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**Louis Leakey**

The Rise of Man in Africa

 Louis Leakey is an anthropologist who is known for changing the entire theory of where the human race came from. Before his discoveries it was believed that humans had descended from Asia due to some archaeological findings that other people had made. Louis was born August 7, 1903 in Kabete, Kenya and attended Cambridge University in England. While Louis was attending University he believed that Africa was where the human life started. This theory was considered likely to fail and that he would be considered a fool. He married a fellow anthropologist named Mary Nicol and had three children with her. Louis Leakey died October 1, 1972 in London, England, United Kingdom.

 His theory that is most relevant and most famous is his theory that man arose in Africa. This theory became his most famous and most successful due to the fact that before his discoveries everyone was looking to Asia for the start of the human race. What he found in Africa changed the entire way that people now look at the start of mankind. Leakey began excavating Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania in 1931 in hopes of finding our ancestors. At first the were only finding stone tools that something made millions of years ago. It wasn’t until 1959 that Mary Leakey found a human fossil that they dubbed Zinjanthrobus bosei which was an australopith. It was estimated that the fossil they had found was nearly 2 million years old. It was decided that this was not the human ancestor that would have made the tools therefore not confirming that the human race started in Africa.

 In 1960 Louis and Mary had begun finding a new type of fossil in Olduvai Gorge. This fossil was named Homo Habilis meaning Handy Man for all the tools that were found in the surrounding area. This was the big find that he was looking for to help prove his theory to the world. Initially people were still skeptical of his theory but they were accepting of the fact that the discovery he and his team had made was important. Even though he was doubted he believed it H. habilis was a direct ancestor to today’s homo sapiens. Continued findings did support that H. Habilis was an evolutionary step from australopiths towards homo erectus.

 The discovery of H. habilis was so big that it shifted the entire scientific focus of man rising in Asia towards Africa. It proved that human beings are older than we had previously thought. It changed the basis on early research into the origin of human life.His theory has led to many more discoveries of hominid fossils in Africa. It has also inspired to people to study our ancestors through the study of apes. He was the influence for three well known women known as the “The Trimates”; Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey and Biruté M.F. Galdikas. One of the biggest things that his theory and research have done is made the theory of evolution more popular and accepted by some people.

 Louis Leakey’s research into his theory of man coming from africa helped reinforce the theory of evolution. I believe that his work played a factor in schools accepting to teach evolution. His findings were to hard to ignore and more and more people had to accept the fact that evolution is a legit theory. The teaching of the theory of evolution in Canada is a good thing in my opinion because it makes people a bit more open minded to new ideas and theories that might be out of their comfort zone.

**Key Thinking Questions**

1. Do you think in today’s society that people still wonder if human life started somewhere else in the world or they accept whatever they are taught? Whether it is through religion or school or self research.
2. Louis Leakey wanted to find the ancestors of the human race in Africa. How do you think the world have been affected if he had found that a single species was the ancestor for all primate life including humans?
3. If human life originated Africa how do you think civilizations like the Mayans, Aztecs and the Natives came to be so early in time?

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**Research Notes**

**Louis Leakey**

Anthropologist

Basic Details

* Born August 7, 1903
* Died October 1, 1972
* Born in Kabete, Kenya
* Died in London, England, United Kingdom
* Full name Louis Seymour Bazett Leakey
* Married to Mary Leakey (1937)
* His main theory was that man arose in Africa
* Popularized and promoted the theory of evolution
* Called the Father of Hominid Hunting

The Theory that Man arose from Africa

* Mary Leakey discovered fossil remains of Proconsul africanus, an ancestor of apes and humans that existed more than 18 million years ago
* Asia was believed to be the cradle of human life
* First began excavating Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania in 1931
* Began major excavation at Olduvai Gorge in 1959
* Louis had the flu and Mary discovered a human fossil dubbed Zinjanthrobus bosei that would be estimated to be around 2 million years old
* In 1960 with the help of their son they made a find of Homo habillis, humanity’s earliest ancestor discovered thus far
* Louis Leakey also discovered a Homo erectus skull at the site.
* Later he theorized that H. habillis and Z. bosei represented separate, co-existing hominid lineages, a claim that was met with skepticism from his colleagues
* The fossil discoveries he made proved that human beings were far older than we expected
* Changed the belief that human evolution took place in Asia to Africa
* Their findings established that the H. habillis does indeed represent an evolutionary step between the australopiths (who became extinct) and H. erectus.
* They believed that H. erectus was a direct ancestor of the modern man.
* His work and teachings influenced Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute M.F. Galdikas
* Changed the basis on what the origin of human life was
* His discovery led to many other archaeologists finding more fossils in Africa