

colin turnbull the forest people

Colin Turnbull and The Forest People: An Intimate Glimpse into the Mbuti Pygmies

colin turnbull the forest people is a phrase that immediately conjures images of dense African rainforests, intricate human relationships, and a pioneering anthropological study that transformed how we view indigenous cultures. Turnbull's work remains a seminal piece in anthropology, offering an intimate portrait of the Mbuti, a group often referred to as the "Forest People" of the Ituri Rainforest in Central Africa. This exploration not only sheds light on their unique way of life but also challenges many Western preconceptions about society, kinship, and human connection.

Who Was Colin Turnbull?

Before diving into the essence of *The Forest People*, it's important to understand the man behind the book. Colin Turnbull was a British-American anthropologist whose passion for exploring human cultures led him deep into the heart of Africa in the mid-20th century. He was particularly interested in how societies functioned in environments vastly different from the industrialized world.

Turnbull's approach was immersive. He lived among the Mbuti pygmies for extended periods, learning their language, participating in daily activities, and observing their rituals firsthand. This method allowed him to gather rich qualitative data that no mere observation from the outside could offer. His work broke away from earlier anthropological studies that often viewed indigenous people through a detached or exoticizing lens.

The Forest People: An Overview of the Book

Published in 1961, *The Forest People* is Turnbull's most famous work. The book offers a detailed ethnographic account of the Mbuti pygmies, focusing on their social structures, cultural practices, and interactions with their environment.

Life in the Ituri Forest

Turnbull portrays the Ituri Forest not just as a backdrop but as a central character in the lives of the Mbuti. The dense canopy, the sounds of wildlife, and the rhythms of the forest shape every aspect of their existence. The Mbuti rely on hunting, gathering, and small-scale agriculture, adapting ingeniously to the challenges and resources of their environment.

One of the most striking features of the Mbuti's relationship with the forest is their profound respect and spiritual connection to nature. Turnbull details their beliefs in forest

spirits and how these beliefs govern their hunting practices and communal behavior. This spiritual symbiosis contrasts sharply with the often exploitative relationship industrial societies have with nature.

Social Organization and Kinship

Unlike many societies structured around strict hierarchies, the Mbuti operate with a fluid sense of leadership and community. Turnbull highlights the egalitarian nature of their society, where decisions are often made by consensus rather than imposed by a central authority.

The concept of kinship among the Mbuti is equally fascinating. Instead of rigid family structures, they emphasize sharing and mutual support. Turnbull's observations reveal that the bonds between individuals are maintained through reciprocal acts—sharing food, labor, and protection—rather than formalized legal or hereditary ties.

Why Colin Turnbull's Work Still Matters

More than half a century after its publication, **The Forest People** continues to resonate with readers, anthropologists, and environmentalists alike. Here are a few reasons why:

Breaking Stereotypes and Changing Perspectives

Turnbull's empathetic portrayal helped dismantle stereotypes about African "primitive" peoples by presenting the Mbuti as complex, intelligent, and deeply human. His work challenged the notion that modern, industrialized lifestyles are inherently superior or more "civilized."

Insights into Human Adaptability

The Mbuti's way of life offers valuable lessons about human adaptability and sustainability. In a time when climate change and environmental degradation are urgent concerns, studying societies like the Mbuti provides perspective on living harmoniously with nature without depleting its resources.

Contributions to Anthropology and Ethnography

Turnbull's immersive ethnography set new standards for anthropological research. His detailed narrative style brought the Mbuti's world to life, making the academic study of cultures accessible and engaging for a broad audience.

Challenges and Criticisms of The Forest People

While *The Forest People* is widely celebrated, it's important to recognize some critiques that have emerged over time.

Romanticizing Indigenous Life

Some scholars argue that Turnbull's portrayal occasionally veers into romanticism, idealizing the Mbuti lifestyle while downplaying hardships such as disease, conflict, and external threats from encroaching colonial forces.

Impact of External Contact

Turnbull's presence and the awareness brought by his work might have influenced the Mbuti, altering their traditional ways in subtle ways. The ethical considerations of anthropological fieldwork—such as the impact on studied communities—are topics of ongoing discussion.

