



Polio: An American Story

By David M. Oshinsky

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Here David Oshinsky tells the gripping story of the polio terror and of the intense effort to find a cure, from the March of Dimes to the discovery of the Salk and Sabin vaccines--and beyond. Drawing on newly available papers of Jonas Salk, Albert Sabin and other key players, Oshinsky paints a suspenseful portrait of the race for the cure, weaving a dramatic tale centered on the furious rivalry between Salk and Sabin. He also tells the story of Isabel Morgan, perhaps the most talented of all polio researchers, who might have beaten Salk to the prize if she had not retired to raise a family.

Oshinsky offers an insightful look at the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, which was founded in the 1930s by FDR and Basil O'Connor, it revolutionized fundraising and the perception of disease in America. Oshinsky also shows how the polio experience revolutionized the way in which the government licensed and tested new drugs before allowing them on the market, and the way in which the legal system dealt with manufacturers' liability for unsafe products. Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, Oshinsky reveals that polio was never the raging epidemic portrayed by the media, but in truth a relatively uncommon disease. But in baby-booming America--increasingly suburban, family-oriented, and hygiene-obsessed--the specter of polio, like the specter of the atomic bomb, soon became a cloud of terror over daily life.

Both a gripping scientific suspense story and a provocative social and cultural history, *Polio* opens a fresh window onto postwar America.

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Polio: An American Story By David M. Oshinsky Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #35856 in Books
- Brand: Baker & Taylor
- Published on: 2006-09-01
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x 1.10" w x 9.20" l, 1.19 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 368 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The key protagonists in historian Oshinsky's (Univ. of Texas, Austin) account of the bruising scientific race to create a vaccine are Jonas Salk, a proponent of a "killed-virus" vaccine, and Albert Sabin, who championed the "live-virus" vaccine. As revered as these men are in popular culture, Oshinsky records their contemporaries' less complimentary opinions (even Sabin's friends, for instance, describe him as "arrogant, egotistical and occasionally cruel"). Oshinsky (*A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy*, etc.) looks at social context, too, such as the impact of the March of Dimes campaign on public consciousness—and fear—of polio. Tying in the role polio victim FDR played in making the effort a national priority, the precursory scientific developments that aided Salk and Sabin's work, and the ethical dilemmas surrounding human testing, Oshinsky sometimes bogs down in details. But all in all, this is an edifying description of one of the most significant public health successes in U.S. history. 46 b&w photos not seen by *PW*. (Apr.)

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School—This well-grounded account documents the quest for a polio vaccine. It reveals professional rivalries and clinical breakthroughs, describes a new era in approaches to public philanthropy, and re-creates the tenor of American culture during the 1940s and '50s, when every city, suburb, and rural community faced potential tragedy from annual outbreaks of the disease. The decades-long contentious relationship between doctors Albert Sabin and Jonas Salk provides the centerpiece of this story. Virologists were split into two main camps: those pursuing the development of an attenuated live-virus vaccine versus those focusing on a killed-virus vaccine, with adherents of the latter believing it would prove not only safer and more effective, but also quicker and cheaper to mass produce. Historical context is provided by detailing how Franklin D. Roosevelt raised public awareness, how his influence led to the emergence of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis and the March of Dimes, and the subsequent creation of the poster child concept as a way of creating grassroots fundraising. The writing dramatically captures both tensions and ethical dimensions inherent in moving from laboratory work with monkeys to human experimentation and, eventually, to implementation of a massive inoculation program reaching 1.3 million schoolchildren in the 1954 Salk vaccine trials. While this part of the story and the public adulation of Salk have been told elsewhere, Oshinsky amplifies the tale with data explaining why the Sabin oral vaccine became the one preeminently adopted internationally, and why the debate has continued. Sixteen pages of arresting black-and-white photographs are included.—Lynn Nutwell, Fairfax City Regional Library, VA

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review The success of the enormous 1954 field test of the killed-virus polio vaccine developed in the Pittsburgh laboratory of Jonas Salk made him iconically famous. At center stage in journalist Jeffrey Kluger's gripping *Splendid Solution* [BKL F 1 05], Salk is only chronologically central in historian Oshinsky's effort, which expands, as Kluger doesn't, on the half-century after Salk's achievement, in particular. Oshinsky shows first that polio was, even at its most prevalent, a relatively low-incidence disease and that the happenstance that it struck Franklin Roosevelt (or did it? Some question the diagnosis) was crucial to making it as dreaded as it was. Roosevelt was also crucial to setting the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis going, with his aggressive law partner, Basil O'Connor, in charge. While Kluger emphasizes the foundation's good works, Oshinsky points up its inspired fund-raising and PR. During the final push to produce a vaccine, Oshinsky illuminates Salk's competitors more than Kluger, and after Salk's

triumph, he turns to Albert Sabin, whose live-virus vaccine became officially preferred before mass immunization with Salk's was finished. He confirms what Kluger skirted, that Sabin was a real SOB as well as a good scientist, but, unlike Kluger, he airs trenchant criticism of Salk, too. Further, he brings the story down to the recent reemergence of Salk's vaccine and the present, when the WHO hopes for polio's ultimate eradication in 2008. Narrative history doesn't get much better. *Ray Olson*
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kurtis Henry:

This Polio: An American Story usually are reliable for you who want to be described as a successful person, why. The reason why of this Polio: An American Story can be one of the great books you must have will be giving you more than just simple reading through food but feed you actually with information that perhaps will shock your previous knowledge. This book is handy, you can bring it everywhere you go and whenever your conditions in the e-book and printed versions. Beside that this Polio: An American Story giving you an enormous of experience for example rich vocabulary, giving you demo of critical thinking that we understand it useful in your day pastime. So , let's have it and luxuriate in reading.

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Paul Williams:

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Olga Andres:

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