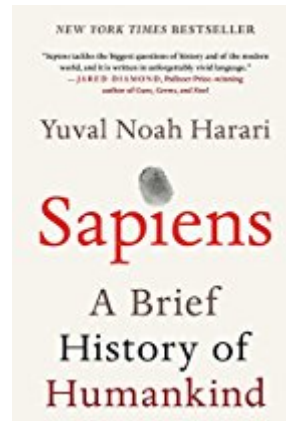


Read Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind By Yuval Noah Harari



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Amazon.com Review An Amazon Best Book of the Month for February 2015: Yuval Noah Harari has some questions. Among the biggest: How did Homo sapiens (or Homo sapiens sapiens, if you're feeling especially wise today) evolve from an unexceptional savannah-dwelling primate to become the dominant force on the planet, emerging as the lone survivor out of six distinct, competing hominid species? He also has some answers, and they're not what you'd expect. Tackling evolutionary concepts from a historian's perspective, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, describes human development through a framework of three not-necessarily-orthodox "Revolutions": the Cognitive, the Agricultural, and the Scientific. His ideas are interesting and often amusing: Why have humans managed to build astonishingly large populations when other primate groups top out at 150 individuals? Because our talent for gossip allows us to build networks in societies too large for personal relationships between everyone, and our universally accepted "imagined realities"—such as money, religion, and Limited Liability Corporations—keep us in line. Who cultivated whom, humans or wheat? Wheat. Though the concepts are unusual and sometimes heavy (as is the book, literally) Harari's deft prose and wry, subversive humor make quick work of material prone to academic tedium. He's written a book of popular nonfiction (it was a bestseller overseas, no doubt in part because his conclusions draw controversy) landing somewhere in the middle of a Venn diagram

of genetics, sociology, and history. Throughout, Harari returns frequently to another question: Does all this progress make us happier, our lives easier? The answer might disappoint you. --Jon Foro

Review "[I]nteresting and provocative...It gives you a sense of perspective on how briefly we've been on this earth, how short things like agriculture and science have been around, and why it makes sense for us to not take them for granted." (President Barack Obama) "I would recommend this book to anyone interested in a fun, engaging look at early human history...you'll have a hard time putting it down." (Bill Gates) "Thank God someone finally wrote [this] exact book." (Sebastian Junger) "Sapiens tackles the biggest questions of history and of the modern world, and it is written in unforgettably vivid language." (Jared Diamond, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, *Collapse*, and *The World until Yesterday*) "Sapiens takes readers on a sweeping tour of the history of our species.... Harari's formidable intellect sheds light on the biggest breakthroughs in the human story...important reading for serious-minded, self-reflective sapiens." (Washington Post) "Sapiens is learned, thought-provoking and crisply written.... Fascinating." (Wall Street Journal) "In Sapiens, Harari delves deep into our history as a species to help us understand who we are and what made us this way. An engrossing read." (Dan Ariely, New York Times Bestselling author of *Predictably Irrational*, *The Upside of Irrationality*, and *The Honest Truth About Dishonesty*) "Yuval Noah Harari's celebrated Sapiens does for human evolution what Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* did for physics.... He does a superb job of outlining our slow emergence and eventual domination of the planet." (Forbes) "It is one of the best accounts by a Homo sapiens of the unlikely story of our violent, accomplished species....It is one hell of a story. And it has seldom been told better.... Compulsively readable and impossibly learned." (Michael Gerson, Washington Post) "This was the most surprising and thought-provoking book I read this year." (Atlantic.com) "Yuval Noah Harari's full-throated review of our species may have been blurbed by Jared Diamond, but Harari's conclusions are at once balder and less tendentious than that of his famous colleague." (New York magazine) "This title is one of the exceptional works of nonfiction that is both highly intellectual and compulsively readable... a fascinating, hearty read." (Library Journal (starred review)) "An encyclopedic approach from a well-versed scholar who is concise but eloquent, both skeptical and opinionated, and open enough to entertain competing points of view....The great debates of history aired out with satisfying vigor." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) "Writing with wit and verve, Harari...attempts to explain how Homo sapiens came to be the dominant species on Earth as well as the sole representative of the human genus.... Provocative and entertaining." (Publishers Weekly) "The most idea-packed work of non-fiction I've read in years." (Dick Meyer, www.abccactionnews.com) "In this sweeping look at the history of humans, Harari offers readers the chance to reconsider, well, everything, from a look at why Homo sapiens endured to a compelling discussion of how society organizes itself through fictions." (Booklist Best Books of the Year) "It's not often that a book offers readers the possibility to reconsider, well, everything. But that's what Harari does in this sweeping look at the history of humans.... Readers of every stripe should put this at the top of their reading lists. Thinking has never been so enjoyable." (Booklist (starred review)) "The sort of book that sweeps the cobwebs out of your brain.... Harari...is an intellectual acrobat whose logical leaps will have you gasping with admiration." (John Carey, Sunday Times (London)) "Harari's account of how we conquered the Earth astonishes with its scope and imagination.... One of those rare books that lives up to the publisher's blurb...brilliantly clear, witty and erudite." (Ben Shepard, the Observer (London)) "An absorbing, provocative history of civilization...packed with heretical thinking and surprising facts. This riveting, myth-busting book cannot be summarised...you will simply have to read it." (John Gray, Financial Times (London)) "Full of...high-perspective, shocking and wondrous stories, as well as strange theories and startling insights." (Bryan Appleyard, Sunday Times) "Not only is Harari eloquent and humane, he is often wonderfully, mordantly funny" (The Independent (London)) "Engaging and informative.... Extremely interesting." (Guardian (London)) "Harari can write...really, really write, with wit, clarity, elegance, and a wonderful eye for metaphor." (The Times (Ireland)) From the Back Cover One hundred thousand years ago, at least six

