



## *The Origins of AIDS*

It is now thirty years since the discovery of AIDS but its origins continue to puzzle doctors and scientists. Inspired by his own experiences working as an infectious diseases physician in Africa, Jacques Pepin looks back to the early twentieth-century events in Africa that triggered the emergence of HIV/AIDS (human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and traces its subsequent development into the most dramatic and destructive epidemic of modern times. He shows how the disease was first transmitted from chimpanzees to man and then how urbanisation, prostitution and large-scale colonial medical campaigns intended to eradicate tropical diseases combined to disastrous effect to fuel the spread of the virus from its origins in Léopoldville to the rest of Africa, the Caribbean and ultimately worldwide. This is an essential new perspective on HIV/AIDS and on the lessons that must be learned if we are to avoid provoking another pandemic in the future.

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This having been said, the most important person who helped me through this whole adventure will be acknowledged in the Introduction.

## Abbreviations

AEF	Afrique Équatoriale Française
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CFA	Colonies Françaises d’Afrique/Communauté Financière Africaine
CFCO	Chemin de Fer Congo–Océan
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CRF	circulating recombinant forms
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EIC	État Indépendant du Congo (Congo Free State)
GPA	Global Programme on AIDS
HBV	hepatitis B virus
HCV	hepatitis C virus
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HTLV	human T-cell lymphotropic virus
ID	intra-dermal(ly)
IDU	injection drug user or intravenous drug user
IM	intra-muscular(ly)
IV	intra-venous(ly)
KS	Kaposi’s sarcoma
MMWR	<i>Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report</i>
NIBSC	National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
ONUC	Organisation des Nations-Unies au Congo
OPV	oral polio vaccine
SC	subcutaneous(ly)
SFV	simian foamy virus
SIV	simian immunodeficiency virus
STD	sexually transmitted disease

UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

## *Note on terminology*

Before we move on, I want to point out that for readers unfamiliar with virology, the Appendix provides a brief overview of the viruses that we will be discussing. In a few chapters where this is necessary, elements of molecular biology will be discussed. I aimed to explain them succinctly to readers who have no training in this field.

With regard to toponymy, in English-language publications West Africa generally encompasses all countries on the Atlantic coast of Africa, plus some in the corresponding hinterland. I will rather use French terminology whereby West Africa starts in Mauritania, ends with Nigeria and also includes the corresponding hinterland. Central Africa (in colonial times, Equatorial Africa) starts with Cameroon and Chad, goes all the way to Rwanda and Burundi and also encompasses the two Congos, Gabon, the Central African Republic and Equatorial Guinea. Most of the story told in this book occurred in central Africa.

In former French colonies, city names did not change much after independence. Gabon's major port is still called Port-Gentil, despite the latter character's dubious human rights record. However, in the former Belgian Congo, these traces of the colonisers were enthusiastically erased so that Léopoldville became Kinshasa, Stanleyville became Kisangani, Elisabethville was renamed Lubumbashi, and so on. The country itself was successively known as the Congo Free State, the Belgian Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) after 1960 (or Congo-Léopoldville, and then Congo-Kinshasa), Zaire under Mobutu's dictatorship and then DRC again after Mobutu was overthrown.

The federation of Afrique Équatoriale Française (AEF) included four distinct colonies: Moyen-Congo (present day Republic of Congo, or Congo-Brazzaville), Oubangui-Chari (Central African Republic), Gabon and Tchad. AEF disappeared as a geographic entity shortly before 1960 when independence was granted to the four countries. To avoid confusion between the two Congos, I will use the term Congo-Brazzaville

(it also changed names a few times) to designate the independent country that succeeded Moyen-Congo. Cameroun Français, or just Cameroun with the French spelling, refers to the part of current day Cameroon that was administered by France under a mandate from the League of Nations after World War I (WWI) and the United Nations after World War II (WWII), until the country became independent in 1960. The maps in this book use the names of countries and cities as they were known at the time of the events in question, and in principle the location of each city, district, region, river or park mentioned anywhere in the book should be shown on at least one of the maps.



Map 1 Map of Africa.