**Human Prehistory:**

* The first bipedal hominids emerged over 5 million years ago in Africa.
* The human species began to emerge in East Africa around 2.5 million years ago.
* Between 2.5 million years ago and 100,000 years ago, the human species went through a variety of evolutionary phases in different parts of the world.
* A large number of human species were generated over time (all believed to be descended from H. Erectus), but most of them disappeared well before the appearance of “modern humans,” Homo sapiens sapiens.
* Current theories posit that adverse climatic conditions and competition from other species (human and non-human) caused the other humanoid species to disappear.
* A major pre-agricultural development is the experience of massive human species migration.
* Some thousands of years after the human species originated in eastern Africa, they began to pour out into other regions, most likely in search of food.
* Ultimately, humans settled around the world.

**The Paleolithic Age:**

* The Paleolithic Age (Old Stone Age) lasted for almost two million years (until about 14,000 years ago).
* Humans began to walk more upright and they developed a larger brain capacity.
* Humans during this period tamed the use of fire (about 750,000 years ago) and used simple (mostly stone) tools.
* Wearing animal skins enabled humans to live in colder climates.
* It is believed that the first humans left Africa about 750,000 years ago.
* Other species such as Homo pekinensis (Peking Man) have been found in China and Indonesia and date from 600,000-350,000 years ago.
* Human remains have been found in Britain that are 250,000 years old.
* Humans crossed into Australia (via Southeast Asia) about 60,000 years ago.
* Humans came across the Siberian land bridge into North America at least 25-30,000 years ago (maybe earlier).
* By 25,000 BCE, Homo sapiens sapiens occupied (in small numbers) virtually every region of the world that is currently inhabited except New Zealand, some other Pacific islands, and Bermuda.
* This means human history begins at a point when the species was widely dispersed.
* Since humans were spread out, and in small numbers, environmental conditions caused the formation of local cultures and institutions, setting the stage for the current regional aspect of human identity.

**The Paleolithic Age: (Continued)**

* Modern humans (Homo sapiens sapiens) emerged between 240-120,000 years ago.
* Today, every human on the planet is of the same species…
* H. sapiens sapiens.
* H. sapiens sapiens coexisted with other human species such as Neanderthals (actually a subspecies) for many thousands of years.
* We don’t know exactly how H. sapiens sapiens triumphed over the other species.
* Anatomically, modern humans can be characterized by the lighter build of their skeletons compared to earlier humans.
* Modern humans have very large brains (avg 1300 cc).
* Housing and protecting this brain involved the reorganization of the skull into what is thought of as “modern”—a thin-walled, high-vaulted skull, with a flat, near vertical forehead.
* Modern human faces also show much less (if any) of the heavy brow ridges and prognathism of other early humans.
* Our jaws are also less heavily developed, with smaller teeth.
* It is believed that H. sapiens sapiens had less of an advantage with brain capacity and more of an advantage with running ability.
* Neanderthals were excellent at long-distance, slow running which worked when hunting large game.
* But H. sapiens sapiens had the advantage with smaller, swifter animals.
* So archeologists don’t know if H. sapiens sapiens simply out-competed other species like Neanderthals--clubbed them to death (our species was very violent from the outset)—or intermarried with them.
* Some of you may have more Neanderthal DNA in you than you realize
* Soon after the emergence of H. sapiens sapiens, sociobiologists believe humans developed what has become known as the “speech gene” (actually an articulation gene).
* This gene is hidden among 50,000 other genes.
* The “speech gene” greatly facilitated human communication (more talking-less grunting) which helped lead to organized human societies.
* From this point onward, there have been no major evolutionary changes in the human experience.
* The human species, even before H. sapiens sapiens was a tool-using animal, more adept than other species at finding tools for hunting, gathering, or for use as weapons.
* During the Mesolithic (12,000-8,000 BCE) and Neolithic Eras (8,000-3,000 BCE) tool use became increasingly deliberate.
* But instead of just finding tools, humans became capable of making them, fashioning rocks, wood, and bone into better weapons, better tools, and even primitive boats.
* About 25,000 years ago, Paleolithic peoples began miniaturizing their stone tools.
* Known as “micro-blades,” these smaller and more refined spear points, arrowheads, knives, and scrapers were often mounted in antler, bone, and wooden handles.

**Paleolithic Art:**

* In February 2012, a cave was discovered in northern Spain (called El Castillio) with paintings carbon dated to c. 42,000 years ago (the oldest known in the world).
* This date coincides with the earliest known Homo sapiens in Europe.
* Some archeologists believe the art to be the work of Neanderthals, which has caused some archeologists to rethink Neanderthal culture.
* In Australia, cave paintings have been found of long extinct fauna (dating to over 40,000 years ago), making it one of the oldest known Paleolithic art sites.
* Altamira (northern Spain). Discovered in the 1880’s, it was the first discovered example of Paleolithic cave art.
* Considered the Sistine Chapel of cave art.
* Horse and Bison c. 15-10,000 BCE
* The prevalence of Venus figurines and other symbols throughout Europe has convinced many scholars that Paleolithic religious thought had a strongly feminine dimension.
* This was embodied in “Great Goddess” figurines and focused most likely on regeneration and renewal of life.