Lessons from The Forest People for Today's World

What can modern readers and researchers take away from Colin Turnbull's *The Forest People*? Beyond its ethnographic value, the book offers insights relevant to contemporary issues.

- **Community and Cooperation:** The Mbuti's emphasis on sharing and consensus can inspire modern societies grappling with individualism and social fragmentation.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Their sustainable interaction with the forest underscores the importance of respecting ecosystems rather than exploiting them.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Turnbull's respectful approach to understanding another culture serves as a model for cross-cultural dialogue and appreciation.

Exploring Further: Related Works and Studies

For those intrigued by *The Forest People*, several other works delve into similar themes or build upon Turnbull's foundation.

Turnbull's Later Works

Colin Turnbull continued his anthropological pursuits with books like **The Mountain People** and **The Human Cycle**, expanding his exploration of human societies and cultural dynamics.

Contemporary Anthropological Studies

Modern ethnographies revisit African forest societies with updated methodologies and perspectives, incorporating the voices and agency of indigenous peoples themselves.

Documentaries and Visual Media

Visual documentaries about the Mbuti and other forest-dwelling peoples provide an immersive experience, complementing Turnbull's textual narrative with vivid imagery.

Walking through the pages of **The Forest People**, readers embark on a journey that transcends geography and time, connecting deeply with a community whose life is intertwined with the natural world in ways that many of us rarely witness. Colin Turnbull's dedication to portraying the Mbuti pygmies with nuance and empathy remains a beacon in anthropological literature, inviting ongoing reflection on what it means to be human in diverse environments.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is Colin Turnbull in relation to 'The Forest People'?

Colin Turnbull was a British-American anthropologist and author who wrote 'The Forest People,' an ethnographic study of the Mbuti Pygmies of the Congo.

What is 'The Forest People' about?

'The Forest People' is an ethnographic book that explores the life, culture, and social structure of the Mbuti Pygmies living in the Ituri Forest of Central Africa.

When was 'The Forest People' published?

'The Forest People' was first published in 1961.

Why is 'The Forest People' considered an important

work in anthropology?

The book is considered important because it provides an intimate and detailed portrayal of a hunter-gatherer society, emphasizing the Mbuti's harmonious relationship with their environment and their egalitarian social structure.

What methodology did Colin Turnbull use in 'The Forest People'?

Turnbull used participant observation, living among the Mbuti for an extended period to gain deep insights into their daily lives and culture.

What are some key themes explored in 'The Forest People'?

Key themes include the Mbuti's communal lifestyle, their connection to the forest, social organization, rituals, music, and their perspectives on life and death.

How did Colin Turnbull's portrayal of the Mbuti differ from other anthropological works of his time?

Turnbull's portrayal was more empathetic and immersive, focusing on the emotional and spiritual lives of the Mbuti rather than just objective cultural analysis.

What impact did 'The Forest People' have on popular perceptions of indigenous hunter-gatherer societies?

The book helped raise awareness and appreciation of the complexity and richness of hunter-gatherer cultures, challenging stereotypes about so-called 'primitive' societies.

Are there any criticisms of Colin Turnbull's 'The Forest People'?

Some critics argue that Turnbull's romanticized portrayal may overlook internal conflicts or challenges faced by the Mbuti, and that his presence might have influenced the community he studied.

Where can one find or read 'The Forest People'?

'The Forest People' is available in bookstores, libraries, and online platforms as both print and e-book editions.

Additional Resources

Colin Turnbull *The Forest People: An Anthropological Insight into the Mbuti Pygmies*

colin turnbull the forest people stands as a seminal work in the field of anthropology, offering an in-depth ethnographic study of the Mbuti pygmies who inhabit the Ituri Forest in the Congo. Published in 1961, this book captures the complex social structures, cultural practices, and daily lives of a community often marginalized and misunderstood by the outside world. Turnbull's work provides a rare and intimate portrait of a hunter-gatherer society, challenging prevailing stereotypes and contributing significantly to the discourse on human diversity and cultural relativism.

