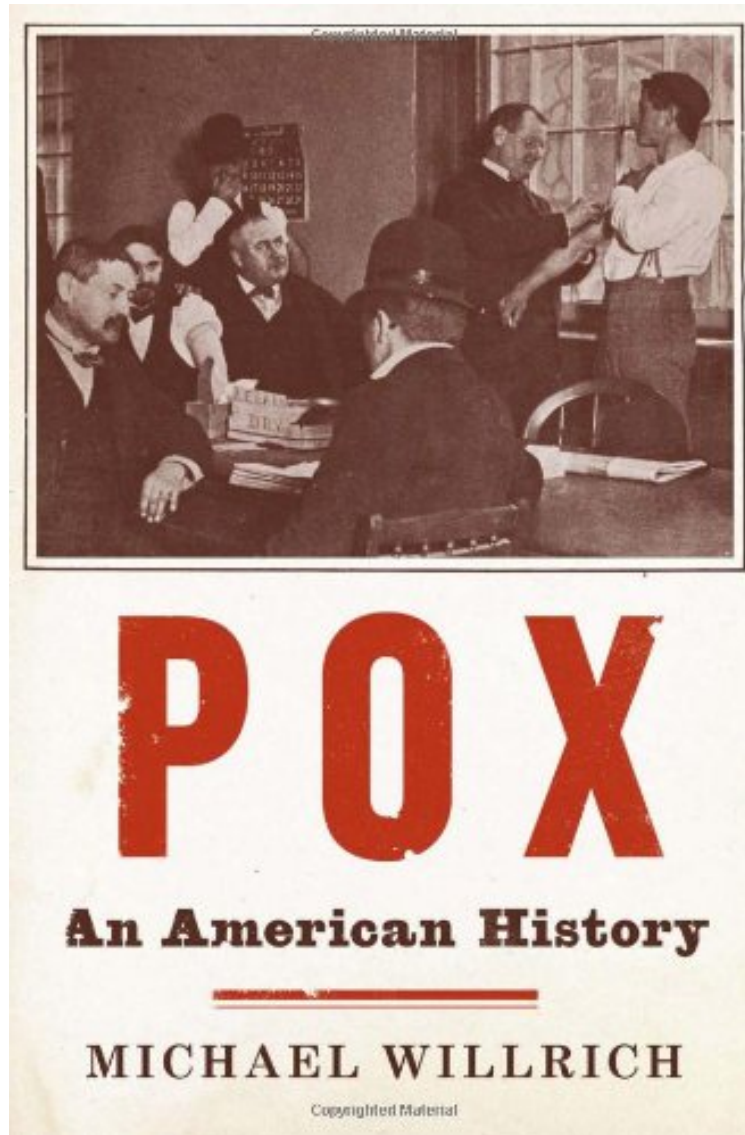


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Pox: An American History (Penguin History of American Life)

Michael Willrich

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Michael Willrich : Pox: An American History (Penguin History of American Life) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Pox: An American History (Penguin History of American Life):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I had to read this book for a class and ...By KimrI had to read this book for a class and it was surprisingly interesting. Definitely puts the smallpox epidemic into the context of it's time.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Boring BookBy Island GirlBoring, very boring.1 of 1 people found the

following review helpful. POXBy Always ReadingThis book was recommended to me by a niece. It is an interesting read. Never realized that smallpox was so rampant in the United States. Recommend to anyone interested in this type of history.

The untold story of how America's Progressive-era war on smallpox sparked one of the great civil liberties battles of the twentieth century. At the turn of the last century, a powerful smallpox epidemic swept the United States from coast to coast. The age-old disease spread swiftly through an increasingly interconnected American landscape: from southern tobacco plantations to the dense immigrant neighborhoods of northern cities to far-flung villages on the edges of the nascent American empire. In *Pox*, award-winning historian Michael Willrich offers a gripping chronicle of how the nation's continentwide fight against smallpox launched one of the most important civil liberties struggles of the twentieth century. At the dawn of the activist Progressive era and during a moment of great optimism about modern medicine, the government responded to the deadly epidemic by calling for universal compulsory vaccination. To enforce the law, public health authorities relied on quarantines, pesthouses, and "virus squads"-corps of doctors and club-wielding police. Though these measures eventually contained the disease, they also sparked a wave of popular resistance among Americans who perceived them as a threat to their health and to their rights. At the time, anti-vaccinationists were often dismissed as misguided cranks, but Willrich argues that they belonged to a wider legacy of American dissent that attended the rise of an increasingly powerful government. While a well-organized anti-vaccination movement sprang up during these years, many Americans resisted in subtler ways-by concealing sick family members or forging immunization certificates. *Pox* introduces us to memorable characters on both sides of the debate, from Henning Jacobson, a Swedish Lutheran minister whose battle against vaccination went all the way to the Supreme Court, to C. P. Wertenbaker, a federal surgeon who saw himself as a medical missionary combating a deadly-and preventable-disease. As Willrich suggests, many of the questions first raised by the Progressive-era antivaccination movement are still with us: How far should the government go to protect us from peril? What happens when the interests of public health collide with religious beliefs and personal conscience? In *Pox*, Willrich delivers a riveting tale about the clash of modern medicine, civil liberties, and government power at the turn of the last century that resonates powerfully today.

From Publishers WeeklyToday's controversies over vaccinations pale beside the pitched battles fought at the turn of the 20th century, to judge by this probing work. Historian Willrich (*City of Courts*) revisits the smallpox epidemic that ravaged the United States from 1898 to 1904 and sparked a showdown between the burgeoning Progressive-era regulatory regime and Americans fearful of the new Leviathan state and the specter of "state medicine." Anxious to stamp out the contagion, public health officials in the South quarantined African-Americans in detention camps if they were suspected of carrying the disease and vaccinated others at gunpoint; in New York "paramilitary vaccination squads" raided immigrant tenements, forcibly inoculating residents and dragging infected children off to pesthouses; their coercive methods sparked occasional riots and lawsuits that helped remake constitutional law. Willrich sees merit on both sides: draconian public health measures saved thousands of lives, but resisters did have legitimate concerns about vaccine safety and side effects, racial targeting and bodily integrity. He does tend to romanticize anti-vaccine activists, whose movement he associates with feminism, free speech, and abolitionism, styling them as "libertarian radicals" engaging in "intimate acts of civil disobedience." Still, his lucid, well-written, empathetic study of a fascinating episode shows why the vaccine issue still pricks the American conscience. Photos. (Apr. 4) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved. "Willrich's account of the early days of the American progressive movement couldn't be more instructive or timely...a worthy read." -"Booklist" (starred review) "Willrich melds meticulous research with elegant writing to create a richly- textured social history...at the charged intersection of science, politics, race, and culture...You'll never think the same way again about the now all-but- mechanical ritual of rolling up your shirtsleeve for a vaccine needle." -Hampton Sides, author of "Hellhound on His Trail" ..".In the highly skilled hands of Michael Willrich, hard cases make great history. We all have much to learn from this excellent book." -David Hackett Fischer, author of "Champlain's Dream" and "Washington's Crossing" "A fascinating, fast-paced story of America's last major smallpox epidemic...This is history at its best written by a master of his craft." -Michael J. Klarman, author of "From Jim Crow to Civil Rights" "PoxAbout the AuthorMichael Willrich is the award-winning author of *City of Courts*. He is an associate professor of history at Brandeis University and a former journalist who wrote for *The Washington Monthly*, *City Paper*, *The New Republic*, and other magazines. He lives in Wellesley, Massachusetts.