human species inhabited the earth. Today there is just one. Us. Homo sapiens. How did our species succeed in the battle for dominance? Why did our foraging ancestors come together to create cities and kingdoms? How did we come to believe in gods, nations, and human rights; to trust money, books, and laws; and to be enslaved by bureaucracy, timetables, and consumerism? And what will our world be like in the millennia to come? In *Sapiens*, Professor Yuval Noah Harari spans the whole of human history, from the very first humans to walk the earth to the radical—and sometimes devastating—breakthroughs of the Cognitive, Agricultural, and Scientific Revolutions. Drawing on insights from biology, anthropology, paleontology, and economics, and incorporating full-color illustrations throughout the text, he explores how the currents of history have shaped our human societies, the animals and plants around us, and even our personalities. Have we become happier as history has unfolded? Can we ever free our behavior from the legacy of our ancestors? And what, if anything, can we do to influence the course of the centuries to come? Bold, wide-ranging, and provocative, *Sapiens* integrates history and science to challenge everything we thought we knew about being human: our thoughts, our actions, our heritage...and our future.

Customer Reviews Most helpful customer reviews 531 of 568 people found the following review helpful. Fun, Enjoyable Easy Read By Stanley Never before have I reviewed a book after 2300 others have done the same. Who's going to read 2300 reviews and who will read this? Surely a waste of time for a lot of people including me. Now that I am past that let me state that Harari gives a heckeva good read. This is not the usual rise and fall of empires and kingdoms but a broad ranging overview of how we got here. Parts of it were downright fascinating such as "imagination" being a keystone to human activity, e.g. corporations, money, and religion. Something I found really different and pleasing was his discussion of things where he had no real answer. In the case of all cultures being patriarchal he gives three or four possible reasons. That's good enough for me as there is still no real answer. I find that fair and enlightening. He also does something different as he uses the pronoun "she" throughout the book instead of the previously required male pronoun. Finally he keeps touching on the fact that animals have paid a terrible price for the rise of sapiens. From hunter-gatherer days to the factory farms of today they have suffered. He's right. Incidentally our family has a farm background and I eat no chicken, turkey, pork, or beef. Ever been in a confinement barn? Now I didn't give the book five stars because he makes positive references to the misguided but widely read Jared Diamond. He borrows a fair amount from Diamond, for example, in that hunter-gatherers were happier than folks today. Let me emphasize that on this snowy March day the cat and I are both glad we don't need to go out and scavenge something off the frozen earth. Finally, beware of the paper back edition. It has incredibly cheap paper and tiny print. If you purchase the book look for a hard cover. I now consign this review to oblivion. . .still I liked the book. 835 of 891 people found the following review helpful. The Broad Sweep Of Human History By John D. Cofield A standard history of the human race begins with Paleolithic proto-humans, traces the development of modern man or homo sapiens sapiens, then chronicles the beginnings and expansions of human civilization from agriculture to the present. Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens* follows that path, but with several intriguing twists. The result is a fascinating book which will challenge pre-conceptions and occasionally annoy or even anger the reader, but will always intrigue. Harari focusses on the three great revolutions of human history: Cognitive, Agricultural, and Scientific. He asks how "An Animal of No Significance" managed to become the dominant life form, and whether that animal's learning to produce his own food and then to further harness the natural world to his will through science were boons or setbacks, both for that animal and for the rest of the biosphere. In 20 brilliant chapters Harari asks his readers to consider not only what did happen, but what might have occurred had things turned out slightly differently (the roles of chance and accident are given a lot of attention.) He reveals the mutually agreed upon "stories" that helped shape human societies and questions their validity, not to disillusion but to challenge his readers. At times the tone is unavoidably cynical, but at others there's a real optimistic air (leavened by some cautions here and there). I found Harari's ideas fascinating, especially those in his final chapter "The End of Homo

