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Book Review of Global AIDS Policy (Douglas A. Feldman, ed.; Bergin & Garvey 1994)

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Book Reviews

Global AIDS Policy (Douglas A. Feldman, ed.; Bergin & Garvey 1994). About the editor and contributors, index, introduction, preface, references. LC 94-2850; ISBN 0-89789-412-X. [250 pp. \$18.95 paper; \$65.00 cloth. 88 Post Road West, Westport CT 06881.]

Global AIDS Policy is a collection of essays by epidemiologists, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, ethnographers and others involved in AIDS research. In sum, they detail the worldwide failure of governments and organizations to identify and implement competent strategies for dealing with the AIDS pandemic. Incomplete and socially biased epidemiology, difficulties in implementing strategies that challenge traditional moralities, as well as policies based on thinly-veiled political agendas have all harmed efforts to deal successfully with AIDS. Geographical areas highlighted are China, Brazil, Latin America, Uganda, Ghana, South Africa and the U.S.

Contributors provide a great deal of well-supported criticism of trends in AIDS policy from the perspective of their respective disciplines. They attack decisions said to be doomed to failure because scientific and practical constraints are overlooked. While their data and conclusions isolate sources of failure in many decisions, some appear idealistic in their synopsis of potential solutions.

Essays vary greatly in style, approach and breadth. Many contain detailed summaries of information gathering methodologies and considerable statistical analysis of AIDS infection and transmission, and surveys of cultural attitudes towards sex and matters such as condom and intravenous drug use. Data-rich essays do not typically make interesting reading, but such presentations are critical to supporting the credibility of observations and conclusions.

Several essays examine the impact of political agendas on education and resource allocation in China, South Africa and the U.S. These highlight the danger of allowing biases within political institutions to determine responses to health-related issues. Others discuss the effects of cultural biases towards homosexuals, intravenous drug users, the

sexually promiscuous and the economically less fortunate, as well as toward racial minorities. Such biases are said to place blame and divert attention from the most practical, efficient remedies; they are also said to present challenges in overcoming misinformation and traditional social behaviors. Still other essays point out, e.g., the consequences of non-governmental organizations' failures to cooperate.

The objective of *Global AIDS Policy* is to awaken individuals and policy makers to several past mistakes in combating the AIDS crisis and to suggest approaches to research, funding and education that should guide future AIDS-related decisions.

No book of this size can furnish a complete analysis of world AIDS policy. Yet, its critiques and case studies isolate specific problems in a range of diverse nations and provide some basis for general insights. For example, Feldman urges that:¹

If you want to learn what is wrong with a given society, look at how it handles the question of AIDS. Nations under the sway of fundamentalism, fascism, or totalitarianism are quick to employ the emergence of HIV as a mechanism to further political repression. Legislation, enforcement, and changing attitudes are needed to protect the human rights of persons living with HIV. There is no acceptable rationale for discriminating against a person based on his or her HIV serostatus.

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¹ At 239.

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