Context and Background of Colin Turnbull's Study

Colin Turnbull, a British-American anthropologist, embarked on his fieldwork among the Mbuti in the late 1950s, a period when African indigenous cultures were still largely underrepresented in global anthropological literature. His immersive approach involved living with the Mbuti for extended periods, participating in their rituals, hunting expeditions, and social ceremonies. This methodology allowed Turnbull to observe nuances in their daily interactions that might otherwise have been overlooked by more detached observers.

The Mbuti people, often referred to as "forest people" due to their deep connection to the Ituri Forest, are one of several pygmy groups in Central Africa. They are characterized by their short stature, egalitarian social organization, and subsistence strategy centered on hunting, gathering, and trading with neighboring agricultural communities.

Anthropological Contributions of The Forest People

Turnbull's work transcended mere description; it provided a framework for understanding the Mbuti's social dynamics and ecological adaptation. One of the key contributions of *The Forest People* is its analysis of the Mbuti's egalitarian society, which contrasts sharply with hierarchical structures dominant in many other cultures. Turnbull highlighted how the Mbuti maintained social cohesion through shared responsibilities, collective decision-making, and an absence of formal leadership.

Furthermore, the book sheds light on Mbuti rituals such as the molimo ceremony, which Turnbull describes as a spiritual event designed to "wake up" the forest and maintain harmony between humans and nature. This spiritual worldview underscores the intrinsic link between cultural practices and environmental stewardship, a theme increasingly relevant in contemporary discussions about sustainable living.

Social Organization and Daily Life

Turnbull's detailed account of the Mbuti's social structure reveals a society built on

kinship ties and mutual aid. The forest people live in small bands, typically composed of extended families, with flexible membership that allows for movement between groups. This fluidity facilitates resource sharing and conflict resolution without resorting to formal mechanisms of governance.

Daily life among the Mbuti revolves around hunting with nets and bows, gathering wild plants, and communal food sharing. Turnbull observed that hunting was not merely an economic activity but also a social ritual that reinforced community bonds. Men and women contributed differently but equally, with women gathering tubers and fruits, while men hunted game.

Cultural Practices and Beliefs

The spiritual dimension of the Mbuti culture is vividly portrayed in Turnbull's narrative. The molimo ceremony, for example, involves music, dance, and symbolic acts intended to express reverence for the forest. Turnbull interprets this as a cultural mechanism that fosters respect for nature, which in turn supports the group's survival.

Moreover, the Mbuti's language, songs, and storytelling traditions serve as vehicles for transmitting knowledge and reinforcing social norms. Turnbull's ethnography captures these aspects with sensitivity, emphasizing the importance of oral culture in maintaining collective identity.

Comparative Analysis: The Forest People and Other Hunter-Gatherer Societies

When compared to other hunter-gatherer groups such as the San of Southern Africa or the Australian Aboriginal peoples, the Mbuti exhibit both similarities and unique traits. Like the San, the Mbuti practice egalitarianism and maintain intricate knowledge of their natural environment. However, the dense Ituri Forest provides a different ecological context, influencing subsistence patterns and social interactions.

In contrast to some groups where shamanistic leadership is prominent, the Mbuti's leadership remains informal and situational, emphasizing consensus over authority. Turnbull's work thus contributes to a broader understanding of how environment shapes social organization and cultural expression among indigenous societies.

Pros and Cons of Turnbull's Approach

Turnbull's immersive ethnography offers several advantages:

- **Depth of Insight:** Living among the Mbuti allowed for a rich, nuanced portrayal of their lives.

- **Humanizing Representation:** The book challenges exoticized or simplistic views of pygmy groups.
- **Interdisciplinary Relevance:** Insights into ecology, spirituality, and social organization have cross-disciplinary appeal.

However, some critiques have been raised over the years:

- **Romanticization:** Some scholars argue that Turnbull's portrayal may idealize the Mbuti, overlooking internal conflicts.
- **Temporal Limitations:** The snapshot provided reflects a specific historical moment and may not represent ongoing changes.

Legacy and Influence of Colin Turnbull The Forest People

Turnbull's *The Forest People* remains a foundational text in anthropology, widely cited in academic and popular discussions about hunter-gatherer societies. It has inspired subsequent generations of researchers to adopt participatory methods and to emphasize cultural relativism in their work. The book also contributed to raising global awareness about the challenges faced by indigenous forest communities, including displacement and environmental degradation.

