

## THE ORIGINS OF AIDS

It is now forty years since the discovery of AIDS, but its origins continue to puzzle doctors, scientists and patients. Inspired by his own experiences working as a physician in a bush hospital in Zaire, Jacques Pépin looks back to the early twentieth-century events in central Africa that triggered the emergence of HIV/AIDS 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 military campaigns, urbanisation, prostitution and large-scale colonial medical interventions 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 perspective on HIV/AIDS and on the lessons that must be learned as the world faces another pandemic.

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# THE ORIGINS OF AIDS

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*To my father Jean-Marc (1930–2017),  
whose wit and wisdom I will never match*



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## Note on 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: 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 the 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



#### NOTE ON TOPONYMY

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. 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.

## 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
CRC	Croix-Rouge du Congo
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EIC	État Indépendant du Congo (Congo Free State)
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
GHESKIO	Groupe haïtien d’Étude du Sarcome de Kaposi et des Infections opportunistes
GPA	Global Programme on AIDS
HBV	hepatitis B virus
HCV	hepatitis C virus
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
HTLV	human T-cell lymphotropic virus
IM	intramuscular(ly)
IV	intravenous(ly)
KS	Kaposi’s sarcoma
MNC	Mouvement National des Congolais
NIBSC	National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
ONUC	Organisation des Nations-Unies au Congo
OPV	oral polio vaccine

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

PAIGC	Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde
RNA	ribonucleic acid
SIV	simian immunodeficiency virus
STD	sexually transmitted disease(s)
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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