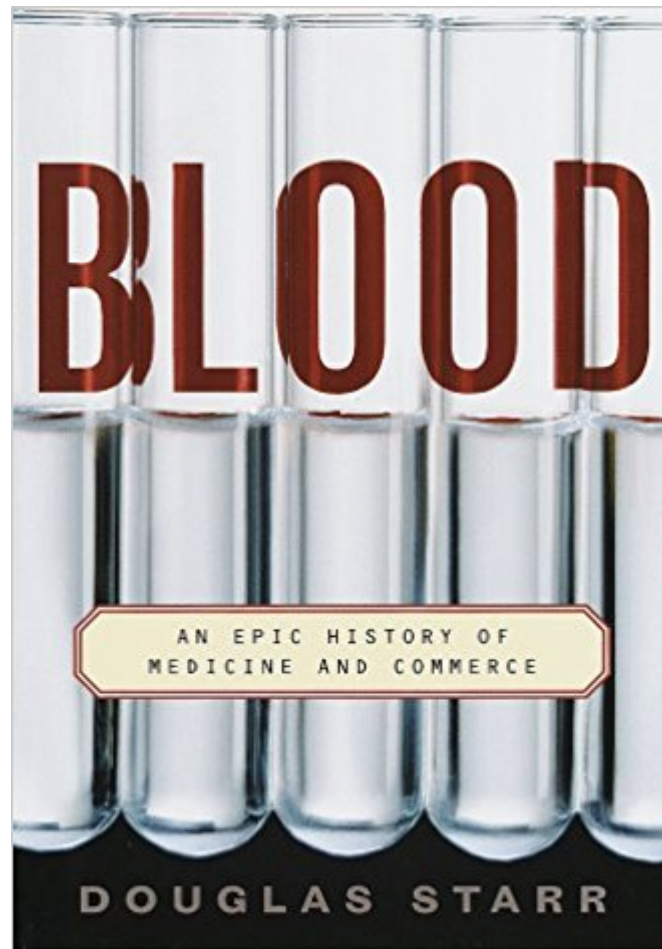




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Blood: An Epic History Of Medicine And Commerce



Synopsis

Essence and emblem of life--feared, revered, mythologized, and used in magic and medicine from earliest times--human blood is now the center of a huge, secretive, and often dangerous worldwide commerce. It is a commerce whose impact upon humanity rivals that of any other business--millions of lives have been saved by blood and its various derivatives, and tens of thousands of lives have been lost. Douglas Starr tells how this came to be, in a sweeping history that ranges through the centuries. With the dawn of science, blood came to be seen as a component of human anatomy, capable of being isolated, studied, used. Starr describes the first documented transfusion: In the seventeenth century, one of Louis XIV's court physicians transfers the blood of a calf into a madman to "cure" him. At the turn of the twentieth century a young researcher in Vienna identifies the basic blood groups, taking the first step toward successful transfusion. Then a New York doctor finds a way to stop blood from clotting, thereby making all transfusion possible. In the 1930s, a Russian physician, in grisly improvisation, successfully uses cadaver blood to help living patients--and realizes that blood can be stored. The first blood bank is soon operating in Chicago. During World War II, researchers, driven by battlefield needs, break down blood into usable components that are more easily stored and transported. This "fractionation" process--accomplished by a Harvard team--produces a host of pharmaceuticals, setting the stage for the global marketplace to come. Plasma, precisely because it can be made into long-lasting drugs, is shipped and traded for profit; today it is a \$5 billion business. The author recounts the tragic spread of AIDS through the distribution of contaminated blood products, and describes why and how related scandals have erupted around the world. Finally, he looks at the latest attempts to make artificial blood. Douglas Starr has written a groundbreaking book that tackles a subject of universal and urgent importance and explores the perils and promises that lie ahead.

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Customer Reviews

Don't faint! Blood may be a highly charged substance, symbolic of our spirit and essential for life, but we can gain much from reflecting on its power over us. Science journalist Douglas Starr has examined the history of blood's medical uses, and his report is at once intellectually engaging and emotionally compelling. *Blood: An Epic History of Medicine and Commerce* covers the late 17th century to the present, detailing experiments with animal blood (one violent madman was briefly calmed by infused calf's blood), the long ban on transfusions, direct artery-to-vein suture between donor and recipient, and today's global blood-banking industry. It's a great story that shows the long climb from great risk and heroism to relative safety. Our greatest stumble during this climb--the AIDS crisis of the 1980s--is the meat of the book. How could it have happened? Why were so many people given contaminated blood products after clear warnings about the risks of infection? Starr is unafraid to name names and lay bare the political and financial decisions that condemned so many thousands of hemophiliacs and surgical patients to early deaths. Those who don't learn from the past are bound to repeat it; Starr aims to help us keep the blood off of our hands. --Rob Lightner