In the context of today's rapidly changing world, Turnbull's ethnography offers valuable lessons about resilience, communal living, and the symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment. As the Mbuti continue to navigate pressures from modernization and deforestation, *The Forest People* stands as a testament to their enduring cultural richness and adaptability.

Exploring Colin Turnbull's work provides not only an anthropological case study but also a broader reflection on the diversity of human societies and the vital importance of preserving indigenous knowledge in an era of globalization.

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colin turnbull the forest people: *The Forest People* Colin M. Turnbull, 1961 This study of the BaMbuti Pygmies of the Congo has become a classic work in the finest tradition of literate anthropology. Turnbull lived among the BaMbuti for three years, not as a clinical observer, but as a friend, learning their customs and sharing their daily life. Turnbull describes their hunting parties and nomadic camps, their love affairs and ancient ceremonies--the molimo, in which the Pygmies praise the forest as provider, protector, and deity; the elima, in which the young girls come of age; and the nkumbi circumcision rites, in which the villagers of the surrounding non-Pygmy tribes attempt to assert their authority over the Pygmies, whose forest home they dare not enter.

colin turnbull the forest people: *The Anthropology of White Supremacy* Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, Jemima Pierre, Junaid Rana, 2025-01-28 White supremacy has shaped cultural anthropology from its inception, yet the discipline also offers powerful tools for understanding how this corrosive force structures societies around the world. The Anthropology of White Supremacy explores how this phenomenon works around the globe and within anthropology itself. Gathering original essays from a diverse, international group of anthropologists, this collection illustrates that white supremacy, far from being only a fringe belief of white nationalists and fascists, is a core mainstream ideology. The book includes essays about many countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Senegal, South Africa, and the United States, and takes up such topics as American advertising, the Belgian Congo, South Asian philosophies, police cadets, U.S. immigration courts, Guantánamo memoirs, Palestinian feminism, Hollywood paparazzi, and how Indigenous anthropologists can counter the damage of settler colonialism. The result reveals not only how anthropology can help us to better comprehend white supremacy, but also how the discipline can help us begin to dismantle it. With contributions by Omolade Adunbi, Samar Al-Bulushi, Aisha M. Beliso-De Jesús, Michael Blakey, Mitzi Uehara Carter, Subhadra Mitra Channa, Celina de Sá, Vanessa Diaz, Britt Halvorson, Faye Harrison, Sarah Ihmoud, Anthony R. Jerry, Darryl Li, Kristín Loftsdóttir, Christopher Loperena, Keisha-Khan Y. Perry, Jemima Pierre, Jean Muteba Rahier, Laurence Ralph, Renya K. Ramirez, Junaid Rana, Joshua Reno, Jonathan Rosa, Shalini Shankar, and Maria Styve--

colin turnbull the forest people: *The King of the World in the Land of the Pygmies* Joan Mark, 1998-12-01 Joan Mark offers an interpretive biography of Patrick Tracy Lowell Putnam (1904-53), who spent twenty-five years living among the Bambuti pygmies of the Ituri Forest in what is now Zaire. On the Epulu River he constructed Camp Putnam as a harmonious multiracial community. He

modeled his camp on the “dude ranches” of the American West, taking in paying guests while running a medical clinic and occasionally offering legal aid to the local people, and assumed the role of intermediary between locals and visitors, including Colin M. Turnbull, author of the classic *Forest People*. Mark describes Putnam’s mercurial relations with family and with his African and American wives—and follows him to his sad and violent end. She places Patrick Putnam within the context of three different anthropological traditions and examines his contribution as an expert on pygmies.

