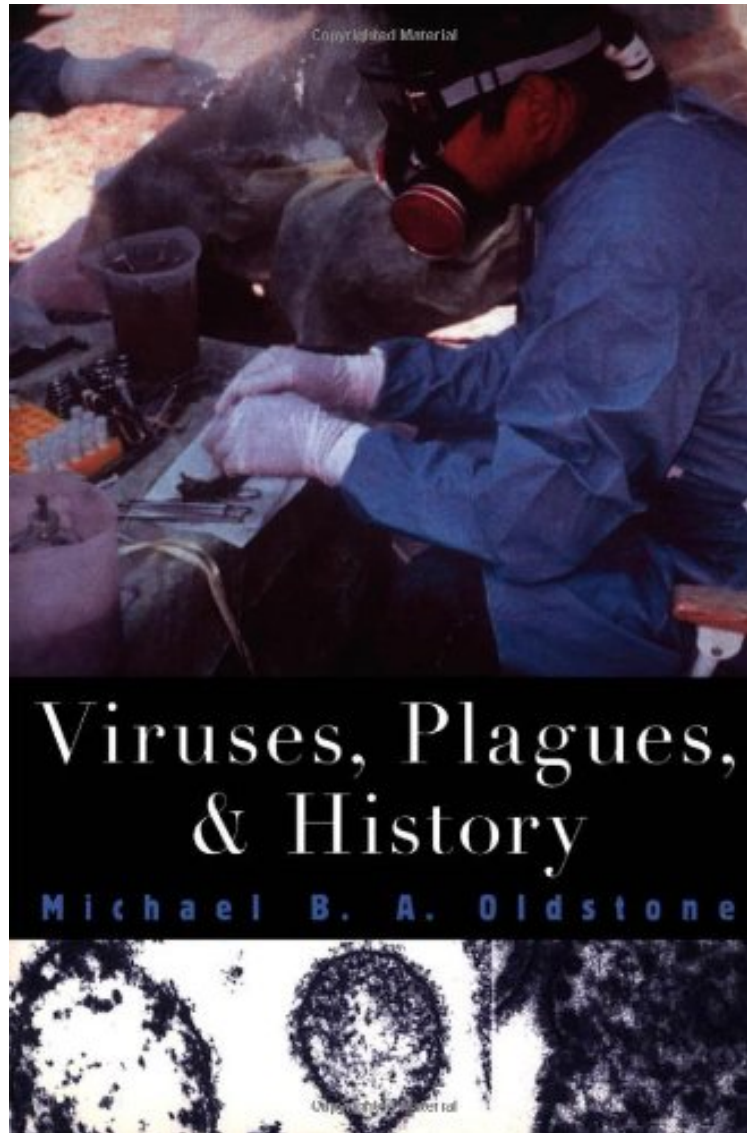


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Viruses, Plagues, and History

Michael B. A. Oldstone

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Michael B. A. Oldstone : Viruses, Plagues, and History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Viruses, Plagues, and History:

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating!By Sammy MadisonI ordered three books on similar subjects, "Viruses, Plagues, and History", "Man and Microbes", and "Plagues and Peoples" at the same time. Each book has something different to recommend it. My least favorite was "Plagues and Peoples". The writing was pompous and cumbersome, and while the thesis of the book, that man's relationship to society and our planet is

pathogenic, is interesting, it can be conveyed in one sentence. There is not a lot of readable material about the actual history of disease in the book. I got a lot more by far out of both "Man and Microbes" and "Viruses, Plagues, and History". Both of these books are filled with interesting facts and stories of how disease has impacted human history. I will definitely keep and re-read both books. As an earlier reviewer noted, the first section of "Viruses, Plagues, and History", entitled "Introduction to the Principles of Virology" is pretty intimidating. If the science bothers the reader too much, it really doesn't hurt to skip this chapter. Maybe the rest of the book will interest the non-scientific reader enough so he will go back and read this section later. Part Two of the book is entitled "Success Stories". It contains fascinating and very graphic descriptions of some very bad diseases and interesting stories about the effects these diseases have had on the course of history. Part Three is "Present and Future Challenges", about some of the newly emerging diseases that are making headlines today. The author is a true professional in the biomedical field, and in his preface, he tells about reading "Microbe Hunters" in junior high and how it inspired him in his education and career to meet many of the foremost experts on viral diseases and become one himself. I think this is a very, very interesting book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. a well told history
By EliA well blended history of virology, scientists, war, expeditions and of course biology. The facts are so well integrated into a coherent whole that nothing seems out of place. A truly great story. Very highly recommended.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.
Good review of viruses
By SA Whitethis is more of a historical book than a scientific book. It tells how viruses have changed history and talks about how history might have been if a plague did not happen. It is for a reader with a nonscientific background, as it has two chapters on basic immunology and viral characteristics. Overall, it has been an informative and well written book, although at some times dry.

