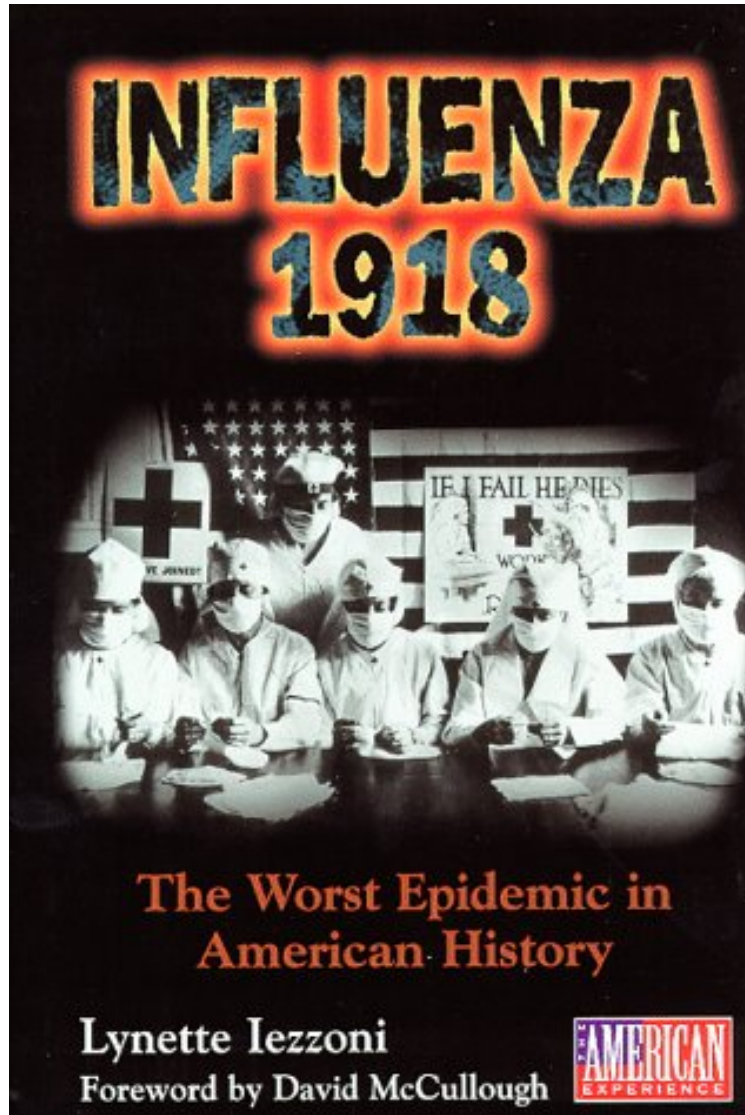


Influenza 1918

Lynette Izzoni

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Lynette Izzoni : Influenza 1918 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Influenza 1918:

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Left me wanting more.By A CustomerWhile I think this is a good overview of the pandemic, I wish better use had been made of the extensive interviews done for the American Experience episode upon which it was based. Even the addition of an appendix of full interviews would have been helpful. Influenza 1918 seems to have been written with the attention span of television viewers in mind -- rather than as an extension of the excellent script upon which it was based. The PBS version focused more upon the sociological

effects of the flu and left me wondering if perhaps the breakdown of the American family began with the fear of exposure to the deadly virus and not with the introduction of the "glass teat." The book, on the other hand, left me wanting more history and less assumption that that the reader doesn't want to READ. Influenza 1918 is simply the latest in the trend of PBS book tie-ins that doesn't deliver the goods on a promising subject. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Terrific! By D. Brown Influenza 1918 is a fascinating, well written account of the horrors of the "Spanish Lady." It is a terrific and compact introduction to the tragic events surrounding the 1918 flu. For those wanting a more comprehensive history or a more in-depth exploration of the science behind the pandemic... look elsewhere. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. WWI's tragic aftermath By Frances Nicholas If you are interested in the WWI period this book will inform you of the second tragedy-the epidemic. All of our families world wide were touched and this book is very informative.

