you want to

purchase this book just know that you'll feel very unfulfilled because you'll find yourself waiting for a conclusion to any point that will come.

For many years, influential scientists have been stepping outside of academia to remind the public that they do not need college degrees to effectively scrutinize the myths, legends, dogmas, and conspiracy theories perpetuated by pop culture. Published in 1981, *Mismeasure of Man*, by evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, showed us how a popular misconception about the relationship between race and intelligence was made worse by scientists with a priori knowledge and a defective version of the scientific method. In 1995, astrophysicist Carl Sagan published *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* in which he gives readers the "Baloney Detection Kit," - now famous in secular humanist communities - and uses it to dismantle claims about UFOs and alien abductions. In 2011, biologist Richard Dawkins published *The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True*, an incredible book for the public that explains how mythological cosmologies are supplanted over time by advances in scientific knowledge. Recently, in this spirit of setting the record straight, Agustín Fuentes has made an anthropological contribution with *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies They Told You: Busting Myths About Human Nature*. And who better to discuss the life-cycle of a myth than an anthropologist? In *Race, Monogamy, and other Lies*, Fuentes takes on what he considers to be the three major myths about humans: biological race, human aggression, and that men and women are wired differently. The first matter of Fuentes' deconstruction revolves around his rejection of the "nature-nurture" dichotomy. Fuentes supposes that humanity is, as he coins, "naturenurturel"; a familiar concept that describes the biological and cultural influences on humanity as inseparable - and the very reason that myths about human nature are myriad. After a short introduction to basic cultural and biological concepts, Fuentes begins breaking down all manners of myths that surround the concept of race, followed by a chapter that challenges the idea that culture tames our innate beast, and finishes the myth-busting by eloquently untangling sex from gender, pair bonding from monogamy, and sexuality from sexual behavior. Each chapter begins by introducing a set of myths surrounding a particular topic, and then proceeds by meticulously breaking each one apart by uncovering the origins of the myth, discussing studies, statistics, and misrepresentations of the truth, and in the end, why the mythological construction still has value. In the chapter titled, "Myths About Sex," for instance, Fuentes lists as a prevailing assumption that men and women are biologically different. Using examples from genetics, endocrinology, embryology, and neuroscience, he explains that while there is sexual dimorphism, we are composed of the same biological components. The sexual differential of size, for example,

may be evolutionary, but biologically-speaking it means little, and it follows that we need not assume that evolution "intended" for men to use their size for sexual coercion. Fuentes closes suggesting that the myth may be wrong, but it can be used to illustrate meaningful differences between the concepts of sex and gender. Departing from the classic conception of myth - a story that explains natural phenomena, usually in supernatural terms - Fuentes defines myths simply as a set of assumptions that we might rely upon to interpret the quotidian. The danger of myths, he warns, is the caveat: they allow us to live our lives with little need for critical inquiry, so much so that we might consider some myths to be "common sense." Not only are myths an interpretation of the everyday, but the everyday is commonplace because it goes unquestioned. Unfortunately, Fuentes leaves the origins of myths aside, other than to say that they arise as assumptions. Myth is the epistemological placeholder - it supposes an attractive model of meaning until it can be deconstructed, if not replaced entirely by a better looking model. Fuentes has little to say about how myths are used as a form of power except when, at the end, he begins using the word "lie" which he defines as a "deliberate intent to deceive." These lies manifest when, as he says, scientific literature becomes enamored with the pursuit of "significant results", at which point they are exploited by those with something to gain - politicians and advertisers. Myths are easily constructed and arduously toppled because of those that control discourse - how many anthropologists must scream at the tops of their lungs to be heard over the Governor of Florida? - but Fuentes only glosses over this fact. If it is sociopolitical and historical context that you want, you should refer to this book's predecessors listed above (in addition to Jonathan Marks' *Why I Am Not a Scientist: Anthropology and Modern Knowledge*). Overall, the book is written with undergraduates and laypeople in mind. Fuentes never seems to suggest whether or not he believes the myths he explores are universal, but one might assume from the many pop-culture references that he is referring to the Western audience to whom he is speaking. *Race, Monogamy, and Other Lies* lays out a crash course in anthropological thought, genetics, animal behavior, psychology, gender studies, and more. While he is careful to avoid jargon unless it is absolutely necessary, Fuentes is also sure to define that which he does use. Terms and concepts are thoroughly spelled out, but he does not undermine the reader's intellect either - many of the myths are complicated constructions of entangled values and beliefs, but Fuentes leads the way, confident that his readers are in lockstep behind him. What I really commend is Fuentes' refusal to solely lay the burden of mythmaking in the hands of culture. Asserting that race, aggression, and sexual behavior are not hard-wired evolutionary traits is easy, as far as he is concerned; negotiating the incongruence between observed patterns and cultural assumptions is what makes the book tick. What sets this book apart from the debunkers of the past

is that Fuentes masterfully maintains that myth need not be cast to the side; rather it should be reshaped into something of worth. There is value in acknowledging and discussing that, for instance, while it may be a myth that human races exist because of biology, it is not a myth that human races exist as a concept and, as a result, it affects human populations. The book accurately sums up many of the foundation-shaking lessons of a contemporary undergraduate education in anthropology, and I think it would be valuable as required reading for lower-division anthropology students. I highly recommend this book for all levels of science and humanities students for its value in planting the seeds and fostering the growth of critical analysis. The development of those skills provides the basis for a lifetime of lie-detection and myth-busting; Fuentes should be lauded for this important contribution toward that end. (Copied from the blog, Anthropology Attacks!)

This is a great book for introductory anthropology students - it explains sensitive matters clearly and with passion. If I was starting out to build a new introduction to anthropology course, I might build it around this book. Exceptional.

Agustín Fuentes offers a take down of conventional thinking on a number of topics. If you like books that challenge conventional "wisdom" then this book is for you. I don't understand sociology to any great extent, and as a bonus Fuentes offers the reader a primer in examining culture from the outside as much as is possible. The fact that every human in the planet is raised in a culture makes it impossible for any person to be completely unbiased. I thought I would be most interested in the busting of monogamy, but Fuentes' take down of our artificial racial divide is the thing that most stuck with me at the end of this book. Humans tend to view race as a very large, real difference between human beings, but this book pokes serious holes in that assessment. Fuentes shows that race is a minor, superficial difference between humans. This analysis alone is worth the price of the book. I also felt that religion was needed a bit in this book, if often incidentally in several cases. I read this book as part of a Freethinking book club, and it generated a lot of passion and discussion in the membership. Worth the read.

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