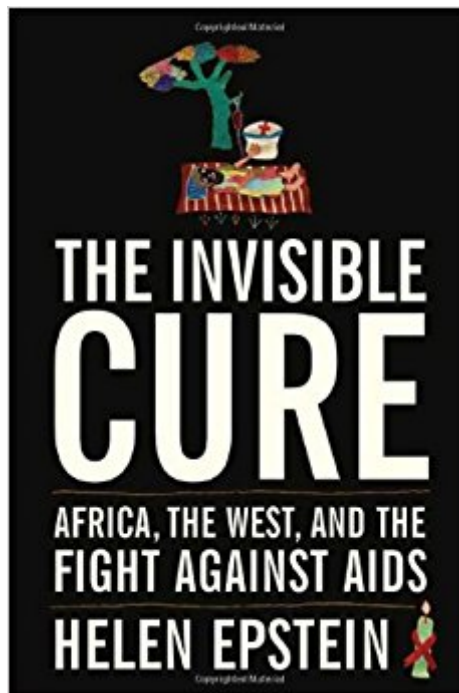




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# **The Invisible Cure: Africa, The West, And The Fight Against AIDS**



## Synopsis

In 1993, Helen Epstein, a scientist working with a biotechnology company searching for an AIDS vaccine, moved to Uganda, where she witnessed firsthand the suffering caused by the epidemic. Now, in her unsparing and illuminating account of this global disease, she describes how international health experts, governments, and ordinary Africans have struggled to understand the rapid and devastating spread of the disease in Africa, and traces the changes wrought by new medical developments and emerging political realities. It is an account of scientific discovery and intrigue with implications far beyond the fight against one tragic disease. ~ The AIDS epidemic is partly a consequence of the rapid transition of African societies from an agrarian past to an impoverished present. Millions of African people have yet to find a place in an increasingly globalized world, and their poverty and social dislocation have generated an earthquake in gender relations that deeply affects the spread of HIV. But Epstein argues that there are solutions to this crisis, and some of the most effective ones may be simpler than many people assume. ~ Written with conviction, knowledge, and insight, *Why Don't They Listen?* will change how we think about the worst health crisis of the past century, and our strategies for improving global public health.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Epstein, a public health specialist and molecular biologist who has worked on AIDS vaccine research, overturns many of our received notions about why AIDS is rampant in Africa and what to do about it. She charges that Western governments and philanthropists, though

well-meaning, have been wholly misguided, and that Africans themselves, who understand their own cultures, often know best how to address HIV in their communities. Most significant is Epstein's discussion of concurrent sexual relations in Africa. Africans often engage in two or three long-term concurrent relationships—which proves more conducive to the spread of AIDS than Western-style promiscuity. Persuade Africans to forgo concurrency for monogamy, and the infection rate plummets, as it did in Uganda in the mid-1990s. On the other hand, ad campaigns focused on condom use helped imply falsely that only prostitutes and truck drivers get AIDS. In addition, Epstein examines what she calls the "African earthquake": social and economic upheaval that have also eased the spread of HIV. Epstein is a lucid writer, translating abstruse scientific concepts into language nonspecialists can easily grasp. Provocative, passionate and incisive, this may be the most important book on AIDS published this year—indeed, it may even save lives. (May)

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Some countries in Africa report that approximately one-third of their adult populations are infected with HIV. Epstein wondered how such a state of affairs came about. Seeking answers, she contracted with a biotechnical company to go to Africa and work toward discovering an AIDS vaccine. What she subsequently learned exploded some preconceived and widely shared notions about AIDS, about how African culture all but ensures its spread, and about what might be a deceptively simple answer to the complex question of how to stem that spread. Her absorbing report reveals governmental inefficiencies and medical bureaucracies and social structures that have done nothing to slow the epidemic's pace—and may be accelerating it. Besides the epidemic's social and medical aspects, she discusses the business of AIDS, and she examines the mystery of how the HIV infection rate dropped some 70 percent between 1992 and 1997 in Uganda and the Kagera region of Tanzania; she believes that the invisible cure involved in that plunge provides clues to resolving the issue of AIDS in Africa generally.

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This is not the kind of book I would have ever thought to just pick up for myself. I live - literally - half a world away from the people and places described in this book; and my career life has been focused on alleviating a very different kind of suffering - that of families caught up in the public child welfare system. I had a chance meeting with the author, she asked for my cooperation in researching a story on child welfare, and I thought I'd read her book just to gain some insight into her thinking and worldview. The Invisible Cure is gripping, compulsively readable, and resonated

deeply with me in ways I did not expect. For anyone who has felt the frustration of challenging the prevailing orthodoxy in their own line of work, for anyone who has struggled to understand how politics and greed can infect and corrupt even the most honorably motivated humanitarian projects, and for anyone who believes in the power and potential of grassroots community organizing as the most effective solution to community problems, this book is informative, affirming, and ultimately inspiring and uplifting, despite the grim subject matter. Highly recommended.

Epstein does a great job intertwining her own story into the history of the epidemic in the late 80s-present day. There is a lot of technical and personal information presented throughout which allows the reader to learn and empathize. This book is for public health junkies, people interested in the HIV/AIDS and also people who are interested in learning more about controversial topics. A very good read, my only complaint and the reason for 4 stars is that the flow of the book can feel choppy at points.

For anyone interested in HIV/AIDS in Africa, this is a must-read. Although formally trained as a molecular biologist, Helen Epstein is an excellent writer and paints an accurate picture of the history of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on Uganda, East Africa, and Southern Africa. A very moving book that helps us realize the ways in which we will end this horrible disease have little to do with big pharma and a western-centered solution.

slightly used but still nicely kept. Had a sticker on the front that covered most of the cover so it was hard taking that off. otherwise it arrived on time and was very useful to me.

This author is amazing. She was able to summarize the HIV/AIDS situation in Africa and make sense of it. Loved this book and use parts of it when I teach this topic at a medium size university in the midwest.

a nice journey about wanting to change the world, but winding up with and the understanding that society needs to change, a tough task

The most important book published on AIDS in a long time, and one of the most important books of the year. If you liked Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* or *And The Band Played On*, you will love this book. It is readable, impassioned and brilliant, and despite its savage denunciation of the failures of

the West to deal with the AIDS crisis, it is an essentially optimistic work. Publishers Weekly in a starred review said it will save lives, and that is not hyperbole. I urge anyone who is interested in the greatest medical crisis of our time; anyone who is interested in Africa; anyone who is outraged by the failure of the UN, the WHO and the Bush administration to deal with this tragedy, to buy this book and give it to your friends. It is the kind of book that will change peoples' minds and will move continents. It will be read for years to come...

Epstein is a PhD biologist who went to Africa to set up a lab to study HIV and when the logistics did not work out she switched to writing journalistic accounts of disease experiences in Africa. Unlike other journalists, she often reads the primary scientific literature and then builds journalistic accounts off of that research. This is the case in the present book where she recounts the story of how indigenous recognition of the cause of HIV infection increases in Uganda produced a dramatically effective program to reduce AIDS infections and also the stigmatization of HIV. By Epstein's account this effective intervention was finally blocked when the US program to address HIV (PEPFAR) insisted that Uganda promote an abstinence program, which was sharply different from the indigenous program. After the US intervention, HIV rates went back up. The first two thirds of this book are an excellent account of the experience of HIV in African communities. The last 1/3 of the book becomes a bit too polemic for my tastes.

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