

Family of Man? Building Global Awareness

By [Jim Miles](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [History](#)

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I frequently write about global politics following an interest in US foreign policy as it tends to strive towards global hegemony by one means or another. Included in that are commentaries on Canada, my home country, and how we run double standards at home and abroad as willing followers of those same policies.

This commentary is a departure from that. I also read many science works ranging from basic natural history through many other branches of interest. One of these branches has been very instructive concerning the family of man and how we are all essentially one big family. Certainly a big squabbling family but in the modern human age, estimated between 150 to 200 000 years of existence, family none the less.

I am not sure it provides hope for the future, but given the human tendency for self aggrandizement, it is instructive to be aware of how much we have in common, how much we have to lose, and raises the big question: If we are as smart as we think we are, why are we doing what we are doing to ourselves and our planet, our only planet?

Grandparents

To start with the most proximate part of a biological regression for examining the family of man, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents and on is the easiest part to understand. Taken purely mathematically we all have 2 parents, 4 grandparents, 8 great grandparents, 16 great-great-grandparents and so on. If the generations are followed back twenty-six times (using twenty years as a generation, thus 520 years) we - at least those of European descent - have great/.../grandparents enough to equal the whole population of Europe at that time. [1] I had not thought this out beforehand, but for reference that happens to be 1498, the decade the European "Doctrine of Discovery" began its treacherous voyages to the 'New World'.

Basically the European "we" are all related and all have ancestry that includes both the best and the worst of European politicians philosophers, explorers, scientists, merchants, craftsmen and farmers (hmm, probably listed in reverse order of importance). "We" are all cousins if not philosophically brothers and sisters of one another.

Races

But humanity is much older than just the European line of descent, although current events might make one think otherwise. Regardless, there are a variety of human races that have developed over the millennia and most have mixed and mingled in some form or another at different times. Superficially there are significant differences, and this has created many of our global problems with European racism against all coloured people being one of them (not exclusively, just predominantly for the current era).

Underneath those superficial differences lies a strong genetic similarity. Without getting into the details of the genetics it can be illustrated with a black and white colour illustration (verbally). If a white person is sitting between two black people, according to regressive genetic analysis, the white person is more closely related to the two black people on either side of them than the two black people are to each other. Obviously this is simplified, made black and white for simplicity, but the main point is that through the various migrations of humanity around the world – out of Africa – there is more significant genetic differences between people still residing in Africa than between all those who have left Africa by whatever means or process.

In short, racial differences while real, are superficial, mostly artifacts of culture except for the obvious physical colour differences, while the underlying similarities of humanity greatly exceed and – if we are truly a sapient superior being – should overwhelm the colour differences. According to the genetic record modern humanity appears to have left Africa in two waves, from a very constricted and narrow (E. O. Wilson uses the term bottleneck) population that was lucky to survive when all of our early hominid ancestors died out. From that small base, one group expanded mostly towards other parts of Asia and further into the Americas and Australasia, and the second group moved more westward through the Levant into Europe.

We – the human we – are a single species, all closely related, a large family of 7.5 billion people trying to live on our one habitable planet. Yet we endanger/threaten both ourselves and most of the rest of the planet with extinction in spite of our supposed intelligence and technological wizardry that has helped produce the recent spectacular increase in both the human population and the degradation of the environment.

Meet your great/..../grandmother....

I will go one step further back along this long (by human terms) journey. Inside all human cells requiring energy (almost all of them) resides an organelle called the mitochondria. It contains its own genetic structure and is transferred from mother to mother only and thus represents a matrilineal line of descent. Using that line of regression takes humanity all the way back to our original matriarch: your great/..../grandmother, known scientifically as “Mitochondrial Eve”, a black woman living in southern Africa some 150 to 200 thousand years ago (range varies by source).

Obviously there had to be a great/..../grandfather, but I find the vision of a matriarchal genetic lineage more compelling than the usual white male dominated image created by those of European ancestry.

Global awareness

So where do we go from here? Our current lifestyle – at least that of the competitive consumer oriented societies of the world – does not tend to create a long term outlook for our species. Our Mitochondrial Eve ancestor nurtured her family; our Mother Earth may decide that she has had enough of nurturing us if we do not act to the best of our capacity as we like to perceive ourselves capable of doing. Sometime probably all too soon, we will discover whether we as a species will do ourselves in or somehow manage to rework our human systems in order to survive along with a healthy planet for the long term.

Books currently sitting on my bookshelf:

Coyne, Jerry. A. *Why Evolution is True*. Penguin Books, London. 2010.

Mukherjee, Siddhartha. *The Gene – An Intimate History*. Scribner, New York. 2016.

Ridley, Matt. *Genome – The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters*. Harper Perennial Edition, New York. 2000.

Wilson, Edward O. *The Diversity of Life*. W. H. Norton & Company, New York. 1999.

Zimmer, Carl. *Evolution – The Triumph of an Idea*. Harper Perennial Edition, New York. 2006.

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Jim Miles is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

Note

[1] All figures rounded as reasonable approximations.

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