Mosquito: A Natural History of Our Most Persistent and Deadly Foe

Andrew Spielman and Michael D'Antonio
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In 1963, I was a 15-year-old high student, and I was required to make a presentation on a topic of my choice to my zoology class. I chose the mosquito because I had just finished reading a book about Walter Reed, and the subject was fresh in my mind. Being 15, I figured that I could thoroughly cover what was known about mosquitoes in the 20 minutes I was allowed. Thirty-eight years later, I am still fascinated by mosquitoes and still learning about them. Andrew Spielman is one of the world's authorities on mosquitoes and the diseases transmitted by them. He is a senior investigator in tropical diseases at Harvard and the director of the antimalarial campaign for the Center for International Development.

The book is divided into 3 parts and 9 chapters, with an appendix of mosquito identification and disease distribution maps. The format is a combination of historical perspective, scientific facts, and first-person narrative of Dr Spielman's experience in studying mosquitoes around the world. I was enlightened by the impact that mosquitoes and mosquito-borne illness have had on the history of civilization and the outcome of many battles, including ancient Rome, the Napoleonic War, World Wars I and II, and Vietnam. Military commanders who neglect the mosquito generally end up on the losing side. I was surprised to learn that Walter Reed actually had a relatively minor role in the eradication of yellow fever; it was Lazear and Carrol who did the real work and in the end gave their lives.

Spielman discusses the economics, politics, and pseudoscience involved in the battle against the mosquito and the why, when, and where some programs succeeded and others failed. Surprisingly, Spielman is a supporter of the "correct" use of DDT in controlling mosquitoes. It is only part of the integrated program devised to eradicate the most important medical problem of the 21st century—malaria. He discusses the threat of introduction of new diseases via global environmental changes and the ability of rapid transportation to spread exotic diseases to distant locales. There is an excellent chapter on

the West Nile virus outbreak in New York City and New England. The politics of big-city mosquito control and the difficulties in getting cooperation among local, state, and federal public health agencies should be a wake-up call to those who think bioterrorism is not a threat to the United States.

The color illustrations are excellent, and the maps and tables are quite helpful. Overall, this is an excellent book that I highly recommend to anyone interested in tropical, exotic, and emerging diseases, biology of the mosquito, or medical history. Whether you are an expert or a novice, you will find something worthwhile here and even be surprised to see why the mosquito is winning its prolonged battle with humans.

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