



# MAKING GENES, MAKING WAVES

*Jonathan R. Beckwith*

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## **MAKING GENES, MAKING WAVES** Jonathan R. Beckwith

In 1969, Jon Beckwith and his colleagues succeeded in isolating a gene from the chromosome of a living organism. Announcing this startling achievement at a press conference, Beckwith took the opportunity to issue a public warning about the dangers of genetic engineering. Jon Beckwith's book, the story of a scientific life on the front line, traces one remarkable man's dual commitment to scientific research and social responsibility over the course of a career spanning most of the postwar history of genetics and molecular biology.

A thoroughly engrossing memoir that recounts Beckwith's halting steps toward scientific triumphs--among them, the discovery of the genetic element that turns genes on--as well as his emergence as a world-class political activist, *Making Genes, Making Waves* is also a compelling history of the major controversies in genetics over the last thirty years. Presenting the science in easily understandable terms, Beckwith describes the dramatic changes that transformed biology between the late 1950s and our day, the growth of the radical science movement in the 1970s, and the personalities involved throughout. He brings to light the differing styles of scientists as well as the different ways in which science is presented within the scientific community and to the public at large. Ranging from the travails of Robert Oppenheimer and the atomic bomb to the Human Genome Project and recent "Science Wars," Beckwith's book provides a sweeping view of science and its social context in the latter half of the twentieth century.

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1. The Quail Farmer and the Scientist
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### Reviews of this book:

In 1969, a Harvard Medical School group headed by Jon Beckwith accomplished a first in molecular

biology--the isolation of a gene...When their paper appeared in *Nature*, they held an extraordinary press conference in which they described their work and warned of the danger that it might lead to...The press conference received international media coverage, and Beckwith found himself embarked on a double career--a continuing one in research and a new one of social activism in science. His *Making Genes, Making Waves* is an absorbing account of how these two strands in his life were woven into a durable braid. The prose is straightforward, and Beckwith is refreshingly frank, revealing the divagations and doubts that marked his course in research.

--Daniel J. Kevles, *American Scientist*

Reviews of this book:

In this beautifully written autobiography, Beckwith...vividly describes aspects of the 'cultural revolution in science that molecular biology brought with it,' epitomized by...major public controversies about genetics in the United States from the 1960s...Beckwith has portrayed a fascinating period in the history of modern biology and of the interaction of science and society in the Western world. Thanks to him and other activists, social injustices resulting from the application of genetics are now widely discussed and, in democracies, meet with legal measures and regulation. In this book Beckwith, a committed scientist...calls for greater humility about what science can and cannot accomplish. This is a call that scientists would do well to take seriously.

--Ute Deichmann, *Nature*

Reviews of this book:

Jon Beckwith in *Making Genes, Making Waves* reminds us that he first warned about the social impact of genetic engineering...

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