The codirector of Boston University's graduate program in science journalism shows how it's done in this exemplary study of the role that blood has played in human affairs. Although Starr begins the story centuries ago, he concentrates on modern times. Throughout his coverage, information about advances in biology and physiology is introduced as needed, often enabling the reader to share in the excitement of scientific discovery. But this book is about much more than just biology. The politics of blood play a central role, from our race with the Germans during the Second World War to develop a system to enable battlefield transfusions to the squabbling and animosity present among the various blood collection agencies in the U.S. As Starr makes clear, as the global traffic in blood and blood products has expanded into a multibillion-dollar operation, the financial bottom line has begun to outweigh the importance of medical benefits. In riveting fashion, Starr explains how business practices enabled the AIDS virus to permeate the world's blood supply, leading to thousands of unnecessary deaths, particularly among hemophiliacs. Truly frightening are tales of the harvesting of blood and plasma from indigent and unhealthy third-world natives and the

unwillingness of governments, third- and first-world alike, to take action to protect their citizens. Clear-eyed and wrought with superb attention to detail, this is first-class science writing, with a striking message. 16 pages of photos, not seen by PW. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Interesting book

The author takes an incredible journey through the history of blood. You will be amazed at how key experiments throughout the years have forever changed our feelings towards the tissue we call blood. You will root "for the good guys" as they pioneer medical research! But then you will cry when you see what modern business did once they got a hold of blood as a "product." You will see how greed, jealousy, and denial killed thousands and ruined the lives of many others. All because companies and some doctors would not listen to reason. Truly heartbreaking indeed. The author composes a beautiful symphony of history which is very easy to read and very difficult to put down. This book has certainly changed the way I think about business and medicine.

The reporter does a great job of giving us a history of blood transfusions from the earliest days to the present. The components of blood can be used for so many different products and who knew they the U.S. supplies the world with Plasma. All about the emotional and political implications of blood donation.

Ordered this for my sister, a nurse, and she loves it. Great, competitive price.

Lots of words on the subject of blood. Pretty good. Never finished it, too long.

Although I defer to Mr. Haschka's expertise in the field of blood, I must take issue with his snippy comment about Mr. Starr's affinity for bad news. I found *Blood* to be well-balanced-- he labors mightily to present good news and noble accomplishments alongside the tales of negligence, ignorance, and good old-fashioned greed. Yes, he does report on the tainted blood in great depth but let's face it-- mistakes advance science as much as, or even more than, successes, and should be accorded the appropriate amount of space. As far as repetition is concerned, I admit that I haven't read Mr. Shilts' tome, but *Blood* is perfect for those of us who are interested in the HIV crisis in the larger context of the industry as a whole, and in light of earlier discoveries. The book lost me a

bit in its lengthy discussion of the business complex, but the information is important in order to understand how the impact of new discoveries (and mistakes) are felt worldwide. The history of blood is nothing less than riveting, how mysticism and individual hubris has given way to science--and how they have simultaneously coexisted and been at loggerheads ever since. A formidable subject, nicely covered in a single volume.

I borrowed this book from the library to help me with a lengthy article that I am writing on the history of blood banking. If I wasn't doing in-depth research, like combing through medical journals and scientific papers, I would have given this book 5 stars. However, Starr makes many omissions and skips vital facts, and I fail to understand why. For example, he credits Richard Lewisohn with discovering the use of sodium citrate, to keep blood from coagulating. However, nowhere does he mention that Lewisohn was not the first to use it in a successful transfusion. Two doctors published results right before he did, and another one gave a talk to the National Academy of Sciences a month before Lewisohn published his results. Lewisohn is credited with finding the perfect formulation, and that is where credit is due. But Starr makes it seem that Lewisohn was the only one doing this research. He completely leaves out the work of Rous and Turner, who first used glucose to expand the life of red blood cells--a necessity in blood banking. He also completely omitted WW I--amazing! That's when the very first blood depot was set up and stored blood was used for the first time. I've found that he has embellished some personalities and downplayed others. He made it sound like no one was doing blood transfusions until Carrel's fateful night when he saved the baby, but in fact, they were being performed. Anyway, this is a good book and I am surprised to find these glaring flaws in it. I found it useful as a background for my research, but I don't understand why he chose to write it this way.

This book makes the history of medicine, especially blood, interesting, and accessible to anyone. It also exposes the blood industry, GOOD and BAD, with names and dates of the people who moved it along: the medics in World Wars who risked their lives, the brilliant and temperamental researchers, and the greedy. Starr gives you well-documented facts and lets the reader decide, as a good writer should, who is the bad guy. This book doesn't tug as much at your heartstrings as *Bad Blood: Crisis in the American Red Cross* by Judith Reitman, but that's by far an advantage. She would have you believe that just because people died (of AIDS, and Hepatitis), there must be someone in the blood industry at fault. There certainly is some fault to go around, but this book helps you decide who and why there is fault, and tells both sides of the story without leaving Reitman's huge empty gaps in the

evidence.

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