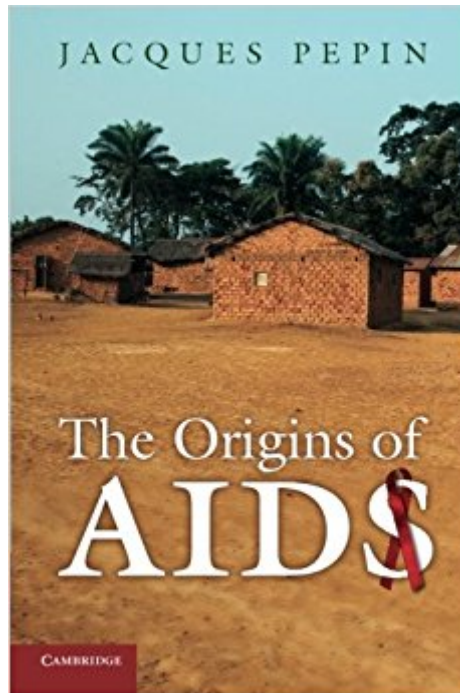




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The Origins Of AIDS



Synopsis

It is now thirty years since the discovery of AIDS but its origins continue to puzzle doctors and scientists. Inspired by his own experiences working as an infectious diseases physician in Africa, Jacques Pepin looks back to the early twentieth-century events in Africa that triggered the emergence of HIV/AIDS and traces its subsequent development into the most dramatic and destructive epidemic of modern times. He shows how the disease was first transmitted from chimpanzees to man and then how urbanization, prostitution, and large-scale colonial medical campaigns intended to eradicate tropical diseases combined to disastrous effect to fuel the spread of the virus from its origins in Léopoldville to the rest of Africa, the Caribbean and ultimately worldwide. This is an essential new perspective on HIV/AIDS and on the lessons that must be learnt if we are to avoid provoking another pandemic in the future.

Book Information

Paperback: 306 pages

Publisher: Cambridge University Press; 1 edition (October 17, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0521186374

ISBN-13: 978-0521186377

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 38 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #64,232 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #8 in Books > Medical Books > Medicine > Internal Medicine > Pathology > Diseases > AIDS & HIV #26 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Special Topics > History #53 in Books > Textbooks > Medicine & Health Sciences > Medicine > Clinical > Diseases

Customer Reviews

"Despite the scientific advances made since the discovery of HIV, questions of the pandemic's origin still trouble us. Why us? Why now? How could this happen? Pepin's remarkable book provides, at last, a comprehensive answer. Three decades of scientific and historical research are distilled into an engaging, highly readable, and sometimes disturbing account of HIV's journey that will interest students and researchers of the virus and its fallible host." Oliver G Pybus, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford
"In this scholarly and immensely readable account of the origin of AIDS, Dr Pepin draws on his personal experience of working in central Africa and his extensive

knowledge of African history, as well as his training in infectious diseases, virology and epidemiology. Unlike others who have tackled the subject, he comes to it with an open mind, and this account is likely to be definitive." David Mabey, Professor of Communicable Diseases, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

"This first major re-assessment of the origin of AIDS since Hooper's *The River*, delves into the extensive archives on the AIDS epidemic. Weaving together the findings of many researchers currently working on the topic, it will undoubtedly stimulate discussion on a subject of great concern and interest: the historical record of the emergence of new viruses."

-William H. Schneider, Professor of History, Indiana University

"The origin and early epidemiology of the Human Immunodeficiency Viruses (HIV) has been perplexing and controversial. Jacques Pepin provides a unique insight as an investigator who has spent years in several African countries and has contributed substantially to our knowledge of routes of transmission. We must learn from this history if we wish to avoid future pandemics."

-Allan Ronald, Professor Emeritus, University of Manitoba

"A great book on the evolutionary origin of HIV and the possible role of cultural and medical practices in Central Africa in the dissemination of the virus"

-Max Essex, Lasker Professor at Harvard University and author of *Saturdays are for Funerals*

"Extensively referenced, the well-written book reads like a detective story, while at the same time providing a didactic introduction to epidemiology and evolutionary genetics. As far as the origins of AIDS are concerned, unless some completely new evidence emerges, it will be difficult to come up with a better explanation than Pepin's."

-Science

"This is a beautifully written book, which explains epidemiological and scientific concepts such as phylogenetic analysis in clear and simple language. Pepin has assembled a vast amount of information from a wide variety of sources, and paints a clear, coherent and convincing account of the origins of AIDS. This book is required reading for anyone with a serious interest in infectious diseases."

-David Mabey, Sexually Transmitted Infections

"Superb ... P  pin rightly argues that, apart from social factors promoting HIV spread, inherent properties of the virus must determine its fitness to become pandemic. He also provides the best analysis I have read of the declining HIV-2 epidemic in West Africa."

