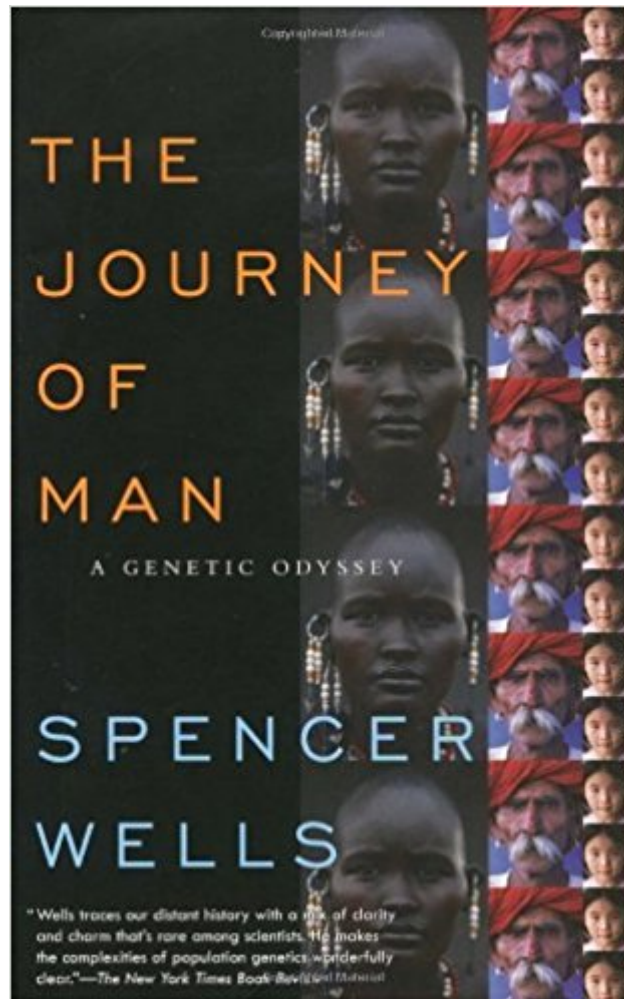


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The Journey Of Man: A Genetic Odyssey



Synopsis

Around 60,000 years ago, a man "genetically identical to us" lived in Africa. Every person alive today is descended from him. How did this real-life Adam wind up as the father of us all? What happened to the descendants of other men who lived at the same time? And why, if modern humans share a single prehistoric ancestor, do we come in so many sizes, shapes, and races? Examining the hidden secrets of human evolution in our genetic code, Spencer Wells reveals how developments in the revolutionary science of population genetics have made it possible to create a family tree for the whole of humanity. Replete with marvelous anecdotes and remarkable information, from the truth about the real Adam and Eve to the way differing racial types emerged, *The Journey of Man* is an enthralling, epic tour through the history and development of early humankind.

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Customer Reviews

Archeologists dig all over the earth to find the history of people who existed too early to leave a written history. There is a new sort of archeology, however, that is changing our long-range view of human pre-history. Scientists are digging into cells, into the genes that everyone knows make us what we are. The details from this new research have given revolutionary insight into where humans came from, how they spread, and the origin and superficiality of races. In *The Journey of Man* (Princeton University Press), Spencer Wells, a population geneticist, has written a wonderfully clear book of origins, drawing upon not just genes but history, geography, archeology, and linguistics. In part, the book is a summary of refutations against the ideas of anthropologists who maintained that

different races were subspecies that arose in different regions at different times. No such hypotheses could be tested in the time they were issued, and now they can. DNA in the cells from mitochondria, and the DNA in the male Y chromosome do not shuffle the way ordinary chromosomes do, and thus are very stable from one generation to the next. Mutations happen, and accumulate, and may be used to see how closely related humans from different regions of the world are. The genetic results of both mitochondrial and Y chromosome research confirm each other, and are unambiguous. We are all out of Africa. We stayed in Africa as humans for generations, and almost all the genetic variation we were going to get was within us at that time. Then around 40,000 years ago, propelled perhaps because of weather changes, we started our travels. Journey has good diagrams, but a map showing the flow of different Y chromosome linkages around the world can be regarded with awe, for the history it shows and for the scientific advances that have made such a diagram possible. Our current way of living has wrought changes in plenty of the subjects in this book. The trail of languages in many ways parallels the trail of genes around the world, but as we develop a global culture, languages are dying out at a faster rate than ever before. Also, there is greater mixing of genes from different cultures now that easy travel makes possible the meeting of members of tribes that would never have met before. It could be that we have passed the heyday for the sort of research reported here, as populations swap genes in unprecedented ways. Nonetheless, Wells's book is full of enthusiasm for basic research, and the results described here are fascinating. We can look back at our origins with new respect for how long and how strange a journey it has been, and with the increasing realization that that our one species has one shared history.

This book will blow you away. In clear, easy-to-follow language, with helpful analogies, Wells describes a scientific and geographical journey wherein, by means of DNA analysis, he and his fellow scientists tracked the contemporary "Y" chromosome from two common ancestors in Africa to the DNA of every living human being. Unbelievably, there really was one "Adam" and one "Eve" -- although they lived more than 100,000 years apart -- whose descendants left Africa about 40,000 years ago and, over 2000 subsequent generations, were the origin of us all. The understanding that we are all related -- cousins many thousands of times removed, if you will -- may not have any immediate effect on politics and social relations, but it does put our human conflicts into a different context, as well as blast away most genetically-based theories of race. Although cultures may differ in many respects, and human beings may subscribe to different value and belief systems, we really are, genetically, one human family. I read this book cover-to-cover in one day, and found it

fascinating, astonishing and inspiring. Kudos to Wells and his crew. Also, those of you who have kids who may be too young to follow the science in this book should try the video.

I enjoyed reading in this book how scientists worked out the migration patterns of prehistoric humans through the dissection of Y-chromosome (and the ladies' mtDNA too) genetic markers. The author's analogies to explain the various genetic theories are fairly good at explaining the concepts. My problem with the paperback edition (I have not seen the hardcover) is that the maps are horrendous. They look like they were photocopied from color originals with a really old machine. I cannot read the text on the arrows of the Big Summary Map at all, and have been writing in the genetic markers on the map in the book as I go along to see if I can figure it out for myself. And I never, never, never write in my books. This is very frustrating and the publisher should ensure that the maps are recreated with gray-scale halftones in the next edition. I recommend looking into whether the hardcover edition maps are any better and get that if they are.

I saw Spencer Wells on Book TV talking about his book and TV special, so when I found the book in paperback I snapped it up. And I am very happy I did. I knew a lot of the history he went over to explain why and how the Y-chromosome could be used to trace human evolution and how humans spread over the world. The reason I enjoyed it so much is that I have many of the books he used as sources and it allowed me to read without those full halts that sometimes happens when you hide an idea or fact you never heard of before. But even people who have no knowledge how DNA works or have no idea how our prehistoric forefathers lived will find the book interesting and easy to absorb. The Y-chromosome not only helps us trace the male DNA back to Africa, it is also shown to help answer once and all questions about language families and even how the knowledge of farming spread. The language used in the book is easy to understand and Mr. Wells knows how to explain even complex issues with humor and clarity. Some information about Homo erectus/ergaster in Asia MIGHT be out-dated with the discovery of Homo floresiensis (Hobbits), but the data about Homo sapiens is still sound.

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