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Lynn Margulis dies

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Lynn Margulis

The eminent biologist Lynn Margulis died on November 22, 2011, at the age of 73, [according](#) to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Born Lynn Alexander in Chicago on March 5, 1938, she enrolled in the University of Chicago at the age of fourteen. She received her A.B. in liberal arts from the University of Chicago in 1957, a joint master's degree in zoology and genetics from the University of Wisconsin in 1960, and a Ph.D. in genetics from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1963. After a stint as a post-doctoral researcher at Brandeis

University, she spent twenty-two years in the Department of Biology at Boston University before moving to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she was Distinguished University Professor. Among her honors and awards were membership in the National Academy of Sciences, the William Procter Prize for Scientific Achievement from Sigma Xi, the Darwin-Wallace Medal from the Linnean Society, and the National Medal of Science. A prolific writer (often in collaboration with her son Dorion Sagan), her books include *Origin of Eukaryotic Cells* (Yale University Press 1970), *Origins of Sex* (Yale University Press, 1986), *Microcosmos* (HarperCollins, 1987), *Slanted Truths: Essays on Gaia, Symbiosis, and Evolution* (Springer, 1997), *Symbiotic Planet* (Basic Books, 1998), and *Acquiring Genomes* (Basic Books, 2002).

Margulis was perhaps most celebrated for her advocacy of the endosymbiotic theory of the origin of organelles, starting with her paper "On the origin of mitosing cells," published in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology* in 1967. The endosymbiotic theory is now generally accepted for mitochondria and chloroplasts, if not for all of the organelles that Margulis thought. She was also known for her advocacy of the Gaia hypothesis and symbiogenesis, the idea that speciation is driven largely by symbiosis. Her proclivity for such unconventional evolutionary mechanisms allowed her to be steadily misrepresented by antievolutionists hoping to convince the public that evolution is a theory in crisis. But Margulis firmly rejected creationism, writing, for example, "Anthropocentric writers with a proclivity for the miraculous and a commitment to divine intervention tend to attribute historical appearances like eyes, wings, and speech to 'irreducible complexity' (as, for example, Michael Behe does in his book, *Darwin's Black Box*) or 'ingenious design' (in the tradition of William Paley who used the functional organs of animals as proof for the existence of God). Here we feel no need for supernatural hypotheses. Rather, we insist that today, more than ever, it is the growing scientific understanding of how new traits appear, ones even as complex as the vertebrate eye, that has triumphed" (*Acquiring Genomes*, p. 202). She was a Supporter of NCSE.

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