

tarium—a powerful position at the nexus between astronomical research and public science education. He writes a regular column for *Natural History* magazine; has served on several US presidential commissions; recently hosted the television NOVA miniseries *Origins*, which aired on PBS in the fall of 2004; and, with Donald Goldsmith, coauthored the program's companion book, *Origins: Fourteen Billion Years of Cosmic Evolution* (W. W. Norton, 2004).

Tyson's story should strike a responsive chord with anyone interested in science. His parents were educators, and he spent his formative years as a middle-class kid in New York City. He caught the science bug early and was one of the many young people who frequented weekly astronomy classes at the Hayden Planetarium. He was a college wrestler and had a pretty smooth academic career right through his postdoctoral work. In one chapter of his book, he eloquently conveys his entrancement with science and the excitement he experienced in Chile while studying the Milky Way, a standard undertaking for most observational astronomers. Other chapters deal with exciting ideas in modern astronomy and some of Tyson's later adventures as a public figure interacting with the academic world. From his writing, one can see that the author is not just urban but also urbane: thoughtful, cosmopolitan, witty, and insightful.

Among the things that distinguish Tyson from so many others is his unique perspective as one of only a handful of black astrophysicists in the US. Although that circumstance doesn't figure heavily in his essays, Tyson does recount a number of anecdotes that must be achingly familiar to anyone of color in our country: He recalls being stopped by police for no particular reason and having strangers at parties or in shops talk to him as if he were a child, a boor, or a criminal. In spite of that, the author writes, "I have retained enough confidence in myself to treat these encounters as the entertaining side shows that they are."

Above all, Tyson sees himself as an educator, and if there is one overarching theme in his essays, it is that what really matters is the life of the mind and the sharing of the excitement of astrophysics with upcoming generations. *The Sky Is Not the Limit* expresses this theme well. I recommend the book to all who, whatever their date of birth, want to learn about what it means to do science in this day and age.

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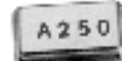
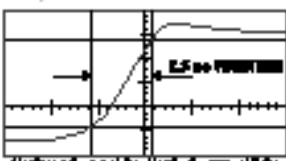


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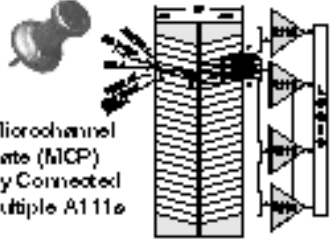
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