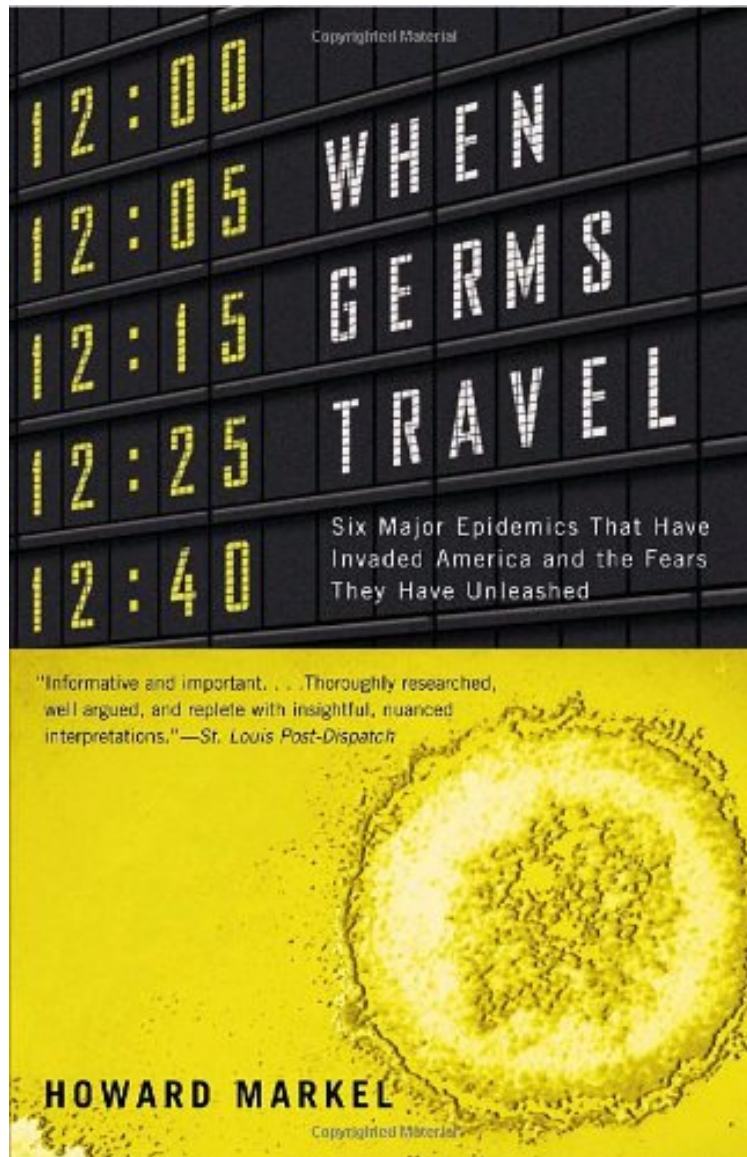


(Free) When Germs Travel: Six Major Epidemics That Have Invaded America and the Fears They Have Unleashed

When Germs Travel: Six Major Epidemics That Have Invaded America and the Fears They Have Unleashed

Howard Markel

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When Germs Travel: Six Major Epidemics That Have Invaded America and the Fears They Have Unleashed:

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Making epidemiology readable
By Kelly L. Norman
Dr. Markel has written a very interesting book, one that not only enlightens but stirs emotion about policy (which is pretty hard to do, one must admit). This book discusses some of the more famous epidemics, as well as their effect on immigration laws and practices in the US, and vice versa. Dr. Markel is well qualified to discuss these issues: he was highly involved in helping us understand the SARS virus, its etiology and containment. He also speaks of the victims discussed in the book with caring and respect, leading one to believe that if they came down with the next plague, whether foreign-born or not, one would want this man as one's physician. I have some reservations about the book, however. Its format--discussing each diagnosis separately, in its own chapter--made the book seem choppy. This may be a compliment to the author, rather than a complaint: finishing each chapter left me wanting to know much more about the disease discussed. Also, I did not feel convinced by his argument for policies to contain future epidemics; this could have been flushed out better. And a small thing that didn't figure into my rating but is simply a personal gripe...there is nothing mentioned about the influenza epidemic of the early 1900s. But how many diseases can you fit into a good book? I work at the hospital where Dr. Markel is based, and my coworkers and I are pleased with his success. We're definitely looking forward to more (and even better) books from his pen.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.
Political lessons
By Jeffrey Huntington
This is a well-written book about the sociology and politics of public health, xenophobia, and epidemics. These subjects are of great relevance today, not just in history, and we can learn from the horrible examples of the past.. There is not much about medicine or epidemiology, which after all, are not just matters of opinion and feelings.
2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Reviewing America's epidemics
By Dave Schan
Germs did major damage to the Native American population but have had smaller effects on the USA in the past 200+ years as a nation. Still, the relative lack of knowledge about germs has led to massive prejudice against a variety of ethnic groups including Eastern Europeans and Mexicans. The book outlines well the etiology of several outbreaks, the emotional responses in the community at the time, the sometimes effective and sometimes extreme responses of fledgling medical knowledge, and the effects of all of these on those who lived during these times.

