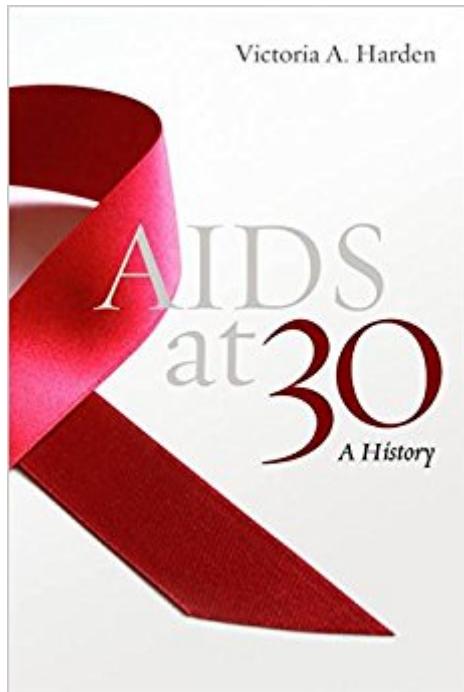


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# AIDS At 30: A History



## Synopsis

Society was not prepared in 1981 for the appearance of a new infectious disease, but we have since learned that emerging and reemerging diseases will continue to challenge humanity. AIDS at 30 is the first history of HIV/AIDS written for a general audience that emphasizes the medical response to the epidemic. Award-winning medical historian Victoria A. Harden approaches the AIDS virus from philosophical and intellectual perspectives in the history of medical science, discussing the process of scientific discovery, scientific evidence, and how laboratories found the cause of AIDS and developed therapeutic interventions. Similarly, her book places AIDS as the first infectious disease to be recognized simultaneously worldwide as a single phenomenon. After years of believing that vaccines and antibiotics would keep deadly epidemics away, researchers, doctors, patients, and the public were forced to abandon the arrogant assumption that they had conquered infectious diseases. By presenting an accessible discussion of the history of HIV/AIDS and analyzing how aspects of society advanced or hindered the response to the disease, AIDS at 30 illustrates for both medical professionals and general readers how medicine identifies and evaluates new infectious diseases quickly and what political and cultural factors limit the medical community's response.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Through the voices of many key players, Harden has provided new insights into the complex history of AIDS." •Peter Piot, director, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and

former executive director, UNAIDS (Peter Piot)"AIDS at 30 stands out from other books about one of the most important medical challenges of our time. It is not only a good read, but is accurate and insightful. Getting the story right is a big deal in this field."•Barbara J. Culliton, president, The Culliton Group, and former news editor, *Science*, and deputy editor, *Nature* (Barbara J. Culliton)"Harden brings her masterful command of NIH history to bear in a narrative of the first thirty years of this devastating epidemic. With a deft hand she lays out the path of discovery, from finding the culprit virus through the current drug regimens that have brought it under control, all the while making complex scientific ideas available to the lay reader. Its comprehensive survey tells the story from the beginning, and its references will guide students to myriad further research topics, both U.S. and global. Although the history of HIV/AIDS will be continuously rewritten, this work should stand the test of time for years to come and be the place to start for future historians of the epidemic."•Margaret Humphreys, Josiah Charles Trent Professor in the History of Medicine, Duke University (Margaret Humphreys)"A succinct and complete narration."•David Olle, *New York Journal of Books* (David Olle *New York Journal of Books*)"This is the most comprehensive history of the AIDS epidemic published to date. It should be read by anyone interested in global health."•Kenrad E. Nelson, *American Journal of Epidemiology* (Kenrad E. Nelson *American Journal of Epidemiology*)

