



The Gene Wars: Science, Politics, and the Human Genome

Robert Cook-Deegan

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“Probably the most authoritative account of the genesis and early stages of the Human Genome Project. . . . This book tells it the way it was?and is.” ?Victor A. McKusick, University Professor of Medical Genetics, Johns Hopkins University

The Human Genome Project, the most ambitious biological research program ever undertaken, was born in controversy. Heralded by its more enthusiastic proponents as a quest for the 'Holy Grail of biology' - and the key, ultimately, to the treatment of a variety of hereditary diseases - it has as its initial goal the mapping of all the genes in the entire three-billion-letter genetic code embodied in the DNA of a typical human cell. A major factor in the counterarguments of its opponents: its projected cost, estimated to run into the billions of dollars, spread over 10-20 years. In this firsthand account of the protracted struggle to launch the genome project, a close observer of that process - and sometime participant in it - unravels the tangled scientific and political threads of the story, relying on primary documents gathered even as events unfolded, supplemented by interviews with all the main actors - including the controversial first head of the National Institutes of Health genome effort, Nobel laureate James D. Watson. The result is an absorbing case study in the politics of modern science - focused in this case on a project with far-reaching medical and social implications.

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