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Jon Entine

Author of *Abraham's Children: Race, Identity, and the DNA of the Chosen People*



Photo Courtesy of Mark Halpern

Entine started out his talk about the Abraham's People, the Chosen people, by saying: "Let me get this straight, the Arabs get the oil and the Jews have to cut off the ends of our what?"

Entine's interest in genetics started when he was a producer of NBC News with Tom Brokaw, who brought the subject of why professional basketball was dominated by African-American athletes after attending a New York Knicks game with movie director Spike Lee. Entine produced a one-hour documentary aired in April 1989 entitled "*Black Athletes: Fact and Fiction*," which led to Entine's book "*Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We're Afraid to Talk About It*."

Entine's interest in his Jewish genes started in 2001 when his sister was diagnosed with breast cancer. Entine's mother, aunt, and grandmother had all died from either breast or ovarian cancer. He found out that breast cancer amongst many Jewish women of Ashkenazi heritage was caused by the BRCA2 gene mutation, a mostly Jewish mutation that has been passed on to successive generations for 2000 years. He realized that Jews are Jews by their DNA. Entine's own daughter has a high risk to also have this mutated gene, but standards do not allow testing until she is older.

Entine's question – "Who is a Jew?" – was well documented in culture, geography, and faith, but not in the core of the being, their DNA.

Entine's talk touched on diverse subjects relating to Jews and their genetic heritage:

- The Khazarian Empire – a formerly pagan culture - which existed in the 7th to 10th centuries. The nobility chose to convert to Judaism.
- Jewish genetic diseases and the ancestry of many of today's "Jewish" men and women. Interestingly, 50% or more of Jewish women do not have Jewish Mitochondrial DNA (passed down from female to female to female ...), while 70-80% of Jewish men are Semitic.
- The Cohen DNA markers: 75-80% of Cohanim have DNA markers that indicate a common ancestor.
- Lost African tribes: the black Jews of Ethiopia, who do not have Semitic DNA and were probably converts and the Lemba Tribe of Zimbabwe and South Africa, who have Semitic DNA
- Ashkenazi Jews have a much higher IQ than most other "ethnic" groups.

For more information about Jon Entine and his books, visit his website at <http://www.jonentine.com/>.

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The reviewer, [Bill Gladstone](#), is the author of the new book "[One Hundred Years in Canada: the Rubinoff-Naftolin Family Tree](#)."

***Abraham's Children:
Race, Identity, and the DNA of the Chosen People
by Bill Gladstone***

Abraham's Children: Race, Identity, and the DNA of the Chosen People, by Jon Entine. Hardcover, \$27.99. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007.

One of the miracles of the modern age is our ability to read and map human DNA. For Jon Entine, an American journalist who was a producer and executive at NBC for 20 years, the scientific advances in genetics in recent years hold a special significance. DNA provided a way for him to unravel his own personal history, which he says was "lost in the fog of the Jewish shtetls of Eastern Europe." Breast cancer linked to BRCA2, a genetic mutation carried almost exclusively by Jews, had claimed his mother, aunt and grandmother, and also had been diagnosed in his sister. Entine himself carries this genetic marker and his teenaged daughter may as well.

Confronted with this scientific evidence of an ancestral link to Judaism going back centuries, Entine says he was forced to rethink his Jewish identity. Given his longtime professional interest in the genetic revolution, it also inspired him to write this book.

From a genetic standpoint, all human beings are roughly 99.9 per cent the same, Entine observes. Because all human beings, whether Mediterranean or Mongolian, Jewish or Japanese, are almost all alike, some consider it controversial to focus on the seemingly miniscule differences between races. Entine, however, has a history of exploring these "pinpoints" of difference. He readily convinces us it's a fascinating area and one well worth

exploring. Some 20 years ago, he produced a documentary with Tom Brokaw at NBC News, titled "Black Athletes: Fact and Fiction." The research evolved into a noteworthy book, *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We're Afraid to Talk about It*.

Now he's back with a more personalized exploration of genetics and what writers from Josephus to Disraeli proclaimed as their own "Hebrew race." *Abraham's Children* presents many intriguing aspects of the subject, including a theological discussion of Jewish beliefs and the Bible as they relate to the topic of genetics.

We are introduced to Father William Sanchez, a Catholic priest in Albuquerque, New Mexico, whose DNA indicates Jewish ancestry; one of numerous formerly Spanish Crypto-Jews living in the American southwest, Sanchez accepts this proudly as an enhancement of his Christian identity. We also meet Tudor Parfitt, the London-based expert on Judaism's lost tribes. Parfitt and numerous genetic specialists have been engaged in testing various groups around the world, like the Lemba of South Africa, who profess a blood kinship with the Jewish people. There are discussions of the first Adam and Eve, the Aaronic priestly gene, genetic diseases, "Abraham's Contested Covenant" and diverse related matters.

For many genealogists, DNA testing has emerged as an important tool (albeit still often indecisive) in attempting to unravel the mystery of one's roots. Those considering the DNA route will find *Abraham's Children* to be a wideranging and thought-provoking summary and happily free of too much technical jargon. Many genealogists may find the appendixes on Genetic Migration Maps, Tracing Your Ancestry and Family History Using DNA, and Jewish Diseases of particular interest.