Victoria A. Harden retired in 2006 after twenty years as the founding director of the Office of NIH History at the National Institutes of Health. She has written numerous articles about AIDS and has lectured widely on its history. Dr. Harden is the author of *Inventing the NIH: Federal Biomedical Research Policy, 1887–1937* (1986) and *Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever: History of a Twentieth-Century Disease* (1990), the latter winning the Henry Adams Prize from the Society for History in the Federal Government. She received the American Historical Association's 2006 Herbert Feis Award for outstanding contributions to public history. In 2007 she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Association for the History of Medicine. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In AIDS at 30, Harden has written a masterful history of the first three decades of AIDS. Actually, she traces the emergence of HIV even further back to the early decades of the 20th Century in Africa where clear signs of HIV infection were evident. More solid evidence is found in the 1970s when researchers went back to examine stored blood samples of those whose deaths fit the profile of infection with HIV. It's clear HIV has been with us for about a century, but it escaped the confines

of Africa only in the past 50 years or so, and it didn't begin reaching epidemic status until the 1980s. Harden presents her text as one for the general reader, and indeed her presentation is lucid and easily comprehended. As I began reading the first chapter I feared I was taking up a text that was \*too\* simplistic and aimed for a reader with no science background whatsoever. However, the pace picks up quickly, and while the writing remains clear and straightforward, this reader was thoroughly engaged with the content throughout the remainder of the text. It is a fascinating read. I was impressed with the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of her text, as well as its incisiveness. Her text is about as lengthy as Jonathan Engel's *The Epidemic*, but Harden covers an additional ten years in the same amount of space, and even where the chronology overlaps, Harden supplies more information than Engel did. Harden utilizes a much broader array of sources for her study rather than simply regurgitating articles from *The New York Times* and *Newsweek* as Engel did. To be fair, she may have an advantage over Engel because she is employed by the National Institutes of Health as a historian, and therefore she has access to oral histories which may not have been available to Engel. However, Harden also utilizes numerous other resources to construct her narrative including interviews and other published historical studies, and I can only attribute laziness or poor workmanship to Engel for failing to take advantage of these sources. Simply put, Engel did not do his homework, thus making Harden's text a standout effort. For me, one sign of a well-written historical work is whether it contains pointers to other texts, other books, for further reading, either explicitly or implicitly. Harden's text has inspired me to track down and read about two dozen additional books which she used as sources. Engel did not provide anything approaching this level of inspiration. Engel explicitly labeled his text as a global history, and he was only partially successful to this end, doing a fair job discussing the AIDS epidemic in Africa. Harden, however, does not make such a claim for her book, yet she successfully provides the global history lacking in Engel's text, and her discussion of AIDS in Africa surpasses Engel's writings on the same topic. Brava, Ms. Harden, for an excellent work. I hope we can look forward to a second edition of *AIDS at 35* or *AIDS at 40*.

Having recently been diagnosed as HIV+, this book was an interesting journey into learning the wheres, whys & hows of this chronic disease. It is very readable, understandable and occasionally fascinating, as it delves into the origins of the disease, the history of our national reaction at the time, and what great strides we've made in helping to turn the disease from a death sentence to a chronic, though manageable, condition. Definitely recommended for HIV+ patients, and all who want to learn about the disease.

I really really enjoyed this book. It was informative and very well written. I liked how she really gave us a global perspective but I disliked how she often went off on tangents. overall great book and a great read!

Harden provides an overview of the AIDS epidemic that is well-rounded if not completely comprehensive. She does her best to address both the scientific and social significance of the disease.

For those working in the HIV/AIDS field this is must to read. Evolution and future of one of human's most challenging pandemics.

Informative and clearly written. Purchased it for a HS library.

With so much written about AIDS one may wonder what more can be said? The answer is found in the pages of AIDS at 30. This work offers a fresh perspective free of the political and culturally driven distortions that color so much of what has previously been written on this topic. As is so often said, history written in the passion of the moment cannot remain objective and this was never truer with something as politically charged as the HIV epidemic. Now, 30 years into this epidemic, this may be one of the first books about AIDS that tells the story with a clear historical perspective. Moreover, the author uses AIDS as a fascinating case study into the working of modern medical research. For most of us, it's a complex and mysterious enterprise where we know little of how things actually work. AIDS at 30 provides a fascinating window into the world of science and medicine. Prepare to have a number of your assumptions toppled and prepare to be fascinated by a rich cast of characters driven not only by science but by the same human forces that govern us all. For the sake of full disclosure, I worked with Dr. Harden in the past and helped her collect some of the source material used in this book.

This book offers the reader a very comprehensive understanding of HIV and AIDS. The chapter on AIDS Therapy is particularly fascinating and informative, and is written at a level most readers will be able to understand. The epilogue was poignant. Overall, a must-read for people working or teaching in the field.

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