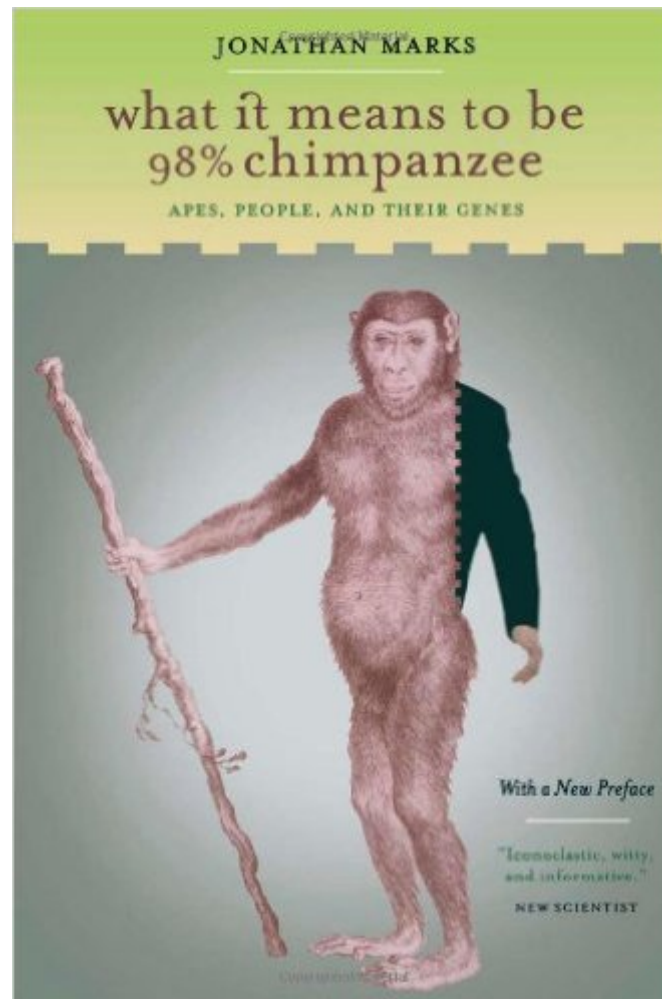


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What It Means To Be 98% Chimpanzee: Apes, People, And Their Genes



Synopsis

Marks presents the field of molecular anthropology; a synthesis of the holistic approach of anthropology with the reductive approach of molecular genetics; as a way of improving our understanding of the science of human evolution. This iconoclastic, witty, and extremely readable book illuminates the deep background of our place in nature and asks us to think critically about what science is, and what passes for it, in modern society.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The easiest thing to do about Marks' work is to dismiss it. Maybe we can simply state that herein lies that 'lefty pinko commie propaganda' that tries hopelessly to be 'PC.' And that's all she wrote! But I am afraid it is not so simple...Jonathan Marks is writing about my field. I have done some similar work. He is fighting against a popular old force, which tries to ignore not only cultural influence, but also ecological and political, and other influences. Marks is an expert in his field, and this is very evident. It is interesting that one of the reviewers of this book, Mr. Haines, cites research from past ten years as diminishing to this book. I would like to see this research, not published in a newspaper, please. Genetic determinism, for all its promises, has failed to live up to its expectations. It tries to solve grand answers, and this is pretty hard. Marks is right to question evolutionary psychology, as the field has brought almost nothing but the so-called 'just-so' stories. This is not science, this is myth. And Marks exposes it, as he should. I am also at a loss to observe how Marks wants no Darwinist baggage. This is false; he notes in his work that these explanations

can contribute--but again, grand theories based on this kind of 'science' avoid about 150 years of anthropology, which has gone through many of the same pitfalls, by the way. He is right to question the silliness of invoking the 98% chimpanzee argument, as it is a ridiculous one. He is right to note that folk knowledge manages to mingle in with what is supposed to be science. This is easily the best part of the book, and the dripping sarcasm and the molten anger with which Marks writes is immensely entertaining. However, it is also tragic to observe.

First a couple of structural observations before i look at the content. It has the organization and transitional structure between chapters of independent essays written for other venues and later shaped into a book. I do not know this for a fact, but the absence of a strong theme which ties the chapters together into a coherent structured book is a hint at it's origin. This lack of coherency as a whole is the main reason i rated it a 4 and not a 5. Second, i bought the book based on reviews and word of mouth recommendations that were wrong about the themes of the book. I thought it was going to be about what makes chimps and humans different. What it is, is an introduction to anthropologic genetics, behavioral genetics, simply the relationship of genetics to human nature. What i thought was the topic of the book is in fact the issue of chapter 11, titled "is blood so really damn thick?". However it is opposed to sociobiology (evolutionary psychology) in a very consistent manner, so don't confuse the two. In fact, i was mildly disappointed at this organization and what i thought was a misleading advertising, so much so that i put down the book in chapter 4 and it sank to the bottom of the to-be-read pile for several weeks. This was in addition to what seemed like an eternity spent talking about race. Sadly so because the 6th chapter "folk heredity" is very good on explaining several interesting and illuminating genetic principles: taxonomism, racism, hereditarianism, essentialism (i would have started with chapter 6 if i had known). Simply put i gave up too quickly, don't you make the same mistake.

Accepting the fallacy of Marks' title, let us start on a positive note. Marks wants to keep apes and humans separate. Fair enough. I don't want to live on termites on a stick, and it's doubtful chimps want to worry about traffic congestion, tax rates or political corruption. Marks wants scientists to do their job well. Who can argue? Marks has courage - he has the temerity to assault the venerable E. O. Wilson, the articulate Richard Dawkins and the revered Jane Goodall. Marks is against racism. Hardly debatable. Marks seems a pretty upstanding fellow. Why then, is this book such an insult to the intelligence? Mostly because it is a froth of misleading statements, misdirected wrath, misconceptions and mistaken views of science. Marks goes to unusual lengths in dismissing the

research achievements of many scientists in both field and laboratory. He blithely dismisses the disclosure that chimpanzee and human genes are nearly identical as "the most overly exposed factoid in modern science." It's not significant because it confuses precision with accuracy. From there, Marks goes on to castigate a legion of scientists for their failure to "get it right" the first time around. Few escape his lash - even Linneaus, who virtually invented classifying life, is a victim, and perpetrator, of cultural artifacts in naming species. This from a man who finds culture an unbridgeable chasm between humans and animals! Marks spends much of the remainder of the book discussing racial/cultural undercurrents in science. He finds far too much of it in current anthropology. He's correct in this, but his case is "overblown"- a favourite phrase of his. In a welter of complaints, he finds but two scientists to exonerate of the charge: Richard Leowntin and - himself.

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