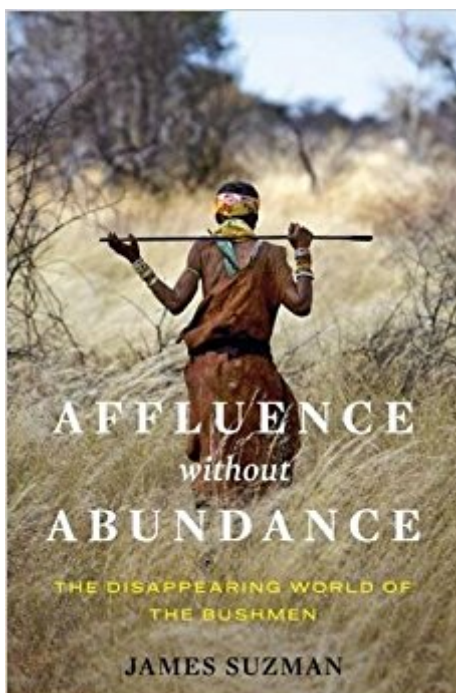


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# Affluence Without Abundance: The Disappearing World Of The Bushmen



## Synopsis

A vibrant portrait of the “original affluent society”—the Bushmen of southern Africa—by the anthropologist who has spent much of the last twenty-five years documenting their encounter with modernity. If the success of a civilization is measured by its endurance over time, then the Bushmen of the Kalahari are by far the most successful in human history. A hunting and gathering people who made a good living by working only as much as needed to exist in harmony with their hostile desert environment, the Bushmen have lived in southern Africa since the evolution of our species nearly two hundred thousand years ago. In *Affluence Without Abundance*, anthropologist James Suzman vividly brings to life a proud and private people, introducing unforgettable members of their tribe, and telling the story of the collision between the modern global economy and the oldest hunting and gathering society on earth. In rendering an intimate picture of a people coping with radical change, it asks profound questions about how we now think about matters such as work, wealth, equality, contentment, and even time. Not since Elizabeth Marshall Thomas’s *The Harmless People* in 1959 has anyone provided a more intimate or insightful account of the Bushmen or of what we might learn about ourselves from our shared history as hunter-gatherers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"An insightful and well-written book, describing the hard transition of foraging communities in Namibia from relative affluence during the Stone Age to contemporary poverty and misery. Avoiding both modern conceits and romantic fantasies, Suzman chronicles how economics and politics have finally conquered some of the last outposts of hunter-gatherers, and how much humankind can still

learn from the disappearing way of life of the most marginalized communities on earth." - Yuval Noah Harari, author of SAPIENS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMAN KIND and HOMO DEUS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOMORROW

"Affluence Without Abundance is not simply a description of Bushman life. Mr Suzman deftly weaves his experiences and observations with lessons on human evolution, the history of human migration and the fate of African communities since the arrival of Europeans. The overarching aim of the book is more ambitious still: to challenge the reader's ideas about both hunter-gatherer life and human nature." - The Economist

"[Suzman creates] a feeling for the landscape, the difficulties encountered by the Bushmen, and the pleasures of their simple, if rapidly changing, way of life... In all, this is a delightful book, full of perceptiveness and understanding." - Science

"This book has truth on every page and is filled with important insights that range from hunting and tracking to how we think about time, money, value or success." - Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, author of THE HARMLESS PEOPLE and THE OLD WAY

"This beautiful book--part memoir, part ethnography--offers a window into the lives of one of the most enduring of human cultures . . . If you have ever wondered how it might be to measure wealth not by material possessions but by the strength of social relations between people, read this book." - Wade Davis, author of THE WAYFINDERS and INTO THE SILENCE

"[A] beautiful, heartfelt paean. AFFLUENCE WITHOUT ABUNDANCE is learned without being condescending, tender yet un sentimental. It is both a celebration of an ancient way of life and a lament for all that has been lost in our own headlong pursuit of the material." - Peter Godwin, author of MUKIWA and WHEN A CROCODILE EATS THE SUN

"A spirited ethnography of the ancestral peoples of the Kalahari. . . . A welcome contribution to a once-vibrant anthropological literature without many recent entries." - Kirkus Reviews

"In his thoughtful, in-depth book, [Suzman] focuses on the Ju/hoansi people, whom he has been working with for more than two decades...A fascinating examination of a society drastically changed by forced modernity." - Booklist

James Suzman, Ph.D., is an anthropologist specializing in the Khoisan peoples of southern Africa. A recipient of the Smuts Commonwealth Fellowship in African Studies at Cambridge University, he is now the director of Anthropos Ltd., a think tank that applies anthropological methods to solving contemporary social and economic problems. He lives in Cambridge, England.

This is a beautifully written book that champions writing anthropology for a wider public. I found Affluence without Abundance to be powerfully evocative and full of ethnographic insights that span centuries. Rather than omit the ever-glimmering realities of modern Bushman

life. To serve an entirely romantic agenda, the author recounts the lives of the Ju|'hoansi as they really are. He does this without losing sight of the joy and humour that characterises their lives.

I met some of the 'San' people recently, admittedly in a touristic setting, having long since forgotten Laurens Van Der Post's writing. The San came across as cheerful, funny, genuine, very in touch with their environment - I left very impressed. My wife says I fell in love with them - many have it seems. They are not 'primitive' people. James captures this beautifully - with historical background, overview of their history, problems caused by interaction with other cultures and hilarious anecdotes every now and then - where the San get their own back at white farmers & Herero people. James makes the point well that their way of life is very longstanding - our 'recorded history' is not much more than a blink of an eye by comparison. Study of the diet of San has been one of the triggers for interest in 'Paleo' food - fairly high on meat and while the San do not get as much exercise as you would imagine they are fit and relatively disease free - this is yet to be explained. When they switch to a more western way of life and diet they succumb to the usual medical problems - diabetes, obesity, etc. I will explore the suggested reading list at the back of the book.

I found much to think about in this book and particularly enjoyed the first half. As the book progressed, I still found a lot of interesting concepts, anthropology and history, but I felt the book meandered. I lost track of the point of the book. It covered a lot of diverse issues relative to the Bushmen and then tried, in its last pages, to wrap everything up in a neat package. Still, I would definitely recommend it for readers interested in south Africa and anthropology.

Wonderfully written and filled with insights into how one of the world's last hunter-gatherer societies has struggled to reconcile its traditional values with the rapidly encroaching reality of modern capitalist life

A kind of rambling look at the three eras: hunter/gatherer agricultural & industrial/post thru the lens of the author's long acquaintance with bushman culture. Well worth reading on the most fundamental issues facing us personally & as a global human society.

Loved reading this book. Suzman's humanity, insight and humor shine through as do the lessons we can learn from reading it. I totally recommend it, having lived and worked in a Bushman

community for a year what Suzann writes resonates with reality.

An excellent book that really shows the love the author has of the SAN people. Very well written. . . I wish I had read this before traveling through Namibia. Highly recommend.

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