

Was Nicholas Wade too speculative on race in “A Troublesome Inheritance”?

New York Times science writer Nicholas Wade's main claim in his new book "[A Troublesome Inheritance](#)" is that human races likely differ in social behavior for genetic reasons as a result of recent evolution. These slight differences in behavior may, in turn, explain why different sorts of social institutions appear among different peoples... Evolutionary biology might therefore have something to say about why some peoples live in modern states and others in tribal societies, and why some nations are wealthy while others remain mired in poverty.

One of the most frustrating features of A Troublesome Inheritance is that Wade wants to have it both ways. At one moment, he will concede that he writes in a “speculative arena” and, at the next, he will issue pseudofactual pronouncements (“social behavior, of Chinese and others, is genetically shaped”). This strategy lets Wade move in a kind of intellectual no-man's-land where he gets to look like he's doing science (so many facts about genomes!) while covering himself with caveats that, well, it's all speculative.

Which might lead you to wonder: If Wade has little or no hard evidence for his evolutionary thesis, how does he hope to convince his readers to take it seriously? Part of the answer is by offering captivating narratives about how recent human evolution could have played out, as we saw earlier with the transition to permanent settlement. Wade also makes several arguments based on plausibility for the role of genes in behavioral differences among the races and, to a lesser extent, attacks those who have doubted such a role.

Read the full, original story: [Stretch Genes](#)