



# On the Origin of Tepees: The Evolution of Ideas (and Ourselves)

*Jonnie Hughes*

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**On the Origin of Tepees: The Evolution of Ideas (and Ourselves)** Jonnie Hughes  
“Ambitious and original. It belongs on the reading list of anybody who hopes to use Richard Dawkins’s insight into memes. That it is entertaining is a bonus” (Daniel Dennett, *New Scientist*, Letters)—now in paperback.

Throughout history, we humans have prided ourselves on our capacity to have ideas, but perhaps this pride is misplaced. Perhaps ideas have us. In this book, science writer and documentary filmmaker Jonnie Hughes investigates the evolution of ideas, taking a look at how they seem to have lives of their own. Adopting the role of a cultural Charles Darwin, Hughes travels across the Midwest with his brother to observe firsthand the natural history of ideas—the patterns of their variation, inheritance, and selection in the cultural landscape. In place of Darwin’s oceanic islands, Hughes visits the “mind islands” of Native American tribes. Instead of finches, Hughes searches for signs of natural selection among the tepees.

With a knack for finding the humor in the quirks of the American cultural landscape, Hughes takes us on a tour from the Mall of America in Minneapolis to what he calls the “maul” of America—Custer’s last stand—stopping at roadsides and discoursing on sandwiches, the shape of cowboy hats, the evolution of barn roofs, and more. Original, witty, and engaging, *On the Origin of Tepees* offers a fresh way of understanding both our ideas and ourselves.

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