Book by Izzoni, Lynette

From The New England Journal of Medicine By conservative estimates, the influenza pandemic of 1918 killed 21 million to 40 million people around the world, 675,000 of them in the United States. After only 17 months, the mortality was half that attributed to the 4-year span of the Black Death in 14th-century Europe and Asia. To many, "Spanish" influenza ranks as the deadliest plague to afflict human beings in recorded history. Its origins were obscure, its pathologic features unique, and its consequences, coming in the midst of the American entry into World War I, almost unendurable. In the panic that ensued, churches and schools were closed, the Army canceled the draft, corpses overflowed mass graves in Philadelphia, and black wreaths hung from virtually every door. Influenza 1918 recounts these statistics with the clarity of a tocsin. Even more affecting are the stories of children, now in their 80s and 90s, whose pastoral reminiscences about Sunday picnics and Thrift stamps darken at the memory of lost friends, parents, siblings, and entire families. This book, adapted in part from the information televised in *The American Experience*, examines with a documentarian's eye the portraits of individual Americans against the canvas of the global pandemic. The tracing of the nearly simultaneous eruptions of influenza in coastal Spain (in February 1918) and Fort Riley, Kansas (in March 1918), is complicated by the disease's wildfire proliferation across Europe as troops in trenches, hospitals, and overloaded transports spread the infection. In April and May 1918, the disease spread through Spain and the rest of Europe, but it remained quiescent in the United States until September, when explosive illness ravaged the East Coast. Continental epidemics in Africa, South America, India, and Australia followed. A time line summarizing these outbreaks might have been helpful to the reader; although they make for an effective journalistic portrayal of the simultaneity of foci, the book's rapid-fire shifts from Europe to the United States, then to India and Australia may be confusing to some readers. The book reads like a modern newscast, with rapid cutting from one scene to the next and brief but memorable sound bites from witnesses. However, many of the scientific questions that would occur to the lay reader, not to mention the medical expert, are left unanswered. For example, what was the origin of the virus? The book breathes mystery: "A chance encounter occurred. Perhaps between a duck and a pig. Perhaps between a duck and a man, woman, or child. Perhaps between a pig and a man." But scientific evidence has demonstrated that partial sequences from 5 of the virus's 10 genes and the entire hemagglutinin sequence are much more akin to mammalian than to avian clades (J.K. Taubenberger, et al. Initial Genetic Characterization of the 1918 "Spanish" Influenza Virus. *Science* 1997;275:1793-6; and A.H. Reid, et al. Origin and Evolution of the 1918 "Spanish" Influenza Virus Hemagglutinin Gene. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 1999;96:1651-6). Some of this work is summarized in the epilogue, but at times a tendency toward sensationalism displaces fact. Other readers might wish to know more about the manifestations of illness, which were described as horrifying, even in contemporaneous medical reviews. Much is made of the awful premonitions that heralded imminent collapse, of the cutaneous, genital, and pulmonary hemorrhages that appalled medical personnel, and of the astounding rapidity of death, but no extracts from medical reports published at the time are provided. In other examples, we are told variously that workers in gas and cordite factories, blacks in the South, and those with tuberculosis were mysteriously spared, but without precise footnoting, these statements appear undocumented. Finally, almost all readers will ask, "Can this happen again?" No facts are presented to dispel this very reasonable concern. A brief discussion of international surveillance organizations -- even without mention of the nearly immediate identification of the avian variant of the Hong Kong flu in 1998 -- would have been appropriate. The book vividly evokes the fear and terror sparked by the pandemic but discusses its clinical, epidemiologic, and virologic correlates cursorily. This is a great read for those attracted to the "you are there" approach, but in the end a dissatisfying one for those who want to know why, how, and whether again. ed by Margaret K. Hostetter, M.D. Copyright copy; 1999 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS.