



Persisting Pandemics

Syphilis, AIDS, and COVID

by Powel H. Kazanjian

DESCRIPTION

Persisting Pandemics explores the history of syphilis and AIDS to provide insights into the limits of biomedicine and our experience with epidemics today. Novel therapies developed for syphilis and AIDS became renowned in the medical field and the broader public sphere as exemplars of biomedical innovations. Public health campaigns based on these spectacular biomedical advances, however, have repeatedly fallen short of their goals to eliminate syphilis and AIDS in the population. The diseases epitomize the power of innovative biomedical therapies for the individual while unveiling limitations of scientific medicine in the domain of public health. The need for a public health approach to address mistrust in science, government indifference, and racial inequalities is relevant for strategies to eliminate COVID-19 today. *Persisting Pandemics* argues that campaigns to eliminate these diseases have not succeeded because they have not adequately addressed how diseases like AIDS, syphilis, and COVID spread unevenly in populations according to race, ethnicity, and geographic location. Despite the expectation of public health officials that medical advances would render epidemics obsolete, new diseases continue to emerge and spread regardless of efforts to eliminate them. Medical doctor and historian Powel H. Kazanjian concludes that narratives of syphilis, AIDS and COVID, unlike smallpox, do not contain a discrete ending—at least not within the timelines specified by their elimination campaigns. Instead they will be a continued part of our existence.

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