-Nature

"An impressive feat of scientific scholarship ... absorbing throughout, interweaving quantitative data with historical narrative and lively biographies."

-The Lancet

"This book is an excellent, fair-minded attempt to elucidate a much-contested story."

-Literary Review

"Pepin's achievement is formidable. He has mastered a vast technical literature in French and English, exploited the archives and material remains of colonial and postcolonial Africa, and knows his African history to boot. He writes with grace and feeling, and makes accessible the scientific and clinical issues. Above all, he comes across as a humane and caring doctor. This is a major contribution to our understanding of the

scourge that has defined our times." -TLS "The superb organization of the book is noteworthy; the reader is never left hanging, and the path to the next topic is always clear. Highly recommended." -Choice "Pepin has written an absorbing analysis of the roots of the epidemic." -Nicolas van de Walle, Foreign Affairs "The language of Pepin's book is academic, yet easily accessible to a lay, educated readership. Graphics, charts and maps emphasize the text content. The Origins of AIDS offers, for the first time, an in-depth look into the pandemic prior to 1981 and, with that, the missing pieces that complete the story of AIDS." -Alina Oswald, A&U, America's AIDS magazine

A compelling new account of the origins and development of HIV/AIDS before the disease was first identified in 1981. Jacques Pepin looks back to the early twentieth-century events that triggered the most dramatic epidemic of modern times and presents a synthesis of its historical, political, medical and molecular dimensions.

and still counting. With an error range of plus or minus five million. That is the current rough estimate of the number of people who have died from the AIDS epidemic. Jacques Pepin's estimate is 29 million, but that was made a half decade ago, when this impressive work was published. It is a pandemic. Though the overall numbers have yet to reach the numbers who died during the Black Death plague of the 14th century or the Influenza of 1918-19, they are in the same league. The AIDS epidemic / pandemic distinguishes itself from the other two in a number of ways: it impacts certain marginalized groups of the population the most, and the prime preventive measure is falling off a log simple it is getting people to actually do it. Jacques Pepin "not to be confused with a more famous chef with the same name" is currently a Professor of Microbiology and Infectious Diseases at the Universite de Sherbrooke in Canada. He spent four years working at a bush hospital, 500 km northeast of the capital, Kinshasa, (once called Leopoldville) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Where did AIDS come from? And how did it spread? These are the essential epidemiological questions. Pepin provides a lucid, solid, well-reasoned account. It is written at a technical level that is suitable for physicians and other specialists in the field of AIDS, but he also takes care to provide explanations of technical terms, as well as his reasoning, so that his account is accessible to educated and concerned non-medical readers. It is a work in the field of public health, and therefore Pepin's account also provides an outstanding analysis of the historical and social conditions which caused AIDS, which could have existed in humans for hundreds of

years, to suddenly explode into a global pandemic, aided, in part, by substantial dollops of human folly. It started with chimpanzees. In Africa. Not any chimpanzees, but a particular subset, with the rather odd scientific name of *Pan troglodyte troglodyte*. Chimps cannot swim rivers, so the geographic area of central Africa was rather well-defined. For hundreds of years certain members of this subset had the simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) which is identical to the HIV-1 virus. How they got it is beyond the scope of this course as they used to say in college, and probably still do. It may have crossed over to humans during that course of time, but met an epidemiological dead end, meaning it did not spread, and died out with the host. Pepin calculates that the one crossover event for the modern pandemic occurred in 1921, with an error factor of more than a decade. Such estimates are possible by knowing the rate of change in the mutations of the genetic sequence of the virus, and applying some back calculations. What made it take off? First, there were guns! Chimps are clever, and hard to hunt without guns, and thus the availability made that one crossover event, around the year 1921, much more likely. Then there were two other major factors that made it spread. One involved the unintended consequences of French and Belgian colonial health care policies (the two main areas where the chimps lived – the Belgian Congo, and three of the four countries of French Equatorial Africa.) The focus of this policy was the elimination of trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) and yaws. In the French areas, they used mobile teams, a concept promoted by one of the giants in the field, Eugene Jamot. But both with the French and Belgian approaches was the use and re-use of syringes and needles, without proper sterilization (because its importance was not realized, and even if it was, autoclaves don't work without electric power). Thus, the source for many a new case was iatrogenic – the word that denotes that a disease was contracted through the health care procedures. The other major factor was the rise of prostitution. Colonial policy required the labor of the natives, for building railroads, and fighting wars, etc. Men concentrated in the cities, creating a huge imbalance vis-à-vis the women, and the former's sexual needs would be met via a class of women who sold their services, sometimes at the rate of a thousand clients a year. Globalization forces presented the opportunities for HIV-1 to spread from central Africa to China and Thailand. One of the unusual modes of transmission was another by-product of Belgian colonial policy: there was no native educated class to take over, after the sudden independence of the Congo in 1960. Thus, the new government had to import many teachers from Haiti, and they brought HIV-1 back to the Western hemisphere. Two other sharply disparate factors: gay sex tourism to Haiti, and the company, Hemo-Caribbean.

