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Goldberger's War: The Life and Work of a Public Health Crusader

Alan M. Kraut

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One Doctor's Fight to End an American Epidemic

Goldberger's War chronicles one of the U.S. Public Health Service's most renowned heroes--an immigrant Jew who trained as a doctor at Bellevue, became an early recruit to the federal government's health service, and ended an American plague. And he did so by defying conventional wisdom, experimenting on humans, and telling the South precisely what it didn't want to hear.

In this fine work, Alan Kraut shows why Dr. Goldberger's life became, quite literally, the stuff of Action Comic storyboards. On the front lines of the legendary public-health battles of the early 20th-century, he fought the epidemics that were then routinely sweeping the nation--typhoid, yellow fever, and the measels. After successfully confronting (and often contracting) the infectious diseases of his day, in 1914 he was assigned the mystery of pellagra, a disease whose cause and cure had eluded the world for centuries and was then afflicting tens of thousands of Americans every year, particularly in the emerging "New South." Dispatched to find a medical solution to what prevailing wisdom assumed was another infectious disease, Goldberger discovered its cause in a dietary deficiency and spent years conducting experiments (some on himself and family) to prove he was right. But finding the cause was just half the fight; its cure required nothing less than challenging the economy, culture, and politics of the entire South.

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