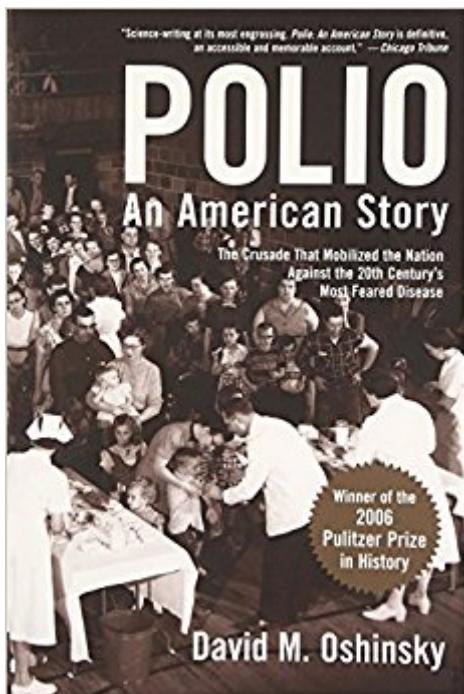


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# Polio: An American Story



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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.  
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Reading this book was a complete shock to my system. At first when I purchased the ebook I wondered just how readable this could be but I have a dear friend who has polio. He now has 'post polio syndrome' and life has been difficult for him but he always faced difficulties in as positive way as he could. That is mainly why I chose this book. I remember getting the vaccine in a cube of sugar when I was a child. So I found this book to be more than interesting. I can't imagine the backstory of how this/these vaccines came to be! I had no idea. Just when I thought I could skip along, a new and completely interesting paragraph or chapter would come along! Truly a 5 star book. I can't imagine this book having anything but a 5 star rating.

I had a bit of a personal reason for reading this book. Not just that I teach microbiology, and about these diseases to my students. My parents told me that when I was little, and they figured out that I was Deaf (from rubella) that they had tried to go to the March of Dimes for help. They were young parents and knew nothing about disabilities and were trying to get some guidance on what to do with their disabled daughter. The March of Dimes didn't give them any help at all of course (in the late 1950's). Mom and Dad did just fine on their own thank you, but I always wondered why in the world they went and asked for help from a group known for their emphasis on polio and disabilities involving limbs/movement. After reading this book, now I understand why. Apparently, after a vaccine was developed, in order to continue to survive, the March of Dimes needed to branch out into other areas. So in the late 1950's the group apparently announced they would deal with other disabilities...but apparently not Deafness. So that was really interesting to find that out. This was a very thoroughly researched book. I knew plenty about FDR's bout with polio, and how he tried to hide it from the public, at the same time pushing for research. Very confusing. But everything else about the race to find a vaccine for it, the politics, the scientists and their petty battles (ugh), the changes over the years, was all new information to me. An impeccably written book on such a great topic, I highly recommend this for anyone interested in disease and in the way science gets done. The politics involved in science is known to anyone working in the fields..it can get ridiculous at time as it did between Salk and Sabin. Oshinsky really painted great portraits of everyone involved in solving the riddle of polio. I had a horrible time having to put the book down in order to work.

This was a well-researched book in my opinion. I don't want to sound callous to people who may have had relatives who suffered from polio, but in a way Oshinsky points out that the reaction to it

was out of proportion to the actual percentage of people afflicted with it. Still, the back and forth competition between scientists was interesting. The machinations made for good reading.

I greatly appreciated this book. I was born in 1945, remember being injected and the oral vaccine in a sugar cube. I never knew the wide spread problem it became and definitely did not know the fight going on for vaccine. I never new or met anyone with polio but my mother swore she must have been exposed because my younger brother born in 1948 was born with smaller leg and arm, slightly noticeable but a mother knows when something is not right with her child. He had a noticeable step sound when that foot came down. When he went work he had to have a physical and the doc told him his organs on right side were smaller than usual.. The book tells me how blessed we were not to encounter this insidious disease like so many people. Its a must read for those of you who never did either. The disastrous results of this disease and the torment and pain they went through and their spirit to fight is humbling. The spirit of our country to come together and support this disease was amazing and then to help over seas so like people. ITS ABSOLUTELY A MUST READ.

I read this in one day. It is an excellent review of the story of the eradication of polio in the world. This book includes the necessary science to tell the story but, it is not unmanageable and is easily understood.

As a polio survivor with important sequelae not being able to move without 2 full leg braces and crutches, I learned a lot of the malady that has affected my life for over 60 years. However, not only the historical facts and the political/ideological/personality battles impressed me, but the detailed account of traits that describe polio survivors. I can, for sure associate myself with most of the characteristics described of the overachiever, type A personality that believed and witnessed having to push yourself beyond the limits was the only way. Now at age 63, just recently retired from a very successful professional career, I plan to take very good care of myself to avoid, as much as possible the dire effects of PPS. Great book, thanks Mr. Oshinsky!

The book spent a lot of time describing the fundraising, campaigning, and fighting among three principal researchers regarding the vaccine. Too much time, IMHO. The medical and other scientific information kept my interest.

I ordered this book because I have never read anything about polio even though I was a polio

pioneer in 1954 and my mother and younger sister both contracted polio in 1952. I found this to be a riveting book, I read it in just four days. It really delves into all aspects of the disease and the processes gone into for eliminating it. Salk and Sabin were both geniuses and worked miracles in their fields. I well remember the March of Dimes and the National Foundation, my father and I were always volunteers for collecting and the Foundation helped my mother and sister many times. My mother was in a wheelchair and had to wear a steel staved corset and the National Foundation provided her with a new wheelchair and corsets when she needed them and there was no red tape. The author did a wonderful job and I would recommend this book to anyone and especially to those whose lives were affected by polio, I think you will learn something.

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