

(Ebook pdf) Plagues and Politics

## Plagues and Politics

*Fitzhugh Mullan*

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**Fitzhugh Mullan : Plagues and Politics** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Plagues and Politics:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great overview of the US Public Health ServiceBy Paul Eckler"Plagues and Politics: The Story of the US Public Health Service," by Fitzhugh Mullan, Basic Books, NY, 1989. This 223-page hardback tells the history of the US Public Health Service from its founding to the time of Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.The US Public Heath Service traces its beginning to the Marine Hospital Fund, which was authorized by Congress in 1799, to serve merchant seamen in US ports as required by international law. The first hospitals were in Norfolk, VA and Boston, but soon served interior lake and river cities, too. By the Civil War, 27 hospitals had been established. (The last PHS hospitals were closed in 1981.) The service suffered from political appointments in the early days, but by 1872, had become a uniformed professional service with employment based on credentials and examinations.Responsibilities gradually expanded. The Quarantine Act of 1878 gave the Marine Hospital Service federal authority after local services failed to stop the New Orleans yellow fever epidemic of 1877, which quickly spread up the river. The Public Heath and Marine Hospital Service name was adopted in 1902, as was the title Surgeon General.PHS has become the primary health agency of the federal government. Within it are the Food and Drug Administration, the Center for Disease Control, the National Library of Medicine, the National Institutes of Health and its sub-agencies, the National Cancer Institute, the National Institute of Mental Health, and more. PHS has played a role in most health initiatives beginning with syphilis (In 1878, 40% of seamen were

reportedly infected with venereal disease, especially syphilis.), yellow fever, cholera, Rocky Mountain Spotted fever, tularemia, pellagra, leprosy, hookworm, plague, the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918, typhus, fluoridation of drinking water, smoking, and AIDs. PHS officers provide health care to federal prisons and to Indian reservations, inspect immigrants for signs of illness or mental illness, and were early advocates of clean rivers and drinking water, monitoring of water pollution, and improved privies. Initially PHS was responsible for medical care to the injured veterans of World War I, but in 1922, Congress created the Veterans Bureau, which took responsibility for veterans hospitals. During World War II, PHS physicians serving the Coast Guard saw action on transatlantic convoys. In 1943, the Cadet Nurse Corps was established under PHS to train nurses for the war effort. Passage of OSHA in 1970 created the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health in PHS. In addition to its major epidemiology studies and research on diseases and treatments, PHS is an advocate for improved health. Massachusetts was the first state to establish a state health office in 1869. Other states followed. PHS worked to get county health departments established. The American Public Health Association was founded in 1872. PHS undertook monitoring of river pollution and especially fecal contamination of water supplies in 1913. Efforts against smoking began in 1959, when the Surgeon General Leroy Burney published an article linking the practice with lung cancer. In spite of its stellar record, PHS has not been without some missteps. One was the Tuskegee syphilis study under which patients were monitored without treatment to collect data on the later stage effects of the disease. When the Salk polio vaccine was ready, one producer's vaccine was improperly processed and produced polio in some patients. PHS had approved the vaccine which had been developed by the March of Dimes. These details too are revealed in Mullan's volume. National Health Insurance was first proposed in 1939 as part of Social Security. The effort was finally killed during the Truman administration (May, 1948). The AMA and Social Security Administration were at opposite ends of the argument, with PHS somewhat more conservative than Social Security. AMA labeled the plan socialized medicine. Medicare and Medicaid, enacted in 1965, were major health initiatives, but were assigned outside of PHS, because PHS was not suited to the health insurance business. Similarly, in 1965, the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration was created under PHS as a precursor to the Environmental Protection Agency. However, when EPA was created in 1970, PHS was thought medically oriented and not well suited to the other aspects of pollution. FDA moved to the PHS in 1968. FDA was established in 1906 under the Pure Food and Drug Act which addressed adulterated and mislabeled foods and drugs. In 1938, the Food, Drug, and Cosmetics Act was enacted after 107 people died from sulfanilamide formulated with a toxic solvent. Staffing and funding improved after 1959, when FDA blocked approval of thalidomide, which caused numerous birth defects in Europe. The book ends soon after AIDs was first reported in 1981, and includes Surgeon General Koop's efforts to deal with that epidemic. The US Public Health Service is subject to the will of Congress. The book follows the various events that caused Congress to take action, and the gradual acceptance of a scientific approach to medicine and public health. Certain eras, the Progressive Era (1906-1920), the Roosevelt administration, and the Johnson administration, were especially favorable to health legislation. Politics is part of the process; the book names names and explores some of the conflicts. The book provides a reasonable overview of the very complex Public Health Service. The appendix includes a list of Surgeon Generals, and of Assistant Secretaries for Health. Notes, photographs, bibliography, index. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great book! By Stengelese For an Ellis Island geek, this book gives an all too rare glimpse into the history of the Public Health Service that administered to so many of our immigrant ancestors at not only Ellis, but many ports of entry into the United States.

Plagues and Politics presents the fascinating history of the United States Public Health Service, written to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the service's unique medical militia, the Commissioned Corps. 2-color illustrations.