The struggle against deadly microbes is endless. Diseases that have plagued human beings since ancient times still exist, new maladies like SARS make their way into the headlines, we are faced with vaccine shortages, and the threat of germ warfare has reemerged as a worldwide threat. In this riveting account, medical historian Howard Markel takes an eye-opening look at the fragility of the American public health system. He tells the distinctive stories of six epidemics--tuberculosis, bubonic plague, trachoma, typhus, cholera, and AIDS--to show how our chief defense against diseases from other countries has been to attempt to deny entry to carriers. He explains why this approach never worked, and makes clear that it is useless in today's world of bustling international travel and porous borders. Illuminating our foolhardy attempts at isolation and showing that globalization renders us all potential inhabitants of the so-called Hot Zone, Markel makes a compelling case for a globally funded public health program that could stop the spread of epidemics and safeguard the health of everyone on the planet.

.com Among the United States' proudest 20th-century scientific achievements was the identification and control of many dangerous infectious diseases. But as medical historian Howard Markel reveals in *When Germs Travel*, quarantines and other disease-control programs often hid racism, nationalism, and class warfare beneath a veneer of public health. This book focuses on six epidemics to demonstrate how social structures and science can clash--tuberculosis, bubonic plague, trachoma, typhus, cholera, and AIDS. What these diseases have in common is that they were perceived to have been brought to the United States by "outsiders," who found themselves unwelcome even in a nation of immigrants. In the diaries and memoirs of immigrants arriving during the early twentieth century, one repeatedly encounters evidence of the intense fear of the physicians at Ellis Island, the medical inspection process, and the potential for deportation. In proving that radical responses such as quarantines are ineffective and not based on good science, Markel applies a personal perspective gained through his family's experiences as Eastern European immigrants as well as his own interactions with 21st century immigrant patients. The six epidemiological histories here are gripping, and Markel's style is reminiscent of Sherwin Nuland or Gina Kolata. Humanity is locked in an eternal war with microbes, Markel writes, and despite all efforts, "contagion cannot be confined to national borders." --

Therese Littleton
From Publishers Weekly
Markel (*Quarantine!*), a professor of the history of medicine at the University of Michigan and a practicing physician, argues that quarantines in the U.S. and other restrictive measures (such as mandatory kerosene baths at the Texas-Mexico border in 1917 to kill typhus-carrying lice) are based more on xenophobia than science. An outbreak of bubonic plague in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1900, for example, resulted in a complete cordon sanitaire around the district; the city's white merchants, however, could move freely within and outside of the area. Similarly in the early 1900s, trachoma, an infectious eye disease that was common throughout the U.S., became associated with Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. More recently, Haitian refugees in the 1980s were stigmatized as carriers of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Markel argues that though quarantines of immigrant populations may have lessened the chance of major epidemics during the early 1900s, such measures unfairly punish people for being poor and sick. And nowhere is this more important than in developing countries, where rates of

tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, AIDS and other deadly diseases are highest. As increased travel continues to shrink distances and bring people together, germs will also travel more easily; the prevalence of infectious disease, therefore, is no longer a merely local issue. As Markel warns in this informative and important book, we must work to prevent and treat infectious diseases throughout the entire world because "in public health terms, every city is a 'sister city' with every other metropolis on earth." Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From *The New England Journal of Medicine* In Howard Markel's engaging book, the second word of the title is a good clue that the author writes for the general reader rather than for the specialist. The book contains an introduction and an epilogue, with each of the six intervening chapters devoted to an infectious-disease episode in the past century: tuberculosis, plague, trachoma, typhus, AIDS, and cholera (the last being the only case that proved to be a false alarm). Germs are nature's primordial terrorists. The language of terror we encounter in our daily news is everywhere in this book, beginning with the title: "invaded," "fears," "unleashed." Indeed, one of the accepted definitions of terror as "living in dread of death or outrage" conveys quite well how epidemics have been experienced throughout history and in the six cases presented in this book. Markel describes modes of transmission, incubation periods, clinical features, and common outcomes of infectious agents in lay terms, but it is the behavior of public officials, infected persons, and the public at large that proves to be the most interesting and disturbing. Each chapter tells its story by presenting accounts of people who bore the infection and of those who were in positions to respond to the outbreak. One of the perennial discouragements of public health workers is the predictability of such responses. We might forgive some of the foolish reactions early in the last century, when characteristics of infections, modes of transmission, and effective controls were little understood, but judging from our responses to more recent threats, we appear not to have learned much. Fear, irrational policy, and misdirected blame are still common. In the epilogue, titled "Public Health Is Purchasable," Markel admonishes the wealthy nations of the world to contribute toward a "cooperative partnership of nations, health care professionals, researchers, public health specialists, concerned corporations, philanthropies, and individuals . . . to safeguard the world against the many public health problems we face today." He gives little attention to the many such attempts that are already under way, however. For the general reader learning about these issues for the first time, perhaps the admonition alone is sufficient, but public health professionals will be disappointed by the lack of more detailed recommendations. Epidemiologists, public health officials, specialists in infectious disease, and most practicing physicians will find no new principles described here. Infectious agents are not new; epidemics are not new; the public and professional responses are not new; the observation that "germs" can travel fast is not new; and even the author's call for coordinated action and support from wealthy nations is not new. Nonetheless, the details of the six epidemics described in the book are fascinating, and the narrative is brisk and highly readable. No two "invasions" are the same, and the public health goals of avoiding overly restrictive measures during an epidemic while not ignoring the risks between epidemics need to be constantly reemphasized. Those who teach epidemiology and public health will find useful material, with excellent documentation and footnotes, to engage students. Reading *When Germs Travel* is a rewarding yet disturbing trip.

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