

New book by UCR biologist discusses 12 diseases that impacted humanity

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Understanding past outbreaks of diseases can better prepare us for diseases in our future. This, in a nutshell, is the message of a new book by a professor emeritus of biology at the University of California, Riverside.

Irwin W. Sherman's *Twelve Diseases That Changed Our World* (American Society for Microbiology Press, 2007), which is written for the general reader, focuses on a dozen diseases that greatly influenced society, politics and culture.

Sherman selected the diseases based on how humans have survived the onslaught of "plagues," many of which led to the introduction of public health measures and other interventions aimed at stemming the spread of diseases.

"The recent pandemics of SARS and HIV/AIDS clearly show that our lives, as well as the political and economic fortunes of the developed world and that of emerging nations, can be influenced by the appearance of a contagious disease," Sherman said. "My purpose in writing this book is to show that, despite the challenges which an unanticipated illness may place before us, the future is not without hope or remedy."

In the book, Sherman argues that the following dozen diseases shaped history and illuminated the paths taken in finding measures to control them:

“The book is about the lessons we have – or should have – learned from our past encounters with unanticipated disease, and how such understanding can be put to use when future outbreaks of disease occur,” Sherman said. “Unanticipated outbreaks of disease – epidemics – provoke questions: What is needed to curtail the transmission of a disease" What will it take to contain a disease so that protective measures can be instituted" These are perplexing and complex questions that need answers.”

Sherman joined UCR in 1962 and retired in 2006. During his tenure, he served as chair of the Department of Biology (1973-1978); dean of the College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (1981-1988); acting executive vice chancellor (1993-1994); and chair of the Academic Senate (1997-2004).

The author or coauthor of more than 150 scholarly papers and four books, Sherman also has edited two books on malaria. His previous book, *The Power of Plagues* (American Society for Microbiology Press, 2006), examined the interrelationship between plagues and culture.

He received his master’s and doctoral degrees from Northwestern University, Ill., where his lifelong research on the biochemistry of malaria parasites began.

Source: University of California - Riverside

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