**The Paleolithic Age:**

* It seems likely that Paleolithic peoples developed a cyclical view of time that drew on the changing phases of the moon and on the cycles of female fertility—birth, menstruation, pregnancy, new birth, and death.
* Such understandings of the cosmos, which saw endlessly repeated patterns of regeneration and disintegration, were very different than later Western views, which saw time as moving in a straight line toward some predetermined goal.
* Along with the increased use of tools came the domestication of certain animals.
* Tool use and animal domestication set the framework for the emergence of agriculture.
* Initially the dog was domesticated, and before the advent of agriculture, in some parts of the world it was also the horse.
* Recent published research (May 2013) of DNA skeletal evidence in Siberia found that dogs may have been domesticated twice as long ago as previously thought (32,000 years ago).

**The Paleolithic Age: (Continued)**

* People who had dogs during a hunt would likely have had an advantage over those who didn't.
* Dogs would also have served as a warning system, barking at hostile strangers from neighboring tribes. They could have defended their humans from predators.
* And finally, though this is not a pleasant thought, when times were tough, dogs could have served as an emergency food supply.
* Approximately 14,000 years ago the last great ice age ended…this enabled humans to live in more northern climates.
* About 12,000 years ago (roughly 10,000 BCE), it is estimated that there were, at most, 5-10 million people in the world.
* It is a very small number, very widely dispersed, but agriculture will be introduced into this framework.

**Hunter-Gatherers:**

* But before agriculture, humans were hunter-gatherers (also known as foragers).
* Theories about why humans migrated out of Africa include drought and that hunter-gatherer societies require as much as 2.5-4 sq miles of space per person.
* Even modest population growth would force hunter-gatherers to move a little further to seek out new space and new hunting grounds.
* A hunter-gatherer society has the fewest social divisions.
* Usually (but not always) the men hunt animals and the women gather plants (they don’t plant, they only gather).
* Even though more prestige is given to the men for supplying meat, the women gatherers usually contribute more food to the group (up to 4/5ths of the total).
* Hunter-gatherer groups are always nomadic and usually have between 10-25 members (kinship based).
* As food supplies dwindle in one area, they move on to another.
* Hunter-gatherer societies place a high value on sharing food, which is essential for their survival.
* Women tend to breast feed their young for 3-5 years, both for nourishment and to limit their ability to conceive more children.
* A hunter-gatherer society cannot afford to have too many mouths to feed and too many young children are a burden for a society always on the move.
* Between nourishment, disease issues, or infanticide, children have only a 50/50 chance of reaching adulthood.

**Hunter-Gatherers: (Continued)**

* According to some anthropologists, 50% of all newborn females were killed by their parents during the Paleolithic Age.
* Some societies also practiced senilicide.
* The diet of foragers consisted mainly of gathered foods—plants, roots, nuts, small animals, and insects—supplemented by scavenging or hunting.
* Of all societies, hunter-gatherers are the most egalitarian.
* Since what they hunt/gather is perishable, they don’t accumulate personal possessions (only what they can carry).
* Consequently, there is no concept of wealth/poverty within the group.
* There are no rulers and decisions are made through discussion at the group level.
* There usually is a shaman, an individual thought to be able to influence the spirits.
* Since their needs are basic and they don’t accumulate material possessions, hunter-gatherers have the most leisure time of all human groups.
* Modern anthropologists studying the few remaining hunter-gatherer societies have concluded their lives are not “nasty, brutish, and short” as was thought but instead they tend to be characterized by adequate and varied food supplies, high levels of health and fitness from a balanced diet and frequent exercise, freedom from disease epidemics, and as mentioned, there is ample “leisure” time.
* All human groups were once hunter-gatherers.
* Up until a few hundred years ago, these groups were still common.
* Today, there are less than 300 hunter-gatherer groups worldwide.
* Pygmies in Africa and aborigines in Australia are among those whose traditions are vanishing.

**Origins of Patriarchy:**

* The most accepted theory on the origins of patriarchy (a male dominated society) points to the social consequences of reproduction and early child-rearing.
* To balance the high death rate and maintain the population, women had to have many children.
* Between pregnancy, birth, and nursing, women spent much of their lives around the camp.
* With a child at her breast or in her uterus, or one carried on her hip or on her back, women were physically encumbered.
* These encumbrances led to women staying home (at camp) and men becoming the hunters of large animals.
* Over time, men became dominant as they hunted, made contact with other tribes, traded, and waged war.
* **Origins of Patriarchy: (Continued)**
* Men controlled the instruments of death, the weapons of war and of the hunt.
* Men gained prestige by killing animals (protein source) to feed the tribe, by being victorious in battle, and by accumulating (limited) possessions through trade.
* Some sociologists believe that some men may have risked their lives as warriors to acquire women (as prizes).
* Women’s roles, on the other hand, were considered routine and not risky.
* Since men tended to risk their lives more often than women (hunting, battle, etc) they came to believe in their own superiority.
* Many male activities became shrouded in secrecy and men created elaborate rules and rituals to avoid “contamination” by females.

**Paleolithic Impact on the Planet:**

* As early human species spread across the planet, they entered continents that had no earlier hominine colonization, particularly Australia and the Americas.
* Humans proved to be highly adaptable and technologically “proficient” by initiating a wave of extinctions among the megafaunal (that is, large sized animal) inhabitants of these continents.
* Since these megafaunal animals had no previous experience with the introduced predators (humans), they became relatively easy prey.
* It is estimated that in the Americas nearly 75% of all animals weighing over 100 lbs disappeared after the arrival of humans. In Australia that number is closer to 90%.
* The largest species were the most threatened because they moved and reproduced very slowly: the mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, and giant elk disappeared in Eurasia; the horse, elephant, giant armadillo, and sloth vanished in North America, and in Australia dozens of large marsupials disappeared.