Sapiens" and in his brief but important "Afterword: The Animal That Became a God." Readers who are looking for detailed chronicles listing, for example, the Emperors of China, Kings and Queens of England, or Presidents of the United States should look elsewhere. But readers who want to be challenged and enlightened will find Sapiens a most enjoyable work. I'm a retired AP World History teacher, and while I was reading there were many moments which made me wish I was back in the classroom so I could share Harari's ideas with my high school students. That's high praise indeed, but Sapiens deserves it and much more. 528 of 582 people found the following review helpful. Masterpiece! Our myths make us who we are By Gary This book is a masterpiece. I feel fortunate that I discovered it before most other people. I discovered it by reading an extremely negative review for this book in the Wall Street Journal written by a historian. (In his defense, he just didn't understand that this is not a history book, and he had no idea what Harari is getting at). This book never stops in challenging my understanding of our place in the universe. What we believe in determines what we want to want. Sapiens are distinguished by our ability to believe in fictions. The cognitive revolutions starts with the first set of hypothetical stories we allow ourselves to believe in whether they are true or not. The real importance is that the family, kin, friends, and community share those beliefs. Our fictions allow us to cooperate. They gives us the imaginary order that is necessary for societies to act together. Corporations are not people, they do not exist in reality. One can not point to a corporation. It's not the buildings, or the executives or any other physical entities that make the corporation, but it is our belief that makes them real. The author notes that the word for corporation comes from the Latin, corpus, the same as in the body (corpus) of Christ within the transubstantiation. Religion gives us comfort from the absurd and comforts us to accept death. Science (and its offshoot, technology) does the opposite. It gives us knowledge leading to life extension and makes our time alive more comfortable. The Gilgamesh Project of life extension is a major character in this book. The myths we create can never be logically consistent without contradictions. Perfect liberty will always conflict with perfect equality. Knowledge about the real world can never be 'universal, necessary, and certain', but we only get glimpses of reality by considering the 'particular, contingent, and probable'. Our myths give us comfort and subjective well being, but they are never without contradictions. The acceptance of our myths give us our commonality. He'll even say that because of the myths we choose to believe in they determine our progress. When cultures (imaginary orders) collectively know Truth, they have no reason to proceed. Biology enables us, cultures forbid us. The most important words necessary for progress are "I don't know, but I want to find out". He connects Imperialism with Capitalism leading to seeking knowledge (and developing science). Only those who do not believe they know everything need to search. If I were to have ever written a book (which fortunately for the reading public, I save all my writing only for book reviews!) this is the book I would have written. I believe this will be a classic in the future and am glad I discovered it. The author has written this book to make sure we do everything in our power to understand that the things we believe in will determine who we will be going forward. The myths we choose to believe in will determine what we become. See all 3621 customer reviews...

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