



The Epidemic: A History of Aids

By Jonathan Engel



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From the Castro bathhouses to AZT and the denial of AIDS in South Africa, this sweeping look at AIDS covers the epidemic from all angles and across the world. Engel seamlessly weaves together science, politics, and culture, writing with an even hand—noting the excesses of the more radical edges of the ACT UP movement as well as the conservative religious leaders who thought AIDS victims deserved what they got.

The story of AIDS is one of the most compelling human dramas of our time, both in its profound tragedy and in the extraordinary scientific efforts impelled on its behalf. For gay Americans, it has been the story of the past generation, redefining the community and the community's sexuality. For the Third World, AIDS has created endless devastation, toppling economies, social structures, and whole villages and regions. And the worst may yet be to come: AIDS is expanding quickly into India, Russia, China, and elsewhere, while still raging insub-Saharan Africa.

A distinguished medical historian, Engel lets his characters speak for themselves. Whether gay activists, government officials, public health professionals, scientists, or frightened parents of schoolchildren, they responded as best they could to tragic happenstance that emerged seemingly from nowhere. There is much drama here, and human weakness and heroism too. Writing with vivid immediacy, Engel allows us to relive the short but tumultuous history of a modern scourge.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Perceptive and concise, but also conversational and impeccably thorough, Engel chronicles humanity's relationship, from the first appearance of the new pathogen to the colossal struggles of today's third-world countries, with a virus that "has proven itself a formidable foe, evading vaccines and antidotes, while mocking our own imprudence, and self-indulgence." Covering the scientific, sexual, political, economic and educational ramifications of the AIDS crisis, Engel pulls no punches in describing large- and small-scale efforts to define, pursue, avoid and deny the virulent plague. After presenting the viral onslaught's first, overlooked victims, he tracks the disease's progression into and throughout the gay community and circles of intravenous drug-users, then into more mainstream populations. Touring bathhouses in New York, heroin-shooting galleries in Burma, and brothels in Bangkok and Zimbabwe, Engel describes how global centers of disease had to adapt-socially, civilly and medically-to face a dangerous new world paradigm. Moreover, this study explores evolving treatments, resources and the lack thereof throughout the world, and how the political, religious, and moral climates of any given culture influence the medical community's response. Looking forward, Engel demonstrates how the disease continues to challenge, and what societal changes are crucial to controlling viral progression. In his conclusion that AIDS "has exposed much of what is worst in human nature," Engel sums up the importance of his work, which reveals more than the history and character of a global crisis, but, in the world's response to such a crisis, the limitations and potential of humankind.

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About the Author

Jonathan Engel received his BA from Harvard, his MBA from the Yale School of Management, and his PhD in the history of medicine from Yale. He has served on White House medical advisory committees and various other health advisory boards. He is Associate Provost of Seton Hall University. Dr. Engel lives with his family in Millburn, New Jersey.

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