colin turnbull the forest people: Unconventions Michael Martone, 2010-02-25 *Unconventions* is a quirky and provocative miscellany that reveals Michael Martone’s protean interests as a writer and a writing teacher. Martone has, shall we say, a problem with authority. His chief pleasure in knowing the rules of his vocation comes from trying out new ways to bend, blend, or otherwise defy them. The pieces gathered in *Unconventions* are drawn from a long career spent loosening the creative strictures on writing. Including articles, public addresses, essays, interviews, and even a eulogy, these writings vary greatly in form but are unified in addressing the many technical and artistic issues that face all writers, particularly those interested in experimental and nontraditional modes and forms. Martone’s approach has always been to synthesize, to understand and use any technique, formula, or style available. “I find myself, then,” he writes, “self-identifying as a formalist, both and neither an experimenter and/or a traditionalist.” In “I Love a Parade: An Afterword,” Martone writes about not fitting in--and loving it--as he recalls the time he marched alone in a local Labor Day parade, as a one-person delegation from the National Writers Union. Elsewhere, in writings formally, stylistically, purposely at odds with themselves, Martone’s expansive curiosity is on full display. We learn about camouflage techniques, how a baby acquires language, how to “read” a WPA-era post office mural, and why Martone sold his stock in the *New Yorker* and reinvested his money in the company that makes Etch A Sketch®. *Unconventions*, then, is Martone’s “Frankensteinian monster,” a kind of unruly, hybrid spawn of the mainstream writing enterprise. “Writing seems to me an intrinsic pleasure, an end in itself first,” says Martone. “The question for me is not whether my writing, or any piece of writing, is good or bad but what the writing is and what it is doing and how finally it is used or can be used by others.”

colin turnbull the forest people: The Mysterious Origins of Hybrid Man Susan B. Martinez, 2013-11-02 A provocative challenge to Darwin’s theory of evolution • Shows there is no missing link because the human race, since day one, is the result of outright interbreeding among highly diverse types • Reveals multiple “Gardens of Eden” and how each continent has its own independent hominid lineages • Explains *Homo sapiens*’ mental powers (the Great Leap Forward) and how we acquired the “blood of the gods,” which endowed us with a soul Did we evolve from apes, or are we all descendants of Adam and Eve? Why is the “missing link” still missing? Is the dumb luck of natural selection valid? Piecing together the protohistory of humanity through anthropology, genetics, paleolinguistics, and indigenous traditions, Susan B. Martinez offers an entirely original alternative to Darwin’s evolution: Modern humanity did not evolve but is a mosaic of mixed ancestry, the result of eons of cross-breeding and retro-breeding among different groups, including Cro-Magnon, Neanderthal, hobbits, giants, and Africa’s “Lucy” and “Zinj.” Martinez shows that there were multiple “Gardens of Eden” and how each continent had its own blend of races prior to the Great Flood, which caused the diaspora that brought a renaissance of culture to every division of the Earth. Martinez explains *Homo sapiens*’ mental powers (the Great Leap Forward) in cosmological terms--how we are the product of both heaven and earth. She identifies the “Sons of Heaven” and the angel-engendered races, explaining how *Homo sapiens* acquired the “blood of the gods,” which endowed us with a soul. Providing the ultimate resolution to the Evolution versus Creationism debate, this landmark study of hybrid man justifies his unexpectedly sudden appearance in the fossil record, the curious parallels between oral histories of the world’s people, and why anatomically modern features are found in the earliest paleontological evidence.

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Taiwan SaiSiyat people's paSta'ay ritual, still held to this day to commemorate the koko ta'ay. Follow the distribution of the legends, interspersed with original stories by modern Indigenous authors. Explore the archaeological find of small-statured negrito remains in Taiwan, and delve into the most current research on the topic by linguists, anthropologists, folklorists, and other specialists to unravel the mystery of what—or who—inspired these ancient legends.

colin turnbull the forest people: Study Guide SuperSummary, 2019-02-14 SuperSummary, a modern alternative to SparkNotes and CliffsNotes, offers high-quality study guides for challenging works of literature. This 41-page guide for *The Forest People* by Colin M. Turnbull includes detailed chapter summaries and analysis covering 15 chapters, as well as several more in-depth sections of expert-written literary analysis. Featured content includes commentary on major characters, 25 important quotes, essay topics, and key themes like *The Children of the Forest* and *Village Life versus Forest Life*.

