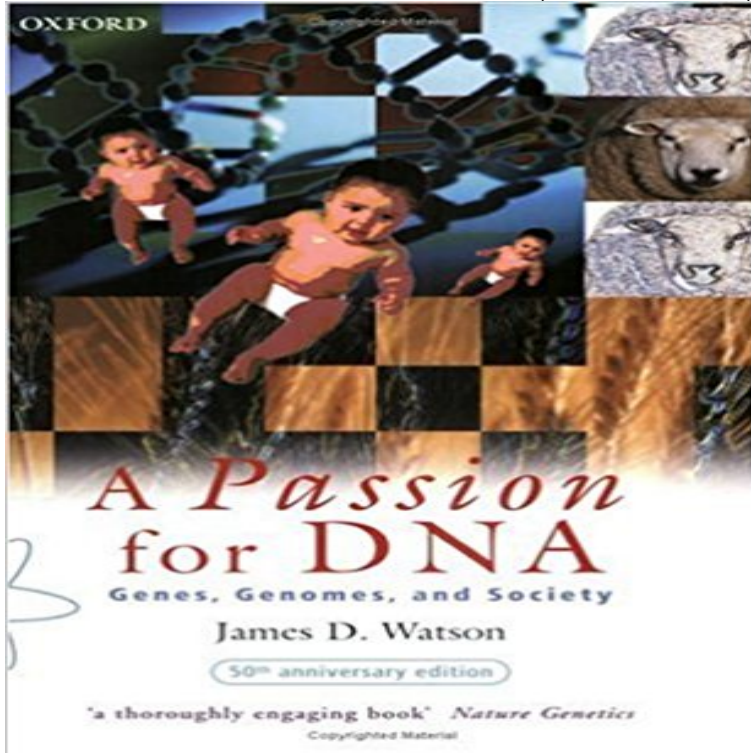


## A Passion for DNA: Genes, Genomes, and Society



In 1953, two young, unknown scientists sparked a worldwide revolution. Studying DNA for clues to the nature of genes, James Watson and Francis Crick deduced its molecular composition - two chains twisted into a double helix - and immediately realized that the structure implied how genes were copied and passed from one generation to the next. Their observation has had extraordinary consequences: the discovery of a genetic code that all living things share and the realization that the code translates into proteins; the ability to alter an organisms genetic make-up; recognition that diseases like cancer begin when genes go wrong; the foundations of a biotechnology industry and the means of cloning plants and animals; a start on cataloguing human genes; and the glimmer of a new kind of medicine that uses DNA therapeutically. In the midst of the ferment, its instigator Jim Watson has been tireless. A principal architect and visionary of the new biology, a Nobel Prize-winner at 34 and best-selling author at 40 (*The Double Helix*), he had the authority, flair, and courage to take an early and prominent role as commentator on the march of DNA science and its implications for society. In essays for publications large and small, and in lectures around the world, he delivered what were, in effect, dispatches from the front lines of the revolution. Outspoken and sparkling with ideas and opinions, a selection of them is collected for the first time in this volume. Their resonance with todays headlines is striking. As public concern about genetically modified food mounts, here is Watsons salutary reminder, from a previous era of DNA anxiety, that restrictions on potentially rewarding research are justifiable only if there is robust evidence of likely harm. Commenting on the 1970s War on Cancer, he warns that effective leadership of publicly funded research initiatives, such as

the current search for an AIDS vaccine, demands the courage to support promising but risky new ideas and prune away anything less than the best. And as the first Director of the Human Genome Project, now approaching its climax, he acknowledges the past evils of eugenics but argues fiercely for the need to balance potential misuses of genetic data with the overwhelming benefits of a rational attack on the roots of disease. These combative pieces mingle with charming memoirs of distinguished former colleagues, advice for young scientist, and a pointed account of Germany's troubled historical relationship with genetics. They open with Watson's reflections on the family influence and values of his Chicago upbringing that helped shape his career. This collection of provocative, optimistic, and entertaining essays begins and ends with elegant commentaries from the distinguished molecular biologist and writer Walter Gratzer. They illuminate a volume that portrays the life and work of a scientist, educator, and author who is acknowledged as an intellectual leader of the twentieth century.

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