which prepared much of the plasma for western countries, and was drawn from poor (infected) Haitians, and was operated by Luckner Cambronne, the head of the Tonton Macoutes (Papa Doc's secret police), were two enormous vectors that spread the disease beyond this one impoverished country. There is much else, including the different course of HIV-2, which spread from the epi-center of Guinea-Bissau, former Portuguese Guinea. Pepin's account is overwhelmingly dry and scientific, with numerous graphs, yet he leavens it with wry commentary on social conditions. Concerning Dr. Jonathan Mann, another giant in the AIDS field, and who died in the crash of SwissAir 111 in 1998, he says of Mann's outlook: "Since AIDS was linked to poverty, injustice, exploitation, vulnerability and all kinds of inequities, all these determinants of the epidemic needed to be addressed simultaneously. This was dreaming in technicolour." The only statement of Pepin's that I would take issue with is on page 174: "While soldiers stationed in peaceful countries certainly tend to frequent sex workers and acquire STDs, there is little evidence that such prostitution occurs close to combat areas." (!) Au contraire, as evidenced by French military mobile bordellos among much else. Overall, Jacques Pepin has written an excellent scientific account of the origins of AIDS. He is a mix of scientist, historian, sociologist and detective. For that slender sub-group, the wise, it would be an excellent text to prepare for the next pandemic. 6-stars.

In *The Origins of AIDS*, Jacques Pepin uses epidemiological and phylogenetic data to demonstrate rather conclusively that AIDS originated in Africa and was the result of a species crossover from the chimpanzee. In fact, the Simian Immunodeficiency Virus that infects chimpanzees, *Pan troglodytes troglodytes*, is identical to HIV-1, the primary variant of HIV that infects humans. Pepin shows that even if but a single person were to become infected with the chimpanzee Simian Immunodeficiency Virus, that would be sufficient for the virus to establish a foothold in the human population. Once this has been accomplished, the virus is then further spread through two primary mechanisms. One is a dual transmission route involving sex workers: sex workers infect clients, and clients infect sex workers. The second major means of transmission is iatrogenically by the medical profession itself. Syringe needles were reused repeatedly, and the virus could be transmitted in this manner. Evidence for this mode of transmission is provided by parallel outbreaks of Hepatitis B infections. Pepin describes how HIV reached the US via Haitians who worked in Africa and then carried the virus back to their homeland. From Haiti, the virus then spread to the US. Pepin carefully uses detailed study of the form of the virus in Africa, then Haiti, and then the US in order to support this controversial claim. Of note is that Pepin takes up the hypothesis advanced in *The River* that

AIDS was spread as a result of contaminated oral polio vaccine. Pepin shows that this hypothesis does not stand up to scrutiny. Although Pepin uses technical language in describing his concepts, these terms are well-explained and are not reduced to jargon comprehensible by only the advanced reader. This is a well-written, wide-ranging and accessible text that would be useful for the general reader interested in a scientifically sound recounting of the origins of AIDS and the natural history of HIV. Pepin's story is not limited to the scientific factors related to the emergence of AIDS, but the numerous social factors as well. The book rambles somewhat, and it could have benefited from a firmer editorial hand. I frequently asked myself, "Of what relevance is this to the story being told here?" Although published in 2011, it continues to reflect our current understanding of the origins of AIDS.

HIV began as an obscure, poorly transmissible chimpanzee virus that may have infected only one person in an isolated part of rural Africa in 1920. How did it turn into a global plague? Pepin's book is a thoroughly fascinating, highly readable, and exhaustively researched account of how colonial public health efforts in central Africa during the 1920's-1950's amplified the virus. Tens of thousands of people were injected (often repeatedly) with unsterilized syringes in an effort to wipe out tropical diseases such as sleeping sickness and yaws. Meanwhile, urbanization and widespread prostitution in central African cities caused the virus to explode into the population. Ironically, STD clinics treating prostitutes and their clients in Leopoldville, in the Belgian Congo, may have played a crucial role in spreading the virus in the early years of the epidemic. This book serves as a good sequel of sorts to Randy Shilts' "And The Band Played On", which was written when much about the origin of AIDS was still a mystery. It would also be interesting to read along with "King Leopold's Ghost", which tells the tragic story of colonialism in the Belgian Congo. AIDS, it appears, is one of those restless ghosts.

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