

Dr. Will Reviews

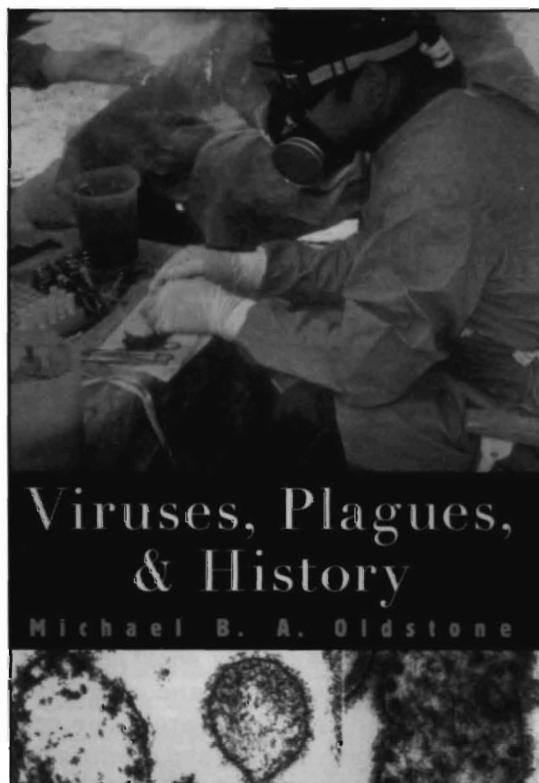
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Viruses, Plagues and History will serve useful for the inquisitive science reader as a general purpose reference for the historic aspects of the diseases covered. The material is pleasant to read and holds the attention of the reader. It is not heavy or boring. The references are sufficient but are not as extensive as they may appear at first, since many are repeated by the format used.

Organized into fifteen chapters, this book is built around a core of two sets of four viral diseases. Each of the four chapters on the older historic diseases focuses on a viral scourge that has successfully been controlled (measles, yellow fever, and poliomyelitis) or eradicated (smallpox). The other four diseases (HIV and Ebola, Hantavirus, and Lassa hemorrhagic fevers), which Oldstone deals with in a five chapter set, are currently emerging plagues much like those in the first set in that they are out of control early in the society's experience with them.

Oldstone has written more about the older plagues than the current ones, which may be explained by the existence of wider historic literature for reference regarding society's experience with the rise and control of the diseases. It is easier for an author, with regard to reputation and acceptance of fact, to write complete reviews about plagues that have been conquered, ones for which all the pieces are there for the telling. In reality, the modern plagues seem in the perspective of the contemporary writer to be more complex and the importance of individual pieces in their puzzle less certain than those that have been solved and are now well-described. It is also true that less can be written today about the emerging plagues that will not be refuted as more is learned about them. It should be noted that more of the newly emerging viral as well as other plagues are zoonotic.

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Viruses, Plagues, & History by Michael B.A. Oldstone. Hardcover, 211 pp. Oxford Press, New York, New York 10016. ISBN 0-19-511723-9. 1998. Available through Oxford Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016. \$25.00, price subject to change without notice.

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (Mad Cow Disease) is given a separate chapter because the etiology is uncertain. A possible role for virus and/or prion, cause or effect, has not yet been elucidated. Another chapter is devoted to influenza, which could rise at anytime to pandemic proportions. Veterinarians will readily recognize that these latter diseases plus yellow fever, Ebola, Hantavirus, and Lassa fever are zoonotic and HIV cases have several zoonotic-associated infectious agents that were intimated in earlier diagnosis of AIDS. Buffalo pox is emerging in humans in Bangladesh and some fear it may occupy the niche that smallpox once did.

The three introductory chapters provide a synopsis of the role of viral plagues in the history of mostly Western civilization (Chapter 1), and reviews of virology (Chapter 2) and immunology (Chapter 3). Personal and professional biases of the author are evident in the preface and the first chapter. This is unfortunate, because these distract the reader from the accounts of the viral plagues that Oldstone has written.

The reader may be struck that the author confers much of the credit for advances against these plagues to the medical profession, which leads an array of ancillary researchers and the community behind it. It is impressed upon us that the author is a personal friend of many of the purported modern medical leaders, and by inference, that what is written is the real and authentic autobiography of humankind's struggle against the plagues. Many of the personalities are familiar to us (Salk, Sabin, Gallo). Oldstone credits veterinary contributions at times but misses the opportunity to fully recognize that the conquest and continuing struggle against viral and other plagues involve a global community effort in which many notable discoveries and efforts are important, and that there are many contributors from other fields and countries.

This book's incorporated history of the conquest of the New World is tainted by the ethnocentrism of the American author. While the real role of viral and other infectious diseases in the destruction of the Na-

tive American civilizations and cultures are recounted, the author falls into the current vogue of retrospectively judging European cultures and ethics viewed from the present. Typically, the Spanish and French are roundly castigated, and the British and northern Europeans, Dutch, and Belgians, while their misdeeds are noted, are barely criticized though all conquerors operated in similar fashion as the world was opening through exploration and conquest. The death toll in the New World (from the Caribbean through the Americas and the Pacific) as a result of conquest and the transmission of virulent disease was devastating regardless of the origin, beliefs, and culture of the foreign intruders.

The history of plagues in the past, as now, is about change and exploration; in the past it was discovery of new worlds and colonial expansion. Today, it is manifested as extension of power and influence of nations through ownership and complex interactions in trade and economics, about undervaluing rainforests and habitat. The causes of the current plagues are affected by wealth and influenced by poverty, by rapidly changing socioeconomic systems, and extension of humans into wilderness areas. These are difficult to write about from a medical model of health and disease, and it is Oldstone's relative lack of insight with regard to a more holistic view of humans and disease as part of nature that may be the weakness of this book.◆

Cy - continued from page 39.

my major five times, and I'm beginning to think that Cy is going to leave Iowa State before I do. Recently, I joined the staff of the *ISU Veterinarian* because I have a passion for both animals and writing. My current, and hopefully permanent, major is Journalism with a Public Relations emphasis.

Cy has a strong interest in the *ISU Veterinarian* as well. Through working in conjunction with the *ISU Veterinarian*, Cy hopes to pick up some useful information. Not only does Cy hope to make friends with some doctors and receive free health care benefits, he also hopes to obtain some knowledge that will help him in the future. What would Cy

hope to learn, you ask? He informed me that he wants to learn how to euthanize a Hawkeye and tranquilize some other pesky vermin such as a Jayhawk, a Tiger, and a Buffalo, to name a few.

I'm sure that Cy will be consulting a few veterinarians in the future due to the fact that everyday is a potential danger in Cy's life. Since I've known Cy, he has been clocked by a Colorado basketball player, fallen down countless stairs (his vision is not so good), and been rammed into a goal post numerous times. Cy and I are looking forward to working with the *ISU Veterinarian* staff and the Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine for the next year.◆