The story of viruses and the story of humanity have been intertwined since the dawn of history. The first small cities formed not only the cradle of civilization, but the spawning ground for the earliest viral epidemics, the first opportunity for viruses to find a home in the human herd. This is a story of fear and ignorance, as everything from demons and the wrath of the gods to minority groups have been blamed for epidemics from smallpox to yellow fever to AIDS. It is a story of grief and heartbreak, as hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, are wiped out in a single year. And it is a story of great bravery and sacrifice, as doctors and nurses put themselves in harm's way to combat yellow fever in Memphis and Ebola in Zaire, and as researchers risk their own lives to test theories of vaccines and the transmission of disease. Now, in *Viruses, Plagues, and History*, Michael B. A. Oldstone tells all these stories as he illuminates the history of the devastating diseases that have tormented humanity. Oldstone focuses his tale on a few of the most famous viruses humanity has battled, beginning with some we have effectively defeated, such as smallpox, polio, and measles. Nearly 300 million people were killed by smallpox in this century alone -- more than were killed in all the wars of the twentieth century combined. The author presents a vivid account of the long campaign against the virus, the insightful work of Edward Jenner, who created the smallpox vaccine from cowpox virus in 1796, and the monumental efforts of D. A. Henderson and an army of W.H.O. health care workers to finally eradicate smallpox. The smallpox virus remains the only organism that we have deliberately pushed to complete extinction in the wild. Oldstone then describes the fascinating viruses that have captured headlines in more recent years: Ebola and other hemorrhagic fevers, which literally turn their victims' organs to a bloody pulp; the Hantavirus outbreaks in the southwestern United States and elsewhere; mad cow disease, a frightening illness made worse by government mishandling and secrecy; and, of course, AIDS, often called "the plague of our time." And he tells us of the many scientists watching and waiting even now for the next great plague, monitoring influenza strains to see whether the deadly variant from 1918 -- a viral strain that killed over 20 million people in 1918-1919, more than twice the military and civilian casualties of the First World War -- will make a comeback. Viruses have enormous power. They have wiped out cities, brought down dynasties, and helped destroy civilizations. But, as Michael Oldstone reveals, scientific research has given us the power to tame many of these viruses as well. *Viruses, Plagues, and History* shows us the panorama of humanity's long-standing conflict with our unseen viral enemies, from our successes to our continuing struggles. Oldstone's book is a vivid history of a fascinating field, and a highly reliable dispatch from a worker on the frontiers of this ongoing campaign.

.com Had it not been for viruses, the U.S. and Canada might today be one country; the African slave trade may not have been as extensive; and the Spanish almost certainly wouldn't have conquered the Aztecs and other New World native peoples. In fact, viruses have affected world history more extensively than most of us can imagine. *Viruses, Plagues, History* not only shows us what viruses are and how they work, but looks at what newer ones such as Ebola and HIV might mean to our future. Even more frightening, Oldstone discusses the influenza virus of 1918 to 1919-- which may have killed as many as 50 million people worldwide and certainly helped England, France, and the U.S. defeat Germany in World War I--and wonders if it's due for a return visit. Granted, a book with a chapter titled "Mad Cow Disease and Englishmen: Spongiform Encephalopathies--Virus or Prion Disease?" isn't for everybody, but it's a fascinating for anyone interested in health and wellness and the medical future of our planet.

From Library Journal
The current interest in emerging diseases has led many virologists to write their own popular books on the subject. Many

incorporate the entertaining if lurid detail popularized by Richard Preston's bestselling *The Hot Zone* (LJ 8/94). Some, like Frank Ryan in his *Virus X* (LJ 1/97), use accounts of emerging virus outbreaks as a lead-in to fascinating discussions on the ecology and evolution of viruses. Oldstone, who directs a laboratory of viral immunobiology at the Scripps Research Institute, takes a more traditional approach, intending to write in the spirit of Paul de Kruif's classic *Microbe Hunters* (1926). After a short introduction to the principles of virology and immunology, Oldstone describes the partial or total conquests of four major killers—smallpox, yellow fever, measles, and polio—then discusses old and emerging diseases that are serious threats—Lassa fever, Ebola, Hantavirus, AIDS, and influenza. Unfortunately, Oldstone's writing lacks de Kruif's prose style and engrossing detail; much, if not all, of his work reads like a rather terse textbook. Also of concern is Oldstone's tendency to ignore controversies or make unsupported statements that go against generally accepted scientific consensus. His competent but unexciting book is an optional choice for general science collections.

Marit MacArthur, Auraria Lib., Denver
Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc.
From Kirkus sFamiliar but compelling, the story of mankind's undoing by epidemic infectious diseases never fails to fascinate and appall. This retelling, by Scripps Research Institute virologist Oldstone, is less passionate than Laurie Garrett's *The Coming Plague*, being more or less prosaic, factual account of viral plagues in recorded history. Oldstone provides background chapters on the nature of viruses and the ways the body's immune system combats them, then launches into a detailed description of the plagues themselves. He devotes a fair amount of space to smallpox, following its depredations from ancient Greece all the way up to the work of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta. Modern strategies have led to the total eradication of smallpox-- a major success, given that the disease killed 300 million people in the 20th century. Other success stories cited by Oldstone include the treatment of yellow fever, measles, and polio, although the lack of immunization programs still racks up enormous tolls. The World Health Organization estimates that in the 1980s and early '90s as many as 2.5 million children died of measles annually. The second half of the book deals with such unconquered viral diseases as Lassa fever, Ebola, Hantavirus, and AIDS. The role of urbanization and air travel in spreading viruses to large pools of susceptible people, the unpredictable nature of viral genetics and evolution, and the impact of politics on medicine are among the variables Oldstone cites to remind us that as a species we are always vulnerable. Interestingly, while the author loudly condemns governments and corporations for suppressing information, he is silent on the rivalries and contentions among scientists themselves: nary a word on Salk vs. Sabin, for example, nor Gallo vs. Montagnier. A bit of the old-boy network? In sum, a somewhat sanitized, professorial account of the ever-fascinating legacy of viral disease on human history. (64 illustrations, not seen) -- Copyright 1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.