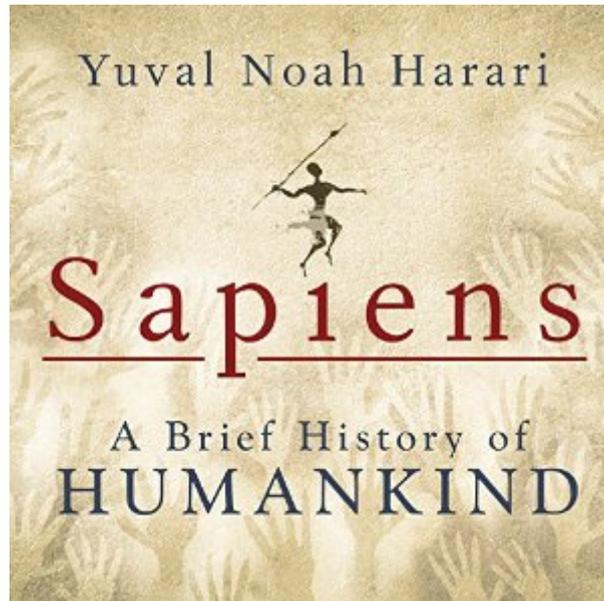


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Sapiens: A Brief History Of Humankind



Synopsis

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? 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.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 15 hours and 18 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Tantor Audio

Audible.com Release Date: February 10, 2015

Language: English

ASIN: B00SX6ZKE4

Best Sellers Rank: #1 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > World #2 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science #3 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > General

Customer Reviews

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.

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 give 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.

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