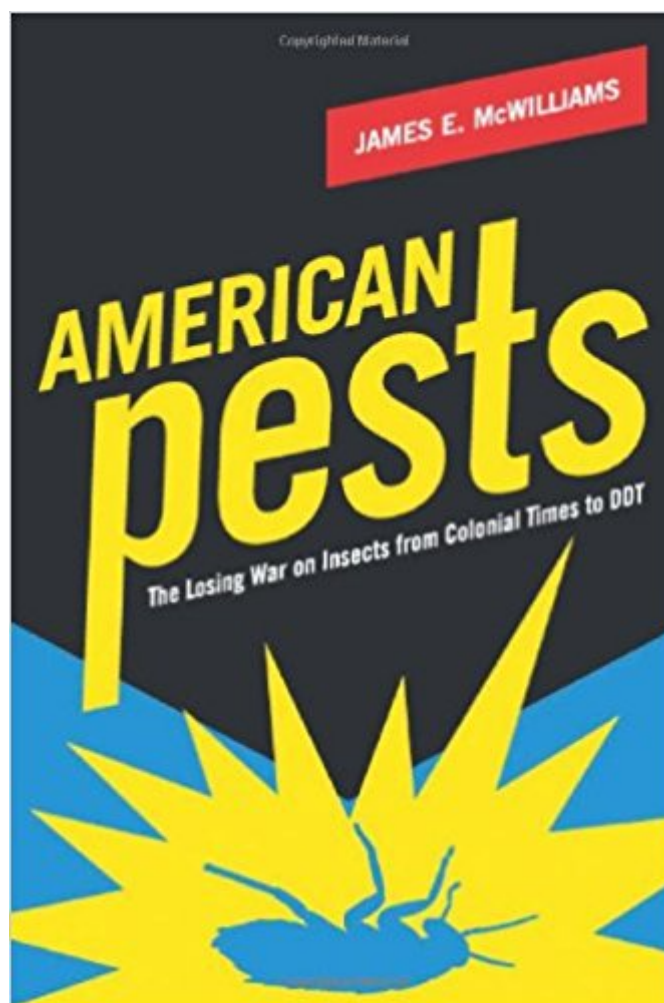


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American Pests: The Losing War On Insects From Colonial Times To DDT



Synopsis

The world of insects is one we only dimly understand. Yet from using arsenic, cobalt, and quicksilver to kill household infiltrators to employing the sophisticated tools of the Orkin Man, Americans have fought to eradicate the "bugs" they have learned to hate. Inspired by the still-revolutionary theories of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, James E. McWilliams argues for a more harmonious and rational approach to our relationship with insects, one that does not harm our environment and, consequently, ourselves along the way. Beginning with the early techniques of colonial farmers and ending with the modern use of chemical insecticides, McWilliams deftly shows how America's war on insects mirrors its continual struggle with nature, economic development, technology, and federal regulation. He reveals a very American paradox: the men and women who settled and developed this country sought to control the environment and achieve certain economic goals; yet their methods of agricultural expansion undermined their efforts and linked them even closer to the inexorable realities of the insect world. As told from the perspective of the often flamboyant actors in the battle against insects, *American Pests* is a fascinating investigation into the attitudes, policies, and practices that continue to influence our behavior toward insects. Asking us to question, if not abandon, our reckless (and sometimes futile) attempts at insect control, McWilliams convincingly argues that insects, like people, have an inherent right to exist and that in our attempt to rid ourselves of insects, we compromise the balance of nature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

[A] colorful chronicle of pest management in the United States... As well written as it is thorough. (Publishers Weekly)[McWilliams] knows how to address unusual historical topics in rich detail... Poignant... Thorough... Recommended. (Library Journal)"[An] articulate, well-organized... excellent primer. (Irene Wanner Seattle Times)[McWilliams'] book should resonate in these times of GM temptations and global food shortages. (Times Literary Supplement)Highly recommended. (Choice)a solid contribution to U.S. environmental history, one that is refreshingly ambitious in its chronological scope. (Sarah T. Phillips American Historical Review)An engaging and important book. (David Kinkela Technology and Culture)...a rewarding read... (Joshua B. Buhs Journal of Southern History)

James E. McWilliams is an associate professor of history at Texas State University-San Marcos and a recent fellow in the Agrarian Studies Program at Yale University. His articles have appeared in the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and Washington Post, among other publications, and he is the author of *A Revolution in Eating: How the Quest for Food Shaped America* and *Building the Bay Colony: Local Economy and Society in Early Massachusetts*.

This was not exactly what I was looking for and my reason for getting it changed as well. I never read the book actually, only ever glanced through it, since my needs changed. Had that not happened, I am sure it would have been more valuable to me.

I haven't read the book yet but I imagine it's good. The book was in great quality for being used. I am very happy to add it to my collection.

American pests is the first book (at least that I am aware of) for popular consumption on the history of plant pest/insect eradication in the USA. I suppose that this topic does not sound like fun to most people. Nevertheless, for me it is an interesting subject, and if you consider how plant pests affect the price and quality of food, as well as their ability to spread disease, then bug control may begin to sound more worthwhile as something to read about. The book begins with Colonial America through to the present(almost). The book haphazardly jumps through American history, with no clear breaks. The chapter headings often have little to do with chronology, and are rather broken off arbitrarily. The writing is at times terse, and at times focuses on the mundane. Providing details is fine, but why so randomly? It is no surprise that this book was published by a university printing house, as I feel that a more mainstream publisher would have forced dramatic changes in the book (assuming

they'd print something on this topic in any situation). The author is an academic historian, and the book appears at times more for the consumption of historians than the popular reader. The coverage is also uneven. The post-WWII years are not really covered much. Shockingly, the GMO situation is not mentioned. In the end, this book really could have used a better editor (I don't know if it had one at all this time), and it needed to be another 100 pages or so longer to be thorough enough. For lack of a better alternative, I recommend this book to anyone interested in this subject.

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