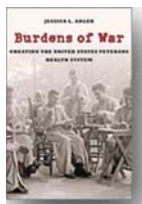


BOOKMARKS

BURDENS OF WAR: CREATING THE UNITED STATES VETERANS HEALTH SYSTEM

By Jessica L. Adler
 Baltimore (MD): Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017
 368 pp., \$49.95



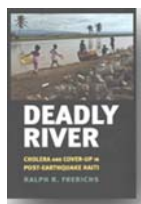
The Veterans Health Administration may be as maligned as it is essential. Periodically criticized in the media and by many veterans for long wait times and quality issues, the veterans health system shoulders the Herculean task of caring for nine million enrolled veterans each year. How such a large entitlement program came about is an interesting study in altruism, activism, and politics. In *Burdens of War*, Jessica Adler, an assistant professor of history and health policy at Florida International University, details the haphazard but ultimately successful path to the creation of today's veterans health system. The journey reflects a shift from a lofty goal of rehabilitating wounded soldiers and restoring them to society with little need for long-term care to the realization that the wounds of war can last a lifetime. Patients' stories—reconstructed from interviews, case files, memoirs, and other documents—humanize the policy. Dating back to a legal promise made in the War Risk Insurance Act, passed in 1914 and expanded in 1917, to provide injured soldiers

with “reasonable governmental medical, surgical, and hospital services,” the veterans health system has at times struggled to meet its aspirations. Yet at the same time, health care for veterans has been at the forefront of medical innovations, including the electronic health record. Adler's book deals more with the beginnings of veterans' health care than its current state and will appeal to those with a historical interest in the program. The criticisms of today, she notes, are not so different from those voiced a hundred years ago.

—Jessica Bylander, senior editor

DEADLY RIVER: CHOLERA AND COVER-UP IN POST-EARTHQUAKE HAITI

By Ralph R. Frerichs
 Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 2016
 320 pp., \$29.95



Remember that adventure-mystery book you read as a kid and couldn't put down until the end? Ralph R. Frerichs's *Deadly River* achieves that thrilling pace with a very different subject matter. Frerichs, a professor emeritus of epidemiology at the University of California, Los Angeles, tells the story of Renaud Piarroux, a physician and infectious disease specialist working to determine the mysterious origins of the 2010 cholera outbreak in Haiti. Piarroux hoped not only to keep cholera from spreading from rural Haiti to the capital of Port-au-Prince (which unfortunately happened) but also to eliminate the disease from the country entirely.

Frerichs's timeline of the events in

Haiti from 2010 to 2014, interwoven with a discussion of the efforts to cover up the origin of the outbreak, paint a picture of a scientist up against entities and individuals bigger than he. Piarroux's work exemplifies the challenges of conducting epidemiology in a setting with an active disease outbreak and limited resources (Haiti had just been hit with a magnitude 7.0 earthquake that affected three million people). But Frerichs reveals that when that work was done, the battle had only just begun, and a new challenge awaited: politics.

Piarroux had discovered that the outbreak's origin was related to human activity—specifically, to the dumping of fecal waste into the Artibonite River by Nepalese troops from the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti—though the UN maintained in a May 2011 report that the origins were unclear. The hard truth that politics trumps science and the safety of people is aptly highlighted, but also significant is the perseverance of Piarroux and others to stand behind their data and the truth. Public health professionals, whether in an academic or real-world setting, are often situated between people whose health is at risk and those in power, whose interests and motivations may lie elsewhere than in protecting health. Thankfully, Piarroux held firm, and, following news stories about his findings and the filing of a human rights lawsuit against the UN mission on behalf of the cholera victims in 2011, then-UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon traveled to Haiti in 2014 and spoke of the “moral duty” the UN had to help end the outbreak. In *Deadly River*, Piarroux emerges as a modern-day public health icon.

—Elisabeth Skiles, assistant editor