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introduce key people, and discuss historical and personal influences on theorists. In extensive footnotes, the editors provide commentary that puts the writing in historical and cultural context, defines unusual terms, translates non-English phrases, identifies references to other scholars and their works, and offers paraphrases and summaries of complex passages. The notes identify and provide background information on concepts important in the development of anthropology. New to the Eighth Edition: "Anthropology, Decolonization and Whiteness" puts the anthropology of resistance in historical context, explores the history of the anthropology of decolonization and whiteness, and presents some recent controversies in anthropology "Phenomenological Anthropology and The Anthropology of the Good" broadens the focus of the previous anthropology of the good section to provide a more diverse overview of philosophical anthropology. Revised introductions to every section in the book offer suggested readings for important works in each area beyond what's offered in the text New readings include works by Sherry Ortner, Michel-Rolf Trouillot, Jason Throop, Audra Simpson, and Orisanmi Burton

colin turnbull the forest people: The Age of Capitalism, Consumer Culture, and the Collapse of Nature in the Anthropocene Jack Thornburg, 2024-10-02 The Age of Capitalism, Consumer Culture, and the Collapse of Nature in the Anthropocene argues that the stability of post-industrial, postmodern society is threatened by the convergence of three distinct, yet interrelated, crises: environmental degradation, capitalist economic development, and the primacy of consumption and self-absorption as the basis for economic development at the expense of community and social relationships. Jack Thornburg contrasts advanced modern society with indigenous cultures in terms of nature and conceptions of the communal self. The complex nature of capitalist-oriented society has influenced how individuals conceptualize themselves. The outcome, the author contends, is a competitive society in which individuals are alienated living in uncertain times. One consequence of these crises (all of which derive from the Enlightenment and the concomitant appearance and evolution of capitalism) has been the destruction of a worldview balancing and connecting well-being with prosperity of the natural world. Money and materialism cannot buy happiness as capitalist narrative asserts. Thornburg claims that the happiness sought by individuals seeking meaning through consumption can only be realized by reintegrating nature with the human spirit.

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colin turnbull the forest people: *The Forest People: Africa's Pygmy Tribes Along the Congo River - Their Hunter-Gatherer Culture, Village Customs and Bond with Nature* Colin M. Turnbull, 2020-02-27 In the 1950s, anthropologist Colin Turnbull lived among the pygmies of the Congo river for three years - this is his account of life among the tribespeople. Adventurous as a young man, at the time he moved to the Congo Turnbull already had several years' experience of Africa and its rural cultures. Seeking to shed insight on the pygmy peoples for a wider audience, he sought a home in one of the villages and introduced himself to the locals. Quickly becoming popular in the locality for his courtesy and respectful manners, Turnbull kept a diary and took photographs of the locals, noting their customs and dynamics as a tribal community. The interplay between males and females of the tribe are detailed, with rivalries and conflicts between the younger pygmies. Marriage and the duties therein define the tribe, with complex customs existing between existing and prospective couples. As the tribes live as hunter gatherers, it is necessary for a number of men to be skilled in

gathering meat, fruits and vegetables, together with honeycomb - a substance prized by the pygmies for its deliciousness. Turnbull does not bog down his narrative in academic jargon or complex nuance; rather we find an informal, at times even casual, account of life in a forest tribe. We receive a sense of the personalities and priorities accorded; this readability undoubtedly helps us better comprehend the pygmies' lives.

colin turnbull the forest people: A Modern Theory of Language Evolution Carl J. Becker, 2004-12 The discipline of linguistics is a perfect example of the limitations of the modern academy. The combination of social taboos that make certain subject matter unfit for general knowledge and discovery, and the ever-narrowing specialization of scientists leaves us with an intellectual institution that can no longer do anything but apply, repair, and justify the dogma of Victorian Cosmology that is the rule all must follow. Linguistics should be one of the most interesting subjects, considering it is the study of our most valuable and revealing cultural asset, language. However, recent publications from the linguistic department for public consumption have been some of the most trivial and boring intellectual expositions that have ever been put between two covers. Using the entire database of science, we look at the acquisition of language and how it forms our cultural perspective on life, including theories of language evolution. We develop the theory of the evolution of language from song, one of the few suppositions that Charles Darwin actually got right. From this basis we move on to the roots of Proto-Indo-European, which we call Bhear Tongue. Bhear Tongue is essentially the Eurasian language family dimly perceived by one of the greatest linguists of the twentieth century, Joseph Greenberg. From this perspective we can now retell the tribal stories from Iberia to Siberia, showing a common origin